

## **DECEMBER report from Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst**

### **Llangarron Ward**

**Happy New Year to you all. I hope you had a peaceful and joyful festive season and I look forward to continuing to work with you in 2024.**

#### **Phosphate update**

Following lobbying by the council and our two MPs the Government has awarded a grant of 1.76 million pounds to support work on Local Nutrient Mitigation on the River Lugg. It is four and half years since a ban on the granting of new houses was brought in by Herefordshire Council acting on the directions of Natural England and this money will allow housebuilders to deliver much needed homes in the north of the county. It will also make a contribution to improving the condition of the river.

#### **Budget update**

The Government announced its provisional settlement to local authorities on 18<sup>th</sup> December for their revenue accounts and with a 4.99% Council Tax increase (including the social care charge of 3%) the council is proposing a balanced budget for 2024/25 to be debated at its February meeting. As the Conservatives are a minority administration the revenue budget will have to be supported by a cross party consensus.

There are national and local concerns about the rising costs of Adult and Children's care services, Home to school transport and special educational needs. Given the rate of inflation (around 8%) and the increasing indirect cost of the national living wage an increase in council tax is inevitable. All departments are having to find savings whilst protecting front line services.

Last month the council voted and supported by a majority the Capital Programme of the minority administration. It includes 10.6 million pounds for highway resurfacing, 10 million to support the building of the southern link road south of the city (from A465 Belmont to A49 at Grafton). Previously funds were received from government for this road plus planning permission granted and some land compulsory purchased but the previous (Independent/Green coalition) administration cancelled it and sold the land back.

There is also 3m to re-open the Shirehall in Hereford and make the building operational again – this is an important listed building and it behoves the council to look after it. The delay in getting to grips with this have seen costs rise but nevertheless it simply has to be done. The plan is to relocate the library in this fine building and not in the shopping centre. The capital programme also supports Joint work with Hereford Hospital and the H&W Group Training to build and open an education facility to train local people for careers in the Health and care sector.

There is also provision of 8m to invest in Employment land and incubation space at the large council owned Model farm site at Ross on wye and 4m for the other market towns.

With the recent announcement of the cancelling of HS2 beyond Birmingham huge levels of funding have now come available for transport projects. The council will now look at the road infrastructure needs again and build up the business case for bridge crossings across the Wye to ease congestion and provide local network resilience.

They will also lobby for a new railway station at Pontrilas and the duelling of the line between Ledbury and Hereford.

### **Consultations**

The Council has been carrying out consultations on its proposed budget and corporate plan which priorities the statutory services. There is also a consultation on future fortnightly collection of garden waste from properties from March to October using a 240 litre brown bin. There would be a cost of £55 per annum with the garden waste being composted.

Details can be found at

<https://consultations.herefordshire.gov.uk/consultations/article/105/garden-waste-collection-survey>

I attended a consultation event recently regarding the county plan and it struck me that the council would do well to provide more information about the work that we do. The group that I was listening to were very concerned about the environment and made suggestions like putting a cycle lane on the A49 in Hereford. They were not aware that the council does not have control of the A49 and cannot put a cycle lane on it. It will appear to them that they have been ignored if their ideas are not taken forward – a common complaint regarding consultation – but I can assure you that the council pays close attention to consultation responses. I am going to see if there is some way that the council can actually list some of the suggestions made and respond to them.

### **The continuing challenge of Children`s care services**

The highest priority of any local council is to deliver its statutory duties towards vulnerable residents and no more so than for children in care.

As you are aware Herefordshire Council`s Children`s service was taken over by the Department for Education over 18 months ago with an appointed Commissioner overseeing the work and last month it published the Commissioner`s review of progress in children`s services and the Minister`s recommendations.

It considered that the children`s services should remain under council control and there will be no further consideration of any alternatives. The review says that progress has been made or is under way against all the key recommendations she made in her original review, including a strengthening of the leadership team, increasing the number of permanent front-line team managers, reducing the levels of agency staff and finalising a new strategy for the SEND service. However the pace of change and improvement needs to increase and that there needs to be more consistency in quality of practice and assessments.

It acknowledges that the majority of the key performance indicators the Improvement Board is monitoring have improved in the past six months and the progress we have made to fill vacancies.

The experience and commitment of the new leader and the portfolio holder are both recognised, and the renewed focus of scrutiny meetings highlighted. Particularly pleasing is the Commissioner's finding that our staff like working here and welcome the changes which we are making to improve the service.

Work is already under way – and achieving success – to bring our performance more into line with comparable authorities. We're continuing to drive recruitment so that children do not experience unnecessary changes of social worker and working hard to ensure that we are holding face-to-face meetings wherever possible.

Our partnership with Leeds Council children's department has been well-received, with many training sessions and we look forward to seeing the results of the hard work being put in by staff with our partners in the coming months.

To improve a service like this takes time and money, continued focused on driving improvement and best practice.

One of the best ways we can support our most vulnerable children is with a placement with a family giving consistent care and better life chances – if you think this is something you are interested in please go to <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/fostering>

## HIGHWAYS

Plans are moving forward with a programme of capital investment in our highways infrastructure. Department for Transport have announced that Herefordshire is to receive more funding over the next 11 years. £1.83m of this funding will be allocated for this year and a further £1.83m for 2024/25.

In year 1 there will be a spread of treatments to complement the additional funding – deploying the traditional resurfacing works alongside the opportunity to invite other contractors to tender for the work. The proposed programme is focusing on preventative maintenance backlog. The investment is targeted toward slowing further deterioration and avoiding the risk of road closures.

The remaining balance of the Department for Transport funding will be distributed over the remaining 9 years of the settlement period. While we welcome the funding it will not be enough to bring all 2,000 miles of our highways to a top standard.

Llangrove gets its TRO – well done Llangarron Parish council. After a great deal of effort and persistence there is now a 20mph restriction in the village of Llangrove. The presence of the school, parked cars and the narrow lane all increase the risk to pedestrians, most drivers are sensible and don't go drive too fast but some drivers will benefit from the new signage.

In the meantime, please report potholes and concerns

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/reportingapp/>

Report a serious pothole, flooded road or highway obstruction- Balfour Beatty Living Places: 01432 261800

Footpaths issues –

- PROW - [PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk)
- PROW No – [01432 383 550](tel:01432383550)

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.edgepilot.com/s/f452e836/Hy5YWk\\_SgEGkleekL2ROFQ?u=https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200226/report-a-problem/98/fly-tipping](https://link.edgepilot.com/s/f452e836/Hy5YWk_SgEGkleekL2ROFQ?u=https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200226/report-a-problem/98/fly-tipping)



In December 2020 the Council awarded the former Lord Lieutenant of Herefordshire Lady Darnley the freedom of the County. Partly due to covid the presentation was never carried out and last month Cllr Roger Phillips presented the scroll of the freedom of Herefordshire to her at a reception to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Herefordshire Council in 1998.

As Lord Lieutenant she was her late Majesty's representative in the county and carried out duties on her behalf for 13 years. She supported the local Armed forces and blue light services, encouraged community and voluntary groups and promoted the success of local business. The late Queen made her a Companion of the Royal Victorian Order which is a personal gift of the Monarch.



Sign up to police alerts, you can choose which areas you want to hear about and what activity is taking place in that area. You'll also hear about positive police action, good news stories and be able to play an active part in helping us with our public appeals. <https://link.edgepilot.com/s/bb21d405/UARqOVNajkqv1vLf0zKSJQ?u=http://www.neighbourhoodmatters.co.uk/>

Report a crime Police 101 Ext 61216

Below I attended the Council's Bake off competition in Plough Lane with Herefordshire Council's own employee TV Bake-off star Saku who judged the entries. My personal favourite was the planning teams 'Santa's Unauthorised Grotto' complete with enforcement notice! All proceeds went to charity.



## Local Emergency Numbers

Environment Agency: 0800 80 70 60 (24-hours) or visit [www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident](http://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](http://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](http://www.powercut105.com)

BT phone line issues: [www.downdetector.co.uk/status/bt-british-telecom](http://www.downdetector.co.uk/status/bt-british-telecom)

Gas leak: 0800 111 999 or visit [www.wutilities.co.uk/services/smell-gas](http://www.wutilities.co.uk/services/smell-gas)

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

The Citizens Advice Bureau Online at [advice@citizensadviceherefordshire.org.uk](mailto:advice@citizensadviceherefordshire.org.uk) for initial contact by email. Please also give a contact phone number in case they need to contact you for more information.

## Supporting Ukraine

Local teams continues to organise supplies - details can be found on

<https://www.talkcommunitydirectory.org/ukraine>

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

