

## **Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst, Llangarron Ward August 2021**

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

August is a quiet month for the council so I won't have a great deal of activity to report.

Children's Services.

This is the most important area of work for the local authority and it has been the subject of multiple efforts to bring improvement. Mr Justice Keehan has been very critical of the authority over a number of cases where he has identified serious failings and mistakes both historic and recent. All of my colleagues are very concerned and want to see this turn around, there has been rising investment in the Children's and Young Peoples' directorate over several years – I remember arguing, successfully, for an additional 2m for early help (prevention) when I was the cabinet member – and there has been a real focus on improvement. The journey continues today with a change of senior staff (we now have interim director and assistant director), examination of all cases, external advice and examination from Ofsted and so on. There are two things that are, in my view, central to the successful implementation of improvement plans – one is having enough staff and the other is ensuring that staff morale is not brought so low that you lose the staff you have.

Nationally there is a shortage of social workers (so if anyone is looking for a challenging and rewarding job.....) and Herefordshire is no exception. We currently have 24 vacancies out of 84 with 9 employees off ill and a number of temporary staff. The staffing difficulty is compounded by the remote location of the county (honestly, people get it confused with Hertfordshire and then don't want to come here when they find out the mistake) and the current reputation of the directorate.

Staffing levels are also a challenge in other areas of council activity – in planning the case loads have risen, post lock down – to the point where officers are not being allocated new cases until they have the capacity. This is leading to delays in the decision making process and administration. The democratic services team are also 50% down on staffing which is making it very difficult to organise any extra activity or meeting that is not essential.

Hopefully all of this will come right once the recruitment of new staff has taken place.

Drainage.

It seems odd to be talking about drainage in August but then again the rain will be here soon enough...the council have issued a new set of riparian rights and responsibility guidance notes. I recommend all parish councillors to read them to inform their decision making over who should be digging out what ditch. I have sent a copy to all clerks via e mail.

### **The River Wye.**

Just to update you really – nothing has changed. There have been two more algal blooms that have gone through and killed of what was left of the ranunculus. The river is dying. 66% of the phosphate is coming from agriculture and it is being spread at a rate in excess of requirement within the catchment equivalent to an estimated 1.5m tonnes of farmyard manure every year (Universities of

Leeds and Lancaster). High risk crop choice (maize, potatoes, sugar beet), unsuccessful or absent cover cropping, poor manure management and poor spreading practice all contribute to the problem. There is also a growing understanding of the role of legacy phosphate and the way in which this is pouring out of the fields and into the rivers instead of being used to grow crops.

There is a large groundswell of public outrage and anger – over 500 individuals are volunteering to test water quality up and down the main rivers and all the tributaries in an effort to give the EA the data they need.

I had a meeting with Rebecca Pow (DEFRA) on Ben Taylor Davies' farm at Brampton Abbots– what a great place, really showing what is possible when you know how. Herefordshire farmers should be leading the way and in BTM we have one who is way out front.

I also had a meeting to discuss the potential role of pyrolysis (non combustion heat) as a method of removing the poultry manure from the catchment. This has promise as an idea but I am fearful that by the time anyone actually does any of these good things the river will be dead.

### **Planning**

I had one trip to the planning committee to present on two applications on Welsh Newton Common. In both cases the committee went with the officer recommendation to approve but this is now subject to legal challenge from a group of local objectors.

### **Policing**

There is a new messaging system from West Mercia Constabulary which is really worthwhile – <https://www.neighbourhoodmatters.co.uk/>

### **Queen`s platinum jubilee 2022**

**The 6<sup>th</sup> February next year marks 70 years since the Queen ascended to the throne and the 3<sup>rd</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> June has been earmarked for the official celebrations.**

**The Queens is encouraging the planting of trees as a green canopy, not just to mark the event but also making a strong statement about our future environment.**

### **Some advice from Tony Norman, tree warden.**

Species to plant- the best way is to stand where you are going to plant the tree(s) and have a good look round 360 degrees- identify the trees that are growing well in that area- then chose those to plant.

Do **NOT** plant Ash or Elm (unless it is a resistant variety).

Do plant some shrubs in amongst the trees- again look round and see what is growing locally.

All trees will want protection, weeding and care into the future.

Remember that trees grow so planting near houses, walls and roads will not be sustainable so please give that particular thought.

The Woodland Trust have packs of trees available for certain circumstances <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/>