

Report of Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst serving the fabulous Llangarron Ward and the parishes of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Llangarron, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow, Sellack

June/July

Wasn't the Queen's Jubilee brilliant? It was so great to see people out and about, enjoying community events. Well done to all the organisers (these things do not organise themselves!) who gave so generously of their time and efforts for the benefit of others. I would have liked to go to all of the events in the ward but I only made it to 5 before needing a rest!

Broadband

Hopefully by now anyone who has registered for the digital household grant to fund 4g or satellite solutions will have been contacted by the company. You will need to register with the council if you haven't already.

Moss garden – is this a new agricultural opportunity?

I was invited to attend a virtual tour of a moss garden in Germany which is supplying the moss and the surrounding timber frame to enhance air quality in Hereford. Herefordshire Council has purchased a number of these modern filters to help with the poor air quality – you might see one as you drive through on the A49 – it is a bit bigger than a phone box with louvered sides. The moss absorbs PM2.5 (particulate matter 2.5) which is harmful to human health.

The moss will need to be replaced and at the moment it comes from Germany – wouldn't it be good if we had our own local grown moss? It also likes ammonia so I suggested the company get in touch with some of our poultry growers to see if there is some way in which the moss can help to reduce ammonia emissions as well as the PM2.5 from the sheds.

Planning

The Council is currently consulting on the local plan – if you have any interest in planning please respond to the consultation. Of the various options regarding the countryside the settlements of Peterstow, Bridstow and Llangrove are mentioned in at least some. The earlier consultation showed a lack of support for dispersed development and a greater degree of support for development closer to services so the smaller villages have been left off the options at this phase of the consultation. It is really worthwhile to engage with all phases of the consultation if you want to influence the way the local plan takes shape.

The Place Shaping Consultation documents can be found on the Consultation platform [Have Your Say Today – Herefordshire Local Plan 2021-2041 – Commonplace](#) or on HC website [Local Plan 2021 - 2041 – Herefordshire Council](#). The closing date for the consultation is the 29 July 2022.

Road Closures

There was some understandable frustration about a road closure locally where there was insufficient notice and the works were going to overrun. I escalated the issue with the council with some general observations about the level of inconvenience to my local residents and the need to keep control of these sort of works.

On this occasion the works were emergency and therefore normal protocols hadn't been followed. Having said that there is still an issue around this and I will continue to push for greater control over utility companies closing roads.

As previously, Utility Contractors have to liaise with the local authority on any works and closures of highways; so linking onto this connection will give clear notice of expected timetables of installation. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/roadworks> - link on the live incident maps and they will show red dots which if you click on show the road closure and may be a sounder indicator.

Scrutiny Committee

A great deal of time has been taken up with the somewhat process driven re organisation of the scrutiny committees of the council. I am still the Chair of the Adults Wellbeing Committee but it is now called Health, Care and Wellbeing to reflect the shift of all ages commissioning. The first meeting will be on the 22nd and will receive the task and finish report on the health impacts of the intensive poultry industry in Herefordshire.

I am also now a member on the new Environment committee and will be chairing a new task and finish on the River Wye pollution. Another additional committee will be the scrutiny management board which will oversee the work of all the other committees as well as scrutinise things that are cross directorate. Looks like my diary is going to get pretty full!

LIDB

The Lugg Internal Drainage Board (which I chair) had its annual site visit and meeting. It was really worthwhile to see the challenges that the contractor has to deal with in accessing and maintaining field ditches. I would like to see far less use of glyphosate in this task and work with the area engineer and contractor to establish a more sustainable methodology to reduce unwanted overgrowth along the ditches. The first step is to create a hydrological model of the LIDB area to assess where the water needs to slow up and where it needs to speed up. Working alongside other agencies might improve soil quality and allow water to penetrate fields rather than run off due to compaction and lack of organic material in the soil structure. It's observable on some fields – I was walking earlier in the year by the Monnow and looked at a field that had a bright green pool of standing water on it – it hadn't rained for weeks – this water was not draining because the soil was completely compacted, like a car park, like concrete – no organic matter, no worm casts, no sign of life at all. When it doesn't rain this field will need irrigating long before a healthy field will need irrigating, when it does rain, this field will be waterlogged in no time and the water will then run off into the river carrying with it whatever nutrient has been applied (at high cost). One of the farmers on the LIDB visit was talking about his soil and about his pride in passing his soil on to the next generation – that was good to hear.

ReGenBen

Another inspiring visit to Ben Taylor Davies' farm in Brampton Abbots – this time courtesy of the Wye Preservation Trust. It was great to see Patrick Darling there – encouraging us all to do everything we can to protect the river. Ben tells me that 'hundreds' of farmers have taken up the opportunity to visit his farm and see the ways in which he works with nature to increase his yield, reduce his input, diversify his business and give his farm a great future. He is working on regen ways of growing difficult crops like potatoes and asparagus as well as integrating the grazing on the farm to benefit the arable. He's such an interesting speaker, very knowledgeable but he would be the first to say that he is still learning and still experimenting with new ways (sometimes the old ways) to farm more sustainably.

River Wye Update

There was a Nutrient Management Board meeting this month. Renewed efforts from the Environment Agency and Natural England (thanks to increased funding) are now being reflected in their reports to the board and the EA quarterly report. This meeting also welcomed the publication of the RePhokus report (University of Lancaster) which includes the modelled scenario for river recovery of a 75% reduction in imported fertilizer, 80% reduction in pig and poultry manure (or export) and 50% reduction in cattle manure (or export). It also shows that over a 5 yr period of testing 13000 intensively farmed fields there were 55% of fields that were high for phosphate and 15% that were very high (Olsen 4 and 5). All of which gives a sense of the scale of the problem.

The Upper Wye source apportionment data has just been published which shows an overall apportionment of 72% from agricultural diffuse sources, 23% from Sewage Treatment Works, 2% from Combined Sewer Overflows and 3% other (PTPS, septic tanks, road run off etc.).

This month is also the focus for the various Wye protection groups – Wye July – and they have held a series of meetings along the river to highlight the issues. I have attended events in Hereford, Leominster and Monmouth.

I have also been fortunate to be included in a new cross border group convened by Jesse Norman MP to have frank and constructive talks. This has led to the new 5 year plan to save the river. I am also attending the Welsh minister's meeting at the Royal Welsh.

Due to the low water levels the salmon are holding in the lower reaches. As the water warms up this will put immense stress on the fish. The EA have issued an amber alert to anglers to stay away if they can – but the angling clubs have already walked away, good for them, they don't need to be told to do the right thing. I can't help feeling that some equivalent advice should be given to all river users who are likely to stress or disturb the salmon at this time.

On the plus side there is evidence of some recovery of the ranunculus so let's hope that continues and that we don't get another bad algal bloom during this hot weather.

I was pleased to be the guest speaker at the Archenfield Community Environment Group inaugural talk – it was very well attended and some great questions were asked!

Covid.

I've had Covid – slowed me up for a day or so. There's a lot of it about so take care.

That's all for now folks!