

Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst Herefordshire Council

Llangarron Ward. Happily serving the parishes of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Llangarron, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow and Sellack.

This is the last report of 2022 or possibly the first of 2023 depending when it gets finished. It has already been delayed by the cunning IT savvy skills of my cat who managed to delete the finished document whilst taking a screenshot and all the time looking like she was just washing her bum. I tell you, they are computer ninjas – a casual stroll across the keyboard and they have reset the system, disabled the cursor or subscribed to a year of kITty Times. Anyway. Never mind. Maybe it will be better the second time around.

My last big meeting was on the 21st December – a River Wye Nutrient Management Board. There are a number of voices starting to call for the disbanding of the board, the abandonment of the phosphate action plan because ‘it isn’t working’. The thing is that it wouldn’t be working with or without the board – this is a difficult problem and, as is often the case, a committee/commission/board has been set up to simulate the appearance of action. ‘We are doing something about this problem, we have set up a committee...’ but there is no guarantee that a committee is going to fix the problem. To be fair, when the board was first established in 2014 there was work to be done and in the intervening years a great deal has been accomplished. In 2014 the share of phosphate (SRP) from sewage treatment works was 45%, it is now 23% and once they are fully invested this will fall to single figures. Over the same period the SRP in the river has remained more or less the same. The agricultural source share has gone from 45% to 70% despite investment of tens of millions in support, advice, subsidy and encouragement to reduce pollution. This is because it is a complex and difficult thing to do – it’s not that everyone isn’t trying or that farmers are recklessly over-applying poultry manure to their crops or failing to ensure that their soil stays in the field. The farming board members (NFU, CLA and Farm Herefordshire) are doing all they can to support and advise farmers about where to go to get subsidies to help them reduce their impact but they need to engage with every farmer and landowner and not just the few hundred that are working with them. As ELMS starts to gather momentum it will be all the more important that our local farmers and landowners are well positioned to take advantage of the schemes. Engaging with Farm Herefordshire would be a great first step to making sure we get it right.

The biggest stumbling block is that the regulations on both sides of the border are weak and unenforced/unenforceable. Without regulation it is hard to get innovation. There are so many potential solutions out there but no motivation to fund/ invest in any of them. Public opprobrium has got some movement from the supply chain (Tesco, Sainsburys etc talking to their suppliers Avara, Stonegate who in turn are talking to their growers) but it risks missing the mark as it is a response to public opinion. Either way, the Nutrient Management Board can only work with the regulations as they are and must rely on the agricultural sector to engage with Farm Herefordshire to get the advice and support it needs to start to make a difference to the problem. Without the farmers’ and landowners co-operation there is no chance of a solution.

From Water quality to water quantity...water, water, everywhere ... and not a drop to drink (or flush the toilets).

A fairly extensive bit of the ward was left without water in the week leading up to Christmas. This was due to the cold snap (minus 10) followed swiftly by a thaw (plus 12) which caused land-heave. The pipework was not able to deal with the movement and there were a number of ruptures. Welsh water had predicted this problem on their website but I don’t think they were prepared for the

widespread, multiple failures across their patch. I spoke with a number of engineers who were out trying to get things sorted, they were all working 16 hour days, day after day, to ensure that the water came back on for Christmas. A big thank you to all of them!

As brilliant as the teams were on the ground the communication left a lot to be desired and I think is likely to be a point of learning for the company. It was only when I emailed the CEO that Herefordshire Council leadership knew that there was a problem and given that this would have affected vulnerable people in our communities that is clearly a bit dysfunctional. I was able to speak directly to the emergency planning co-ordinator and pass on updates via my Facebook page. I was also able to make sure that individual properties where there was a persistent problem were seen to as quickly as possible.

I think we can all learn something from this – it is a good idea to keep a supply of emergency water available if there is a risk (the internet has lots of advice about storing tap water), we should all have rainwater butts anyway and they are a good source of water for flushing toilets or watering livestock...if you are vulnerable or if you have a neighbour who has a particular need for water then make sure you/they are registered on the priority list with Welsh Water.

It never rains.....but there is a danger of flooding.

I am trying to get a more joined up approach between the council's drainage team who are drafting the flooding strategy and the Internal Drainage Board/Natural flood management teams. The drainage team tend to look at flooding as an engineering issue – it is all pipes and gullies and ditches – which can mean that they don't 'upstream' the problem. There is an emphasis on urban drainage and very little consideration of rural flooding risks. One thing that stuck with me recently was that it used to take 120mm of rainfall to create a 5.3m peak in the Wye, now it takes 47mm to create the same peak. This means that the Wye peaks more often and higher than ever before, this has an impact on the ecology of the river and is a reason for the decline of the *Ranunculus fluitans*. One of the reasons for the increase in number and severity of peaks is changes in land use upstream – for instance the over-wintered sheep used to come into the lowlands to graze but now they stay in the uplands and eat stubble turnip on steeply sided ploughed fields. Sheep feet are really great at compacting wet soil and stubble turnip is a bare soil crop (ie. No green cover) which leads to increased run off, whereas a pasture field with good infiltration will hold and slow vast quantities of water. It's a complicated subject and closely aligned to the water quality issue so what works to fix one problem is likely to benefit both. This is an opportunity to create 'stackable' benefits – subsidies that do more than one thing on the same bit of land (reduce flooding, increase biodiversity, improve water quality) meaning that the levels of payment should be multiplied with the benefits.

I am also pushing for a preventative approach from the council and local partners/residents. If we have a severe weather warning for snow we don't just all think 'so what?' – the gritting lorries go out to make sure that the roads are prepared. We need to have the same attitude for rainfall. Not just think 'so what' but check drains for obstructions – make sure that the local system is as good as it can be – don't wait until someone has been flooded.

Given the recent weather there are likely to be some potholes appearing on a road near you! Do report directly to the council using the app or website. This is by far the most efficient way of getting something done. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-highways/maintenance/potholes>
<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/e3b2b34e/ttjzBlvlfEewR-39NN73dA?u=https://myaccount.herefordshire.gov.uk/report-a-pothole>

Generally Useful Stuff

Footpaths issues –

- **PROW - PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk**
- **PROW No – 01432 383 550**

Report fly tipping it will be dealt with in a much quicker time frame. by either calling the Contact Centre on 01432 261800 or by logging the fly tipping via the council website on the links below as your

https://link.edgепilot.com/s/f452e836/Hy5YWk_SgEGkleekL2ROFQ?u=https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200226/report_a_problem/98/fly_tipping

THIS WINTER : GENERAL ADVICE, INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

As we go through this challenging time find out information and advice from the national website <https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/>

Last September the Government announced 60 million pounds to subsidise bus fares and this will also be extended to Herefordshire. It will allow single journeys at £2 to help increase passenger numbers on our local services from 1st January to 31st March. More information can be found <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public-transport-1/bus-travel> Local Emergency Numbers

Environment Agency: 0800 80 70 60 (24-hours) or visit www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident

Flood alerts: Floodline 0345 988 1188. Sign up online at www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings to get Flood Warnings from the Environment Agency by phone, email or text message. If you live by a river or stream, keep a watch on current and expected water levels.

Power cut: Call 105 or visit www.powercut105.com

BT phone line issues: www.downdetector.co.uk/status/bt-british-telecom

Gas leak: 0800 111 999 or visit www.wvutilities.co.uk/services/smell-gas

Welsh Water: [0800 052 0130](tel:08000520130) (Water emergencies) or [0800 085 3968](tel:08000853968) (Sewer emergencies) or visit www.contact.dwrcymru.com/

Report a flooded road or highway obstruction- **Balfour Beatty Living Places : 01432 261800**

The Citizens Advice Bureau Online at advice@citizensadviceherefordshire.org.uk for initial contact by email. Please also give a contact phone number in case we need to contact you for more information.

Supporting Ukraine

Local teams continues to organise supplies

Local details can be found on

<https://www.facebook.com/drivingsupplioustoukraine/>

Local information website: <https://www.talkcommunitydirectory.org/ukraine>

Consultation Reminder: [Agricultural Planning supplementary planning document \(SPD\) consultation](#)

The public consultation on the SPD will begin on 28 November for a period of eight weeks until 23 January 2023.

The SPD supplements the policies of the adopted Core Strategy 2011-2031. It includes an outline of the issues that may arise in relation to agricultural development that requires planning permission and what assessments and supporting information may be required to support applications. It also provides a methodology to determine the phosphate loading of a proposed development to inform the determination of planning applications within the River Wye Catchment.

The documents will be available on the Local Plan website at <https://hlp.commonplace.is/en-GB/proposals/agricultural-planning-supplementary-planning-document-consultation/step1>

For further information please contact Angela Newey, Senior Planning Officer at angela.newey1@herefordshire.gov.uk