

June 2020 report from Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst serving

Llangarron, Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow and Sellack Parishes.

The first virtual hiccup happened with a cabinet meeting when the live feed wouldn't work – on the whole the virtual meetings have been ok, if not brilliant, and the public meetings have gone ahead as planned. The meeting was quickly rescheduled and held on the 4th June – and can be seen on the council's you tube channel.

Business included the formal adoption of the Carbon Reduction Plan (the third of its name – little Game of Thrones reference there) which covers the period to 2025/6 with a target of 75% reduction from 2008 levels. The ultimate goal is net zero by 2030. As the cabinet member Cllr. Ellie Chowns acknowledges,

This builds on excellent progress to date – we have reduced our emissions by 43% over the past 10 years (2008/9 to 2018/19).

So lots of good work done so far, and more that needs to be done. If there is one good thing to be said about the CV19 pandemic it is that the agenda for better ways of working (BWOW – one of my favourite acronyms) has been given a kick start. The council has continued to function with many staff working from home – and this will impact on the carbon footprint of the council over the period. I am hopeful that we will be able to capture and consolidate the improved ways of doing some things where that is practical and possible. It certainly makes sense to me. There is no doubt that all council members want to get this right. I am reasonably confident that we will, as a council, get to something approaching net zero by 2030 but I continue to lobby for a clear investment in off-setting now so that when the residual carbon is left we have already planted the trees or whatever to offset it. The cost of planting a 10 year old tree is far greater than the cost of planting a tree seedling and protecting it for 10 years – what's the worst that could happen? Too many trees?

I have been enjoying my time on two task and finish groups – for those who wish to know, a task and finish group is a sub-committee that works in detail on items to come before one or other of the scrutiny committees. I am currently working with cross party colleagues on Climate change (or climate change and ecological emergency as I prefer to call it) and Waste (or let's talk rubbish). Actually both groups are really interesting. Pre Covid we were able to visit an Anaerobic digestion facility to see how food waste is turned into energy, I have also visited our energy from waste plant at Hartlebury (where most of your domestic waste ends up and makes electricity) and the recycling facility. The keynote of the waste group is to change our attitude – it is not waste, it is resource and we need to see the value in it. I am really hopeful that the plan, when it comes out, will have this at its heart – as my mother used to say 'waste not, want not, the saying's very true, practice economy in everything you do' – and that includes economy with the environment. There are not so many trees that we can cut them down for no reason, not so many insects that we can kill them with impunity, not so many flowers that we can cover the world with Glyphosate, not so much water that we can dilute the pollution in our rivers. We really must do better.

Speaking of which – for those of you who have not seen the press – the River Wye is in danger of ecological collapse. If you want to know more, have a look at my councillor facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/CouncillorElissaSwinglehurst/notifications/>

or the Hereford Times or Wye Usk Foundation. Essentially the levels of phosphate in the river (primarily from agriculture) are causing an algal bloom every year – this year the algae started in Llanbister, 231km upstream from the tidal reaches. Algae divides and multiplies in the river and so the higher up the system it begins the worse it is in the lower Wye. The stretch of the Wye between Ross and Monmouth has suffered a very severe algal bloom, the ranunculus downstream of the Wye bridge at Monmouth covered in filamentous algae and is likely to die off. Why does that matter? The algae takes sunlight from the river and kills the plant life – this impacts the invertebrate life and the fish life and generally the entire ecosystem of the river; at night it also strips oxygen from the water and this leaves the fish gasping. The flows are low this time of year, not helped by abstraction, the combination of warming climate, reducing flows, levels of nutrient from arable and livestock farming, outfall from sewage treatment works and sunlight are a toxic combination.

Covid 19 news

The Council has been working very hard to pass on the Government funding to local businesses impacted by CV19. They've done a great job as far as I can tell and there is more to come as the Government has increased the discretionary grant and the decision on how that is to be administered has just been taken. It might interest you to know that, in an emergency, decisions are no longer taken by the elected representatives but by the officers, the entire decision making process is shortened in a way that reflects the urgency of the situation. We are only now starting to see a slight easing of this situation as the more 'normal' emergency measures apply whereby the executive can now make certain decisions, albeit without the normal scrutiny call in mechanism as a check and balance. As chair of one of the scrutiny committees I completely understand and accept these measures and trust that normal service will resume when it is possible to do so.

Fastershire.

Residents in Welsh Newton might be interested to know that it looks as if something might be finally happening on the broadband front. I have been told that Gigaclear are surveying the cabinet and we are listed for inclusion towards the end of the year. In desperation (and so I can attend meetings via Zoom and Webex) I have had to take out an unlimited data contract on my mobile phone – but, those of you who live in Welsh Newton will know – mobile signal isn't all that good either! I will be happy to get more than 1mbps – it might be as high as 100!! Fingers crossed.

To anyone who is still not going to be connected – in June the **Fastershire Community Broadband Grant will launch** – this is stage 5 of the Broadband Strategy that aims to address the remaining localities in the county that are not included in current deployment programmes. The new Stage 5 will offer grants on a property basis to individuals and businesses to procure their own Gbps capable broadband solutions from a selected range of suppliers. To read more about the plans in the Fastershire Broadband Strategy [click here](#).

Stay safe, stay well.

