

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

My life is mainly about the rivers at the moment. This month I seconded a motion to full council to highlight the problems of phosphate and flooding. Like a two headed monster of legend these issues are conjoined and solutions to the one are likely to improve the other.

The motion called upon the executive to appeal to government to do more to help the county to wrestle with this monster. I have already been in several meetings with our MPs and with MPs from adjacent constituencies along with representatives from the Environment Agency, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. There is no shortage of willingness to find a solution but, as they say, 'it's not that simple'. I think of it like a trying to make a plait with string of uneven length – the three strands woven together will be strong – the short length is the measures that need to be taken to mitigate the de minimus impact of new housing, so that the development that has stalled for over a year can start to go ahead. Make no mistake, this is a very serious business, it is costing livelihoods, businesses are going under and it places an enormous strain on the council's ability to get even close to the 5 year housing land supply. It also means that more pressure is put on the other areas of the county to build houses.

The second strand is working to get the Nutrient Management Plan to 'certainty' –this is far more challenging as it involves a reliable reduction in agricultural diffuse sources of phosphate. Up to now the plan has relied on voluntary measures – these have been in place for 6-7 years and there is no evidence that they have worked. There is therefore no evidence that they will work in the future. There is a problem with excessive phosphate spreading in the catchment (it is calculated at 2000t excess pa - equivalent to 1.5m tonnes of farmyard manure) and that is adding to the store of legacy phosphate that is leaching into the rivers. This is compounded by the massive increase in Intensive Poultry Units in the catchment leading to the ready availability of the high phosphate manure; Powys Council are continuing to consent IPU's on the basis that the manure is removed to Herefordshire, Powys currently have 21 applications pending. The only regulatory tool in the box is the 2018 farming rules for water but that has yet to be taken to prosecution – indeed the enforcement levels of this regulation are well below what is required in my view. There is a strong case for a Water Protection Zone as the only way the plan can achieve certainty – it is a draconian step but it may be the only step that can take us where we need to be.

The final piece of string are the actions that will get the river to favourable conservation status. According to the Water Framework Directive that is now due by 2027....how long is a piece of string?

One of the constant challenges is the monitoring of water quality. There has been a real upsurge in Citizen Scientists taking this on and providing the EA with detailed evidence of water quality problems in the smaller tributaries as well as point pollution incidents. The groups that are already established are doing an amazing job – Friends of the Upper Wye, the Wye Salmon Association, Gwent Angling Society, Ross Anglers and now CPRE and CPRW are lending their weight and working with EA and Cardiff University. If you would be interested in becoming a citizen scientist and monitoring your local stream, tributary or main river please let me know.

On the flooding front – I am working with Llangarron and Llanwarne parishes to see how far we can get with a parish level approach to the problem of flooding. The first step has been to get expert hydrological opinion engaged, the EA, Wye Usk Foundation, natural flood management team and others are aware of the project and have all expressed a willingness to help. We have an offer of detailed landscape analysis to enhance our understanding of the risk elements in the catchment and the best areas to deploy natural flood management. The principle issues are climate change (increased severity of rainfall events), siltation due to soil loss, changes in land use from pasture/meadow to arable and the consequential inadequacy of structures to cope with the increased volumes of water.

To give an idea of the increase in volumes of water from pasture to arable – this is from an EA officer

One of the key findings from our Herefordshire Integrated NFM project has identified significant overall reduction in organic matter (typically 30%) in arable when compared to grass land use. This represents significant overall reduction in water holding capacity of our soils and when scaled up across the catchment is massive! As an example, in the Bodenham Brook catchment, this equates to 402,500,000 litres of water or for comparison 161 olympic sized swimming pools. That's quite a bit!!

BBLP (there's good news, and there's bad news)

Always a popular topic with parish councils. It cannot have escaped anyone's notice that drainage (not unrelated to the comments above) has a profound effect on the longevity and quality of road surfaces. It has therefore been decided to put greater emphasis on drainage in this year's annual plan. That's the good news. However there is going to be a consequential reduction of spend on the roads (that's the bad news). In reality there is only so much money to go around. The basic shift in percentage spend is something like this:

20/21 61% on carriageway – 21/22 it will be 25% - 22/23 it will be 15% - 23/24 it will be 15%

20/21 12% on drainage – 21/22 it will be 30% - 22/23 it will be 30% - 23/24 it will be 30%

20/21 23% on structures – 21/22 it will be 38% - 22/23 it will be 49% - 23/24 it will be 49%

20/21 4% on footways – 21/22 it will be 7% - 22/23 it will be 6% - 23/24 it will be 5%

Obviously the future figures are subject to change but that does give a sense of direction and emphasis. Should the government provide further funding this will be spent on the carriageway as it is easier to do that work at short notice Vs structures and drainage. To further enhance the spend on drainage there will be a campaign to highlight riparian rights and responsibilities and a clear process of escalation from parish council to locality steward to letter to enforcement.

Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

One of my other 'hats' is as the chair of the AWSC – this month we had the opportunity to look at the draft Carers' Strategy. It was particularly good to have input in the meeting from two 'experts by experience' – I really think that it is only when you have spoken with the service user that you know how good/bad/indifferent the service is. The strategy was well received by all and is building on the 'strengths based approach' which is the mantra of the adults and communities directorate.

AWSC also had a look at the government's white paper on ICS (Integrated Care Service) which is continuing along the same road to greater integration of health and social care that we have been on for a while (ICS, STP, One Herefordshire all part of this journey). The white paper has been well

received and it is seen as removing the obstacles that remained in the road – it was very good to hear such positive feedback from clinicians who are seeing this as logical and very welcome progress. Having said that, the government still needs to grasp the nettle on adult social care funding or the ‘pushmi-pullyu’ will soon be out of the stable.

That’s all for now.

Elissa