

Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst July 2023

Cabinet Member for the Environment, Deputy Leader of Herefordshire Council

Member for Llangarron Ward

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

Climate change or climate changed?

The wildfires have been much in the news but here it feels like we are stuck under the sprinkler system. Europe and North America have been experiencing intense heat and July has been recorded as the hottest on record. Alongside record breaking heat has come record breaking rainfall particularly in China where an incredible 744.8 ml of rain fell over four days, in Japan 376mm fell in one day; compare with Storm Dennis which caused mayhem in Herefordshire which, even when combined with Storm Ciara, produced average rainfall of 150mm- 200mm over 9 days.

One of the areas that I am working on is making sure that Herefordshire is ready for climate extremes. It is very important that we do all we can to contribute to efforts to limit global warming but it is crucial that our residents are informed and prepared. I have had meetings this month to work with partners to ensure we have an up to date plan so we can be as prepared as possible. Of course it is also down to parish councils and individual residents to be resilient and ready.

Library and Museum

You might have seen some information about this in the news. The new administration has a great deal to consider and some decisions made by the previous administration are being rethought. The previous decision was to remodel the fine building in Broad Street into a fabulous new museum and to relocate the library to the upper floors of the Maylord Shopping Centre. The plan was to create a 'hub' of creative companies but the other companies have decided to remain where they are.

The Nash portico at the front of the Shire Hall is now a sorry sight; surrounded with security railings it looks like a derelict and unloved building, not the jewel in Hereford's architectural crown. We had been told that the cost of refurbishment would be 7.5m so it had not been thought practical as an option for the library. However, closer examination suggests that the building is not a basket case and some investment (not 7.5m) will see it coming back to life.

As an administration we want to see this building back in use and we want to see our library given a location that reflects the importance we place on learning. The Shire Hall says something that the Maylords Shopping Centre does not.

We are therefore developing a full business case to see if we can relocate the library and resource learning centre to the Shire Hall.

Potholes

The new administration is putting about 2.5m as a start into filling potholes. I am making sure that some of the local roads that are particularly poor are considered for works but there are so many throughout the county I cannot guarantee success. Hopefully more funding will be found to do more works in the future.

Children's Services

The latest monitoring report from Ofsted is a mix of good and bad. Improvement is starting to be seen but it is not yet consistent in all areas. Overall the inspector noted that there is a determination to get the service improved and progress is being made. However, it needs to be at a faster pace and there are still some areas where it is proving very difficult. Probably the most intractable problem is recruitment and retention of social workers – it is a national shortage and because Herefordshire is considered a bit remote we struggle to recruit. We are trying to 'grow our own' so if you know anyone who is interested please get in touch. Because we have such a shortage we have to use a lot of agency and locum staff. They are often very good but they are not permanent and this means that a young person in care may have to cope with social workers coming and going. This is very difficult for a young person who may be dealing with a lot of uncertainty in their lives.

Full Council

This month saw the first full council meeting for the new administration. There was no great amount of business to conduct but we did debate a notice of motion to (re)declare the climate and ecological emergency that the council first declared in Feb 2019. It was good to give new members the opportunity to express their views and to establish that the council is still unanimously in support of the motion.

River Wye

I was invited to another meeting at No 10 but I decided to attend a Herefordshire Wildlife Trust roundtable with the supply chain instead. I was ably represented in the No 10 meeting by Cllr Phillips who is the chairman of the council and a local member for one of the wards affected by the so called planning moratorium.

The meeting I attended was interesting and showed the degree to which the big retailers are anxious to be part of the solution. They are already working with the Wye Agri food partnership with Wye Usk Foundation and they certainly seemed keen to do more. I very much welcome the 'on boarding' of major retail companies and their influence over the supply chain is very likely to see changes on the ground.

There are a few promising projects starting to emerge to find a more 'circular economy' approach to the waste/resource of livestock (including poultry) manures. I hope that we shall see one or more of these projects progressing as a way to reduce the over application of manures and save a large tonnage of carbon.

The Nutrient Management Board finally met again after a lengthy hiatus. The statutory agencies requested that the meeting went into closed session to discuss board governance but I voted against as I did not think that this was consistent with the Nolan Principles (openness and transparency). None of the local authorities voted to close the meeting but all of the statutory agencies did – which is odd because they are also bound by the Nolan principles...

In any event the Zoom technology was not working and the meeting had to be abandoned leaving the public bewildered and enraged.

We are now entering into a navel-gazing, governance-rearranging period before the next meeting is held. My personal view is that we need to wait for the Welsh Government to finalise their governance structures around the NMBs (of which the Wye is one) or we will just have to do it all twice!

PARISHES

I am sorry if I have missed meetings recently – I have rather more evening commitments than I used to have. However – please make sure I have your meeting details and I will always do my utmost to attend. If you need to contact me between meetings please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Useful information

Home Upgrade Grants (HUG)

Herefordshire Council has been allocated £7.74m to deliver **fully funded** energy efficient measures to approx. 400 homes across the County over the next two years, via the Home Upgrade Grant scheme (HUG).



The HUG is a government-funded grant scheme that provides energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating to low-income households living in the worst quality, off-gas grid homes in England.

HUG has two key objectives:

- To deliver progress towards the statutory fuel poverty target for England, by improving as many fuel-poor homes as reasonably practicable to a minimum energy efficiency rating of Band C by 2030
- To enable the delivery of the wider Net Zero programme to phase out high-carbon heating for homes off the mains gas grid.

Official estimates put current fuel poverty numbers in Herefordshire at 23,876 households (28%), up from 17% at the beginning of the energy crisis and this funding should go some way to reducing residents energy bills.

For more information visit our [Home Energy website](#).