

# Report of Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst

*Serving the parishes of Llangarron, Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Marstow, Sellack, Bridstow and Peterstow.*

August/September 2020

## **Coronavirus Covid 19 update.**

Herefordshire went from being one of the lowest areas for incidence of the virus to one of the highest due to a single outbreak at Rook Row Farm in Mathon. Although this was a local 'spike' and has been successfully contained, it is a reminder that we are not out of the woods yet. It is really important that people continue to behave sensibly and with an awareness of others so we all do what we can to avoid a second wave. There are some issues around testing – a mixed picture at the moment but something we will be asking about in the Adults scrutiny committee next week.

## **Travel Measures.**

In order to encourage and support local retail and other businesses the government has paid for measures to increase walking and cycling in our towns and city. The idea is to free up space so people can get around, go shopping, have meals out without feeling that they do not have the room to socially distance. The implementation of this has been the subject of a heated debate as the business community of Hereford in particular were very critical of the way the council has closed roads and suspended parking.

I spoke to the Business Improvement District and was told that traders were on the brink – in some cases they have had to deal with flooding, lockdown and now the council is closing the road to traffic and parking. The left bank village reported having cancellations, some shop owners are saying that this is tipping them over the edge – precisely opposite to the effect that the government intended. The level of concern prompted an urgent Cross party Notice of Motion from Cllrs Kenyon and Lester debated by the full council.

Cllr Harrington undertook to listen to everyone's concerns and has had meetings with those who are particularly affected, as a result some of the measures have been altered.

## **The state of the River Wye.**

I know I go on and on about it but it is really important.

I was in a meeting about the pollution in the river and, honestly, there was a moment of real despair as I listened to the news that cygnets are dying this year because of the pollution, adult swans have also been found dead on their nests and river keepers are reporting failed broods along significant stretches of the Wye. I recalled how, earlier in the year, I had noticed the number of Canada Geese that were on the river below the bridge in Monmouth. I had thought it unusual but it makes sense – the geese were there because the swans are not, the swans are not there because the beds of Ranunculus that support them have died. That is the shocking impact of this year's algal bloom – and who knows what the long terms impact will be on fish stocks and the rest of the river ecology.

We have simply got to get this right. Recent press coverage has pointed a finger at the Powys Intensive Poultry Industry as a major contributory factor but they are not the only source of excess nutrient in the river. Current source apportionment data suggests that the proportion of Phosphate

coming from households (point source/sewage treatment works) is around 25% or less which leaves the larger part coming from diffuse agricultural sources (field run off, AD digestate, over application, careless storage of manure etc etc). When you see soil washing out of a field it is not just the miraculous micro-organisms that give life and are essential to soil fertility and structure that are being washed away down the Bristol Channel, it is also all the phosphate that has been spread to try to compensate for the loss of the lovely micro-organisms. There is legislation to prevent this.... the 2018 Water Rules for Farming.... it's worth a look.

### **Waste Not...**

I have spent a reasonable amount of time talking rubbish recently. The two waste contracts are up for re-procurement and so a group have been looking at the various options/models of delivery to recommend a way forward. As part of this I took myself off to the Llanfoist reuse centre which is next to the household recycling site. I have droned on and on about wanting a 'shed' or somesuch arrangement to triage all the waste going through the household recycling site in Ross – the one in Llanfoist is not perfect but even so it is diverting around 1.5 tonnes of material each month and is only open for 4 days! There is so much potential here, not only to increase our levels of reuse but also to give fantastic social value benefits. I am happy to say that this has made it into the final draft of the report that will go to scrutiny.

### **Transport in the County.**

I attended a briefing the other day which was about proposals for a transport improvement scheme in Hereford. There were notable contributors including an emeritus professor no less, an expert in transport. It was really interesting to learn about cycling in Ghent, and trams in Manchester – to hear the fulsome praise for the innovative schemes in Nottingham (a city that it not bisected by a river and a trunked A road, and has two bypasses)....when it came to the slide billed as the answer for Hereford there was a list numbered 1-7 but against the numbers was a blank. Disappointing. It's all very well to hear about marvellous schemes in Timbuktu but what we need is a realistic grasp of the issues and challenges of our city and county.

### **The Government's Planning Consultation**

Still out for consultation – don't forget to respond

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf)

STOP PRESS HOUSING LAND SUPPLY ANNOUNCED AT 3.69 YEARS.

Why does that matter? Although the council is still falling well below the 5 year housing land supply and this can be used as an argument in favour of applicants, where there is an NDP this still carries substantial weight. If the housing land supply falls below 3 years then the effectiveness of NDPs, even site allocated ones, is called into question.

Ironically, the council delivered more housing last year than for very many years but the ongoing moratorium in the north of the county, the pace of delivery on strategic sites and the interruption to normal processes due to CV19 will all put a tremendous strain on the ability to match that performance this year. On top of which, the housing white paper (see above) is proposing a 'standard methodology' to assess housing need/delivery targets and this is likely to see a substantial increase in the number of houses that will need to be delivered in the county. In some areas it is an

increase of 3-400% - in Herefordshire it is likely to be an increase in the order of 200% (ie. to 32,000). When we are talking about such a high number I do not feel that the current approach is the right one. The 'dribs and drabs' of a few houses here and there leads to more and more congestion in our villages and more houses built where local services are poor. It also dilutes the positive impact of development in terms of meaningful contributions to infrastructure. I would prefer to see a new town – maybe more than one – built to fantastic standards, with beautiful outdoor amenities, a lake, cycle paths, nature walks, where the houses are designed with biodiversity and ecology in every stage, with sustainable heating, a heat network perhaps, electric charging points, a Poundbury type village, with services close to hand, built for all generations and something we can all be really proud of. It would have to be close to good transport links and employment, have a school or be close to a school, doctors, dentist, shops etc. It might be a bit radical but at least we could build something inspiring that would enhance our lovely county rather than nibble away at it. Am I crazy? Let me know your thoughts.....on the suggestion, not my sanity.

**Stop Stop press.**

With 94% of the vote I was re-elected to my role as chair of the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee – I am really chuffed to enjoy such cross party support and will continue to do my best to make a useful contribution to that important element of council activity.

As always please contact me with any issues you may have and I will do my best to help.

Elissa

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