

## **Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst May 2019**

First of all I would like to thank everyone who came out and voted for me to remain as your ward councillor. Over the last 4 years I have done my best to work with the parishes to bring improvements and deal with issues in the area. I have also been able to help a number of local residents with a variety of requests from planning to public rights of way to potholes and I will continue to be available to all residents for any help I am able to give.

I have attended all six of the parish councils on a regular basis and will continue to do so as they are a crucial part of the communication between the county council and local people. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all the new parish councillors as well as those familiar faces and say that I look forward to working with you all in the future.

### **The Election**

Whether it was the by-pass or Brexit or the pre-election coalition of all the opposition parties (except the Lib Dems) one thing is certain – the Conservatives were soundly beaten into second place in a ‘no overall control’ council result. The largest group is the Independents who are themselves a group of groups and individuals without a shared manifesto or plan. They have continued in the alliance with the Green Party and It’s Our County and are now the administration/executive of the council. They have chosen a newly elected member, Cllr. Hitchiner, to be the leader of the council and he has chosen a spread of newly elected members and more experienced councillors to form the cabinet. One member, Cllr Chowns, has had to give up her cabinet place as she has been elected to the European Parliament (although she remains as the elected ward member for Bishops Frome and Cradley) so there will be a change to Cllr Trish Marsh – also Green party – to head up Economy and Communications. I wish them all the very best in their new positions; we all want to do the right thing for the county of Herefordshire – even if we don’t agree on what that might be.

The Conservatives had made no secret of the plan for the by-pass for Hereford and it would still be our plan if we were in the majority. I have read a great deal of comment on line about this road and the sneaky plan to build houses along it – the implication being that this is all some sort of grand plan to favour a Tory party donor. I am but a humble councillor and I have only sat in meetings as high up as the cabinet of the council so I have no knowledge of this sort of mysterious activity but what I do know is this....

Since 2010 Herefordshire Council has had to find 90m per annum in savings whilst still delivering the statutory services it was delivering in 2010. The Revenue support grant from the Government has reduced over this period from 60m per annum to 00m(zero) next year and the rising needs and cost of placements for care has added 30m of annual pressure. The net budget for the council is about 150m a year of which about 100m comes from council tax and 50m from various other grants. Of the council tax income around 75% is spent on children and adult care. A further saving of around 14m needs to be found over the next two years – the needs and costs of placements are predicted to continue to rise due to demographic trends. We will need to find some money from somewhere.....or we are going to struggle to look after vulnerable children and adults in Herefordshire....oh, and potholes.

The Conservatives delivered the savings and balanced the budget every year, unlike all our neighbouring authorities we actually added to our reserve to allow for any shortfall as the RSG dies off completely.

So, what was the plan? Basically to grow the economy – invest in the further and higher education opportunities for our young people so they remain the county and start their own businesses, support the development of the enterprise zone in Rotherwas, build a new one in Ross on Wye and meet the target laid down by the Core Strategy in 2015 of 16,500 new houses within the plan period. More houses – more council tax; it's that simple, no shadowy cabals or mysterious handshakes. 6,500 of the houses were planned to be built close to the by-pass – they enable the road and the road enables the houses. It makes sense to me that most of the new housing should be close to Hereford rather than out in the countryside but without the road it may not be possible to develop those strategic sites (which are also contributing to the 5 year housing land supply). The road would also support the development of the enterprise park and improve the air quality in Hereford by reducing the HGV traffic. So, in a nutshell, that was the plan and the people of Herefordshire did not vote for it.

There isn't an overall plan from the alliance as yet (early days though). The Independent Group favour an eastern route for the by-pass (this was looked at a while ago and discounted due to the environmental damage it would do to the incredibly rare and lovely lammis meadow by the Lugg), the Green Party are against any by-pass (although they do support a second by-pass for Leominster) and believe that the traffic in Hereford will not be a problem if we cycle more/install a light tram system/walk/take buses, It's Our County are also in support of trams/cycle etc as well as turning off the traffic lights in Hereford (especially at Belmont roundabout and Edgar Street) or at least that is my understanding. So from these new ideas a direction of travel will emerge over time and over the same time the chance of a by-pass will go away as the Dft realise that we have changed our mind and they will reallocate the funding to somewhere else.

To the Conservatives the by-pass was fundamental to being able to deliver economic growth to the county and that, in turn, was how we were planning to pay for the rising cost of care. What remains to be seen is what the new team have in mind to continue to deliver services in the absence of such development.

### **First Full Council meeting**

Got to say that it is the least thrilling meeting of the year – there is a great deal of process and not much else. The new leader was elected – the outcome was predictable as the Independents, Greens and IOC command a majority which the Conservatives and Lib Dems can't defeat – the Conservatives abstained on the vote, not because we don't support Cllr. Hitchiner but because we know next to nothing about him. Personally I would need to be able to justify my decision to my parishes and those who elected me – what if he turns out to be a disaster and I am asked why I voted for him – what would I say? I have never met him, not spoken one word to him, not seen him in action in committee or debate, he has only just been elected and has no previous experience of local government or politics. The only thing I felt I could do was to abstain – the equivalent of saying that I just don't know – which is what I felt.

The incoming administration looks and feels very different – there is a majority of women on cabinet (by some margin) but there is degree of continuity in the role of scrutiny chair being given to opposition (in this case Conservative) councillors across the board. This is to be welcomed and I think is a really good start for the new team. I have been asked to chair the Adult Wellbeing scrutiny committee and am looking forward to taking up my new role.

Meantime, my workload has considerably reduced and I find myself back in charge of my life.

### **Planning.**

I have referred four planning applications to the planning committee, one on Welsh Newton Common (191286), two in Llangarron (191276, 191288) and several at Biddlestone for Polytunnels (173774 and others). I do not have any dates for the committee as yet but if you have written in on any of these applications then you should be notified of the date in the fullness of time.

### **Roads**

A49 – Highways England - there is a major investment in the A49 coming forward later in the year. Works are due to begin 22 July until 23 August along the road with a diversion in operation along the A4137. This is likely to be disruptive but it will improve the road surface – it is not enough to top dress as there is severe degradation to the sub base layers. I am pressing to make sure that the council is able to take advantage of the road closure to do any other works (like footways/litter picking). Buses will continue to use the route as normal (they are allowed within the ‘soft close’ area and will be escorted through the ‘air lock’ area – likewise residents and other service vehicles). The closure will be 9am – 4pm on weekdays.

So there it is, my first report of the new term –

Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst