

September 2019

Cabinet meeting 26th September

Although I am no longer a member of the cabinet, I attended this meeting as an interested member and as the chair of Adult scrutiny.

There was a very high level of public interest in the meeting with a group gathered on the steps of the Shire Hall and very many public questions. The focus of this interest was the agenda item 'the executive response to the climate change emergency'. Regular readers will remember that the full council voted to declare a climate emergency towards the end of the last administration – this agenda item was the response of the new administration to this declaration. Being a response in the first instance it lacked substance – this will be forthcoming in a later policy and action plan – but set an overall tone. Despite the fact that Herefordshire Council has met greenhouse gas emissions targets three years early (a reduction of over 43%) there seemed no shortage of criticism in the room for the council. I have no doubt that the new administration (no less than the old administration) are completely committed to making a positive contribution and addressing the challenge of climate change.

We need to do all that we can, as individuals, as a council, as a county, as a country, to not only meet the challenge of climate change but also to prepare, as it were, for a 'no deal' scenario. That is something the council must bear in mind as it looks at development and planning as well as land use and enforcement.

The vast bulk of the council's budget is spent on vulnerable people and the balance of the agenda reflected that work with items on Youth Justice, gambling, provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma, Travellers and supported accommodation for care leavers as well as support for the Hereford Business Improvement District. Once the climate change item had been finished the hall emptied and the previously full public space was left with two members of the public (or I think they were) and a few officers.

I had spent some time before the Cabinet meeting visiting Aspire in Canal Road, Hereford. They are a really inspiring group who support neurologically diverse people to live fulfilling and independent lives. The particular focus of the meeting was the over medication of this group contrary to NICE guidelines. A drama group presented a wonderful play which was moving and powerful, showing the way in which the misuse of medication impacts the lives of those with learning disability and autism. Got to say I had a tear in my eye - this is the work of the council and of the amazing groups we support.

Ross Transport Plan workshop

I attended a workshop on the Ross Transport plan – there was no doubt that the main issues were broadly agreed upon by everyone present and should inform the plan as it gets developed. The identified areas of concern were – on street parking, pedestrianisation (full or partial, temporary or permanent), the awkward 'pinch point' by EWM and the desirability of a one way to solve this, the desirability of a park and ride of some sort – perhaps with autonomous vehicles for a shuttle service into town (my idea). I also took the opportunity to ask for improved pedestrian connectivity at Wilton Lane.

Planning

There is a huge log jam of planning applications waiting to be determined at the planning committee – I am going to be pretty busy once these all start coming through. For the avoidance of doubt they are as follows:

192398 Welsh Newton Common replacement dwelling – application is currently withdrawn.

191276 Llangarron Redirected to committee due to level of public interest

191288 Llangarron Redirected to committee due to level of public interest

173774 and others Biddlestone Polytunnels – Redirected to committee due to level of public interest.

191286 2no Welsh Newton Common Redirected to committee due to level of public interest.

190827 1 no WNC redirected to committee due to public interest and to be consistent in approach with above.

192208/O 2 no houses, 1 no Bungalow Llangrove, Redirected to committee due to level of public interest.

Parish Summit and planning

Part of the presentation was concerned with the revision of the core strategy. If you take an interest in planning you may want to keep an eye out for this as it comes forward – unfortunately I can't attach the presentation but would be happy to send on to anyone who would like it. Other areas covered include community hubs and the corporate plan (not as dull as it sounds – actually it is the template for all council spending and priorities).

There will be a series of general public engagements over the next few weeks before a more structured stakeholder consultation.

It's that time of year

As part of my personal commitment to reducing my carbon footprint I have not taken any flights this year, indeed, I haven't had a holiday of any sort so, in lieu, I have the prospect of the party conference in Manchester to attend. Sitting on the sidelines of history is always interesting and I am looking forward to being a background artiste in the epic of 'Brexit or bust'. Got to say I am finding the level of debate in Parliament lamentable – screaming histrionics versus stentorian rhetoric, weeping women versus male mockery, the entirely misjudged weaponising of a murdered colleague, the red faced aneurism in waiting that is the SNP and members on the Labour benches. Whatever happened to erudite debate, to well-reasoned argument, to oratory and a neat turn of phrase? The outbursts are barely articulate in many instances and some of the chuntering is, frankly, disgraceful.

I will give a full account of conference at a later date.

Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst