

## **Report from Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst November 2023**

**Representing Llangarron Ward, the parishes of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Llangrove, Peterstow, Bridstow, Marstow and Sellack.**

It is with great sadness that I report that a Llangarron resident lost their life in a fatal road accident at the Thorn Crossroads. A police investigation is underway.

My sincere condolences to the family and close friends.

### **October**

The BIG event should have been the capital budget setting at full council – possibly that doesn't sound all that thrilling but when I tell you that it is where there could be money for potholes you might be more interested. Most of the £300m capital budget is carrying forward from previous years but a close examination revealed budget lines that were for zombie projects. It actually costs money to keep these projects on the backburner even if there is no money to progress them so we decided to clear them out. If funding were to become available then we can always put them back in.

The upshot of the work was that we had about 10% of the overall capital budget to play with and had developed a shopping list that included £10m for road resurfacing (on top of the £6m we are already putting in), £12m to invest in employment sites in the market towns (including £8m for Ross on Wye), £12m to start the necessary work to get a bypass for Hereford (again) and so forth.

Unfortunately the item had to be pulled from the agenda at the last minute because opposition councillors did not feel that they had enough information or had enough time to come to a decision. Since we are a minority administration there was no way of getting the capital budget through without the support of some opposition councillors so we decided to delay and give everyone the chance to ask questions and satisfy themselves as to the direction of travel. Hopefully the plan will come again in the near future and we can get on with delivering it!

It is our intention as a minority administration to try to be as collaborative and inclusive as possible. We are all trying to do the right thing for the county and I for one, welcome the input of all councillors to the decision making of the administration.

### **Planning**

I spoke in the planning committee on an application in Llangrove. The parish council and local views were ably represented by Nick Saunders and although we did our best – and were rewarded by a split decision – the application was approved.

The new local plan (Core Strategy) is progressing and should be out for reg 18 consultation in March next year...

### **Children's services**

Ofsted have just completed and reported on their third monitoring visit. Although there are some areas of improvement these are inconsistent. Generally improvement needs to happen faster and needs to be more consolidated.

One of the hardest things is to get a stable workforce. This is not just in children's services but across most of the areas of council activity. It is a real challenge to provide a consistent and high level of service when we struggle to recruit and can be understaffed as a result.

Fostering is also a really important element in providing the best care for our young people. Fosterers are supported by the council teams and payment is provided.

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### Fostering - interview on BBC sounds

Darryl Freeman, our Director of Children's Services, was on BBC Hereford and Worcester yesterday morning talking about fostering. The interview highlights the need for more foster carers and the incredible difference that our foster carers make every day.

As long as you have a spare room, whether you own or rent your property, have no child-related convictions and a drive to make a difference, anybody over 21 of any background, faith, employment or relationship status, regardless of your sexual orientation, can foster.



If you're interested, contact us on 01432383240 or [fosteringenquiries@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosteringenquiries@herefordshire.gov.uk) or visit [Fostering pages online](#) Listen to the interview from 3:08:40 - [Tammy Gooding - 09/11/2023 - BBC Sounds](#)

### **Greeny stuff**

Well done ACEG for getting the repair shop up and running in Llangrove. This is proving to be very popular and items are being fixed by a brilliant team of volunteers. So watch out for the next one and get something fixed! Another great success for the ACEG was the apple and pear pressing event. So good to put the fruit to use and not waste it! I can recommend a cocktail with fresh apple juice and fresh wild sorrel (with vodka if a boozy version) and soda.

The Council is working with the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust to review and survey the wildlife sites in the county. As and when biodiversity net gain is finalised we will look to work with the trust to identify and deliver meaningful environmental improvement across the county. Successful actions require joint effort and the wildlife trust, council, community groups and individuals will all have a contribution to make to the whole.

### **Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) – funding now available for energy improvements to off-gas homes**

Herefordshire has been awarded £7 million through the government scheme to fund efficiency improvements to hundreds of off-grid homes in Herefordshire that are hard to heat. The funding is provided exclusively by Herefordshire Council. Residents can apply for **free** energy efficiency improvements through the scheme if they live in Herefordshire, don't have mains gas, their household income is under £31,000 per year and their property has an Energy Performance Certificate of D, E, F or G.

For more information or to apply visit <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing-3/home-energy/2>

The council has already written to the new Secretary of State for the Environment, Rt Hon. Steve Barclay MP, to welcome him to his post and to invite him to visit so we can ensure that the plan for the Wye is not forgotten and to discuss the challenges of rurality.

### **[Have your say on county garden waste collections – Herefordshire Council](#)**

The council is currently consulting on proposals to collect garden waste. Please take a look at the consultation and have your say!

### **Road Safety.**

With recent events in mind it is timely that the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office (PCC) are launching a road safety campaign this week.

#### **Roads Focus 2023**

Council officers and Members are working with the Police and Crime Commissioner's office on the Roads Focus campaign. The project aims to understand public concerns regarding road safety in communities, to ultimately make improvements through the introduction of signage, awareness sessions, Community Speedwatch groups, etc.

There will be two drop-in sessions:

- Thursday 30 November – Ledbury Community Hall, HR8 2AE
- Tuesday 12 December – Leominster Community Centre, HR6 8NJ

Engineering Manager Bruce Evans, Road Safety Education Officer Julie Freeman, and Cabinet Member Cllr Durkin will represent Herefordshire Council at the Ledbury drop-in. Head of Highways & Traffic, Ed Bradford will be attendance in Leominster for the second.

### **Stronger Together**

Herefordshire has signed a ground-breaking agreement with Shropshire Council and Monmouthshire and Powys county councils which will allow us to work together, and with both UK and Welsh governments, on some of the big challenges we all share. While the councils will each continue to run for the benefit of their residents, the partnership provides a helpful framework for collaboration in key areas. Transport, skills and housing, alongside energy, climate change, tourism and digital connectivity are all high on the agenda, and we will now progress work in these key areas

## **Library**

The council has continued to weigh up the decision to relocate the library in Hereford. The previous administration had decided that Maylord Orchards shopping centre was the right place but the current administration wanted to consider other options including the Shire Hall.

The Shire Hall is an imposing listed building – some feel it is unwelcoming and too imposing – it needs investment in any case. The last administration were told that the cost of restoring the building would be over £7m so the option was discounted. They also hoped to create a cultural hub with co-location of other companies around Maylords but those businesses have gone elsewhere so the paradigm has shifted somewhat.

The cabinet, having examined the options and listened to the views of scrutiny and opposition members decided to go ahead with the option to move the library into the Shire Hall. The upside is that this will provide more space, it will be more flexible, it will be a great use for an important building and it is still a convenient location. The downside is that it will cost money to do the necessary (and inevitable) works to the building and it will take longer.

I suppose I take the long view – it may cost more and take longer but this will be something for the county to be proud of for decades to come. Cost and value are not the same thing.

## **Finances**

The 2022/23 accounts have been signed-off by auditors. In May we were among only 30 per cent of councils to submit our draft 2022/23 accounts within new government deadlines, and we're now the first unitary authority in the country to have those accounts signed-off as being 'true and fair'. Well done the finance team!

We are starting the budget setting process and it is already clear that the savings that had been identified by the previous administration may not be deliverable. As with every local authority we have to factor in inflation, rising wages, rising demand for services, workforce recruitment and so on. It is hard to keep on delivering more for less – demand in adult and children's services is rising year on year and the cost of providing those services is also rising.

## **River Wye and Farming**

There is increasing enforcement and monitoring activity by the statutory agencies and we are starting to see some changes in practice as a result. The Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales are inviting citizen reporting of incidents of run off/soil loss/pollution through their reporting hotlines. They can't be everywhere doing everything so it is really helpful if trouble spots can be photographed so they can assess the issue and visit to give some help and advice.

After several months of reorganisation the Nutrient Management Board governance changes have been agreed. I think the changes will be beneficial to delivering the plan to improve the condition of the Wye and Lugg. Happy to report that I am still the Chair of the board.

Herefordshire Council is hosting a 'Building Bridges across Troubled Waters' conference in November. It will be an opportunity for the agricultural sector to showcase and explain the things that they are doing to support the river. The hope is to encourage the campaign groups to celebrate some of the great things that are going on, to give them greater confidence in the efforts being made and to move the dial on 'farming negative' sentiment.

I also attended the Rural Business advice day and I have to report that the room was packed! There was a great deal of interest in everything from free farm carbon audits to farming for better soil. As

the SFI/ELMS funding starts to appear and the BPS disappears we are seeing a fantastic uptake of advice to help farmers to position their businesses to take advantage of the new schemes.

There's plenty of advice out there – a good place to start is the Herefordshire Rural Hub.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

Organisations encouraged to 'Talk Wellbeing' with new Herefordshire service – please share

A new 'Talk Wellbeing service' has been launched by Herefordshire General Practice with the aim of helping people to improve their health and wellbeing.

The service is visiting locations across the county to offer blood pressure and cholesterol checks and advice on how to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Trained NHS professionals will also be on hand to offer help with registration at a GP practice, if not already registered. They can offer advice on all aspects of health and wellbeing, including signposting to additional sources of help and support.

To find out where the service will next be visiting, please visit [their webpage](#).

Talk Wellbeing can be booked to visit employers' sites or community locations. Anyone interested can email the Talk Wellbeing team on [Talkwellbeing.HGP@nhs.net](mailto:Talkwellbeing.HGP@nhs.net) or complete the online form on [the webpage](#). Please note that we are only able to offer this service to adults aged 18 and over.

That's all for now. As always get in touch if you have any local issues or problems that you would like to raise with me.