

Report for June 2020

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I am going to start with the thing that is uppermost in my mind and the thing that most consumes my thoughts at the moment.....there is a crisis and it isn't coronavirus.

If you have been paying any attention to the press or to the condition of the river itself you cannot have failed to notice that the Wye is sick. The Ranunculus, that streamer weed with white flowers, has been obliterated by the worst algal bloom in living memory. There is no Ranunculus to be seen from Bredwardine to Monmouth because the filamentous algae has covered it and killed it. Ranunculus is a keystone species to the Wye, it filters and cleans the river and provides habitat for the invertebrate life that the rest of the river life depends on (dippers, kingfishers, trout, salmon, barbel – the lot). The algae that has bloomed in recent weeks has also deprived the river of oxygen and light. The press reports are linking the bloom with the proliferation of IPU's (intensive poultry units) in the upper reaches – the algae started in Llanbister (231 KM upstream from the tidal stretch) where there are about 87 people and 27 IPU's and because it divides in the water, the longer it is in the river system the worse the bloom is in the lower reaches. There is, no doubt, a specific problem with free range poultry units but there is also a more generalised issue with the use of chicken manure (high PH indices) on land that is already saturated with Phosphate. The Wye has a Phosphate loading of around 82t per year and there are 3m tons estimated to be in the soil of the catchment – but still farmers spread more of it on their land. It's not cheap either so that is a waste of farm resource and tons of it just wash off into the rivers. The Ph is also running off because successive deep ploughing has weakened the soil structure to point where it is very fragile and the slightest bit of rain, falling on compacted land with fragile soil structure and tons of chicken muck has really, really predictable results. We've seen it for ourselves – tons of brown silt washing out of the fields and clogging up the drains and streams, excessive siltation of the water courses we rely on to protect property when it floods.

The other day I was wandering by the Monnow and couldn't fail to notice the stench of chicken manure which had just been spread on a riverside field where maize (a bare soil winter crop which is notorious for soil erosion) was growing with no sign of a cover crop. If we get heavy rainfall this field will discharge tons of phosphate into the river. The Monnow has algae of its own – unpleasant slimy goo that simply shouldn't be there. Those fields are – or should be – riverside meadows but instead they are providing a cash crop that will go to an anaerobic digester to get a government (public money) subsidy. So, in a roundabout way, we are paying for this total Horlicks. I hope and pray that the new Agriculture bill and Environment bill both do what they say on the ticket or we will have a dead river in no time at all.

I am doing my best to understand all the issues and welcome input from farmers and environmentalists. Meanwhile, as the chair of the Nutrient Management Board I am working with partners (NFU, CLA, NE, EA, Powys, NRW, WUF, DCWW et al) to find solutions and I have had constructive talks with Jesse Norman MP.

Meanwhile.....back at the other crisis.....

The council is continuing its work in protecting the most vulnerable, supporting the NHS and working with local communities and businesses. At some point the scrutiny committees will make a full review of the council's response but for now everyone is just busy getting on with it. Staff are having to adapt and take on higher work loads as colleagues have been redeployed to work on the CV19 response. You may find that things take a bit longer or officers are harder to contact but please be patient.

The Government this week published updated [guidance on social distancing until 4 July](#) alongside the [guidance that will be in place after 4 July](#).

These both cover a range of issues people may have questions on such as meeting family and friends, returning to school, going to work, businesses and venues, visiting public places and what the advice is for clinically vulnerable people.

New [sector specific guidance](#) has started to be released, and previous guidance updated to reflect the very latest advice. Further guidance will be published as more businesses are able to reopen. There are currently 12 guides covering a range of different types of work. At the time of writing, this includes:

- Close contact services (including hairdressers, barbers, beauticians, tattooists, sports and massage therapists, dress fitters, tailors and fashion designers)
- Construction and other outdoor work
- Factories, plants and warehouses
- Heritage locations
- Hotels and other guest accommodation
- Laboratories and research facilities
- Offices and contact centres
- Other people's homes
- Restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaways
- Shops and branches
- Vehicles
- The visitor economy

These sit alongside the guidance for educational and childcare settings and public transport operators which, at the time of writing, have not yet been updated.

Council meetings are being held on line – you can watch via you tube

- To view the latest virtual Planning Committee, held on 24 June please click [here](#)
- To view the latest virtual Cabinet meeting, held on 25 June please click [here](#)

Herefordshire Libraries to launch free access to thousands of newspapers and magazines using PressReader

Next week, Herefordshire Libraries' launch their latest online service, [PressReader](#), giving library members access to thousands of popular UK and international newspapers and magazines. It's simple and intuitive to use and can be used online or on the dedicated app. Although the official launch isn't until 1 July, you can get an early look by downloading the app and logging in with your

library card number from today! If you or anyone in your family aren't yet a member, it's completely free and you can [join online](#).

Useful Helpline contacts from the safeguarding board:

Samaritans helpline

In the current climate, you may be feeling stressed or anxious. You might be having more tough days, feeling worried or overwhelmed or you maybe you have things on your mind that you want to talk through.

Samaritans have introduced a confidential emotional support line for social care staff that is free to access from 7.00am-11.00pm, seven days a week. You can speak to a trained Samaritans volunteer who can help with confidential listening and signposting to specific support you might find helpful. Call 0300 131 7000.

Bereavement & Trauma Line

There is a team of fully qualified and trained professionals ready to help you at the Bereavement & Trauma Line. This assistance is available from anywhere in the country and is provided by Hospice UK. Specialist counsellors and support workers are available to support all adult social care staff:

- who have experienced a bereavement
- whose wellbeing has been affected by witnessing traumatic deaths as part of their work
- to discuss any other anxiety or emotional issues they are experiencing as a result of the coronavirus epidemic.
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All calls will be treated in the strictest of confidence and this will be explained to you when you call. This service is open to you and all adult social care staff and is available, seven days a week, between 8am and 8pm. You do not need a referral. Call 0300 303 4434

LGBT+ helpline

COVID-19 is having a significant impact on many LGBTQ+ people with family tensions during lockdown, new levels of isolation and domestic abuse being some of the issues that have been highlighted. Colleagues at the Switchboard [LGBT+ helpline](#) (0300 330 0630) are reminding people that their helpline is still open and they're continuing to support those in need during this time.

KEY PUBLIC MESSAGES

Please make positive and sensible choices and be responsible citizens, by doing this you will save lives, protect the NHS and keep yourself and your family safe.

- Please continue to limit who you have contact with as much as possible.
- Please take personal responsibility and take sensible steps to maintain social distancing if you do go out.
- If you are an adult living alone, or a single parent with children under 18, you can form a support bubble with one other household.
- You are able to spend time outdoors with up to six people as long as those from different households maintain social distancing.
- Being outdoors reduces the risk of infection, but it doesn't eradicate it. Please maintain social distancing.

- We are fortunate to have some beautiful places within our county, and many people will be glad they now have the option to make the most of them. If you travel somewhere and it's busy, please be sensible and go elsewhere or return at a different time. Keep in mind the purpose of the regulations and the ongoing national effort to protect the NHS and save lives.
- There is different legislation and guidance in place in Wales, please respect it.
- Please continue to keep washing your hands. This is a vital part of reducing the risk of infection.
- If you are displaying symptoms of coronavirus, it is vital that you self-isolate for seven days and order a test immediately. If you test positive for coronavirus, you must share information promptly about your recent contacts through the NHS test and trace service to help alert other people who may need to self-isolate. If you have had close recent contact with someone who has coronavirus, you must self-isolate if the NHS test and trace service advises you to do so. If someone you live with is feeling unwell or displaying symptoms, please self-isolate for 14 days.
- Some people might not display symptoms so social distancing and hand washing remains vital. You can wear a face covering when out, to protect other people when you may be asymptomatic.
- You must wear a face covering when travelling on public transport.
- Facilities such as waste & recycling centres, outdoor sports clubs, and non-essential retail outlets are now starting to reopen. Please follow the social distancing instructions and directions regarding entry and queuing, be aware that they might be busy, and try to avoid peak times.
- Hereford and Leominster waste and recycling centres are open. Ross waste and recycling centre is open only to those who have booked a visiting time via the council website. Please only visit if it is absolutely necessary for essential waste that can't be stored safely.
- West Mercia Police will continue to engage with the public, explaining and encouraging people in relation to the guidance and social distancing, and we will only take enforcement action where it is absolutely necessary - when there are clear breaches of the restrictions, predominantly people gathering in large groups.
- Please be responsible and continue to work with us. We all still find ourselves in very challenging circumstances and we appreciate that the public has responded so positively to the extraordinary restrictions placed upon them. Remember that if you need our help we are here for you.
- The NHS are still available and services continue. Please do not delay in seeking medical attention, should you need it.
- If you are self-isolating and don't have support, contact Talk Community on 01432 260027, email talkcommunitycovidresponse@herefordshire.gov.uk or via the council website.

PROTECT YOURSELF ▶ PROTECT OTHERS ▶ BE KIND

