

Report from Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst January/February 2024

### **Stormy Weather**

This month we certainly have been battered by storms Henk, Isha and Jocelyn. I hope all of you have remained safe and well.

The Flood Recovery Framework was triggered on 6 January in response to the severe flooding events that occurred as a result of Storm Henk. Given that some 66 properties in the county have so far been identified as having flooded internally, Herefordshire Council is eligible for Government support and will be administering the following schemes: Community recovery grant, Business recovery grant, Council tax discount scheme and the Business rates relief scheme. If you know of any residents or businesses that might still need help after the storm please do encourage those who have suffered property flooding from Storm Henk to let us know by [completing a form](#) on our website.

### **Gigabit Fibre**

If you live in Welsh Newton, Welsh Newton Common, Llangarron or Llangrove you may have been contacted about a scheme to roll out gigabit broadband. At the initial stage it is only an expression of interest – you are not committing to anything. I have been advised that, even if you have satellite or 5G it is a good idea to apply for this funding. The more people who apply the greater the chances we will be within the roll out. This kind of connectivity can add up to 20% to property prices. Please register on the website. At the moment Llangrove is almost 50% registered – but they need everyone to get on board.

Further details:

Openreach are running in conjunction with Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to bring full fibre broadband to Llangarron Telephone exchange area (Primarily Llangarron, Llangrove and Welsh Newton ). This is outside of the Gigabit National Procurement

Full fibre (FTTP) would provide broadband services via fibre optic cables direct to each premise up to offer speeds of up to 1000mbps which is greater than the current copper fed fttc service in the area which offers a maximum of 80mbps. I should also point out that the fttp fibre-based service is a more reliable technology with respect to faults. This is a significant upgrade in infrastructure and capability.

### **What are we trying to do ?**

This is a proposed scheme sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) which would use public grants issued in form of vouchers to be claimed by each resident at a value £4500. If we can attract enough pledged grants, we will be able to build full fibre to the whole exchange area.

Openreach is a wholesale supplier and once we have built the new network (assuming we get enough support) each resident would be responsible for ordering a service from an internet provider of their choice (perhaps their current supplier). Currently approximately 25 internet service providers offer fttp based broadband. I would suggest people check speeds and prices on a utility website to get a view of potential costs of service. Also see link to isp preview giving independent view on current tariffs [Best Broadband ISP List - Internet Service Providers - ISPreview UK](#)

Llangarron exchange area as follows.

### **What do residents need to do?**

The proposed DSIT scheme works along these three principles and is restricted by time – hence urgency.

1. Check your eligibility and pledge your voucher today - DSIT will have reviewed eligibility of premises which can receive a grant. This can be checked via an Openreach website – see link [Connect my community | Openreach](#) . Note a full description of the scheme's terms are also on this website.
2. Once you pledge – then respond to the following DSIT email to validate your pledge - once enough pledges are confirmed by DSIT to Openreach FTTP build will begin (noting there is pledge threshold that needs to be achieved to trigger build , but the number of pledges is not 100% of the exchange area )
3. Once build is complete – residents order Ultrafast Full Fibre broadband with a service provider of their choice when it's available.

**This is only available for Welsh Newton, Llangrove and Llangarron.**

### **Food Waste Collection**

You may have been aware of some excitement in the local press and social media regarding the council collection of food waste. This falls into my portfolio and I have been on BBC H&W to explain where we are. The council is currently procuring the waste collection contract which will run for at least 8 years and probably much longer. The Conservative Environment Act 2021 commits local authorities to collecting food waste and garden waste. The original intention of the council was to introduce alternate weeks for recycling collection, weekly food waste collection and three weekly 'black bag' residual waste collection. The current procurement is maintaining business as usual and will phase in changes throughout the life of the contract as a series of separate decisions. This kind of flexibility means that we will be well positioned to 'switch on' services as and when the government 'new burdens' grants become available. The Government's November 'simpler recycling' announcement makes it clear that fortnightly 'black bin' collection is expected so it is fortunate that we retained that element rather than rush to make changes in advance of clear direction. The advantage of waiting for funding from the government is that this reduces the burden on the local tax payer.

There has been a consultation running on the proposed garden waste service. This is envisaged as a charged for service (not everyone has a garden or needs the service) but we hope it will offer excellent value for money. The consultation responses will be carefully considered as we look to design the service.

Just a reminder to everyone – the current waste and recycling arrangements in Herefordshire are long standing and it goes to show that the right decision can pay dividends

over time. Over 10 years ago we took the decision to invest in an energy from waste plant at Hartlebury. As a result we have not had to pay millions in landfill tax, we have not put hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste into landfill, we have contributed to generating 135,000 MWh/pa, enough energy for the equivalent of 38,500 homes a year for ten years, we have reduced the emissions of methane from land fill, we have recycled metals from the residual waste stream, we have provided an ash that is used in aggregates for building. The recycling is all sorted by EnviroSort and sold to UK recycling firms.

We currently have 1% of residual waste going to landfill.

Not bad for a decision taken so long ago and it goes to show that future proofing is an important element of long term contracts.

### **Health**

You may be aware that cases of norovirus are on the rise in the county. As we know sickness and diarrhoea can be very unpleasant and highly contagious. Washing your hands frequently with soap and water is the best way to stop it spreading. Alcohol hand gels do not kill norovirus. If you have [symptoms](#) you should stay at home until you have not been sick, or had diarrhoea for at least 2 days, as this is when you are most infectious. You should also avoid visiting your GP or hospital while symptomatic unless advised otherwise. More information about Norovirus is available on the [NHS website](#). Please see further down in the bulletin for all the information you will need regarding keeping safe and well from the virus.

### **Opportunities for Young People**

The Herefordshire Skills Show will take place on Thursday 8 February at Hereford Racecourse and coincides with National Apprenticeship Week. Local businesses and training providers will be at the event to provide over 1,200 young people with professional advice on careers, apprenticeships, job vacancies, work experience, internships, college courses, university courses and gap year opportunities. The aim of the expo is to help young people to make informed decisions on their future career options and hopefully encourage them to take up the opportunities available to them within the county. So please spread the word - [You can find out more on the website](#).

### **Lengthsman**

The administration is proposing a revenue budget that will restore the enhanced lengthsman payments of £120 per km.

### **Budget.**

**We will be setting the capital and revenue budget and council tax on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February. As a minority administration the Conservatives will be asking members to support their proposal.**

The proposed rate of council tax increase will be 2.99% with an additional 2% levy for social care. This means that a band D property will be paying an additional £89.15 (without accounting for precepts due to parish councils, police and fire services). We absolutely recognise that there is a cost of living crisis and for some this will be a burden that they will not be able to accommodate. There is, therefore, a scheme in place to support those who are struggling to pay. Unfortunately the council finances need to be strengthened and it is our hope that we will be able to get things on a better footing for next year. At the moment

the council is also having to factor in 6% inflation and the living wage increase as well as investing in children's services and restoring some of our reserves.

To give you a quick sense of the overall budget (rounded figures)

The 24/25 budget proposes

Children's Services 65 million

Adult Wellbeing 77 million

Economy and Environment (including waste, planning, potholes...) 28.5m

The total anticipated council tax receipts is 135m with the balance in grants/business rates etc.

Stop press....additional funding for rural areas from central government thanks for the Rural Services Network and in particular Herefordshire Council Chairman Cllr Roger Phillips who is a tireless champion for the county.



### **The Rural Services Network Champions Fair Funding and Growth in Parliament**

In a significant move towards addressing the longstanding disparities in rural communities, the Rural Services Network (RSN) successfully launched the 'Winning the Rural Vote' campaign in Parliament last week.

The campaign, led by RSN Chair Councillor Roger Phillips and Chief Executive Kerry Booth, garnered the attention and support of rural MPs and the Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business Kevin Hollinrake MP who attended the launch and shared his views with the audience on the importance of small businesses in rural areas, to the wider economy.

The manifesto asks in key policy areas for rural communities, arrive at a critical juncture, with rural public services facing chronic underfunding and high operational costs.

As a result of RSN lobbying there is some additional funding (945k) and it is proposed that this is spent on the lengthsman grant (see above – 250k), drainage (445k) and to remove long standing problems that have closed public rights of way (250k).

The Government also added another 2.5m into the pot and it is proposed that this is spent on strategic housing (affordable housing), not increasing parking costs (400k cost), not reducing library hours (55k cost) and creating a community and voluntary sector fund of 200k and replenishing reserves.

### **A4137 Thorn Junction**

Herefordshire Council will be making improvements to the signage and road markings at the Thorn junction. There have been a series of road traffic accidents at this site, including, tragically, one fatality. I have been lobbying the council to get improvements and to monitor speed on this stretch of road. I am pleased to report that the designs are nearly complete and I have asked for the work to be expedited.

### **Other items in the news**

A report about the council spending money on replacing bus shelters in Hereford has created a certain amount of online fury.

The **bus shelters** are end of life and need to be replaced. They are being replaced by using funds for 'greening the city' part of the Stronger Towns Fund (not council tax money) from Government. The new bus shelters will have sedum roofs as part of the funding package. This is a project that started in 2021 and is just spending the final bit of grant money. This money cannot be re-allocated to potholes or anything else as it was the result of a specific funding bid.

**Potholes** – Herefordshire is 'the pothole capital of England'. Who knew? Herefordshire is also the second worst funded county in the UK for potholes as the funding is linked to population and not miles of roads. We have 2000 miles of road by the way, long enough to go from Land's End to John O Groats two and a half times. We have a population considerably smaller than the average London borough.

Despite the report saying that we have a lot of potholes the council was also praised for being 'more responsive' than other local authorities and in being proactive in trying to tackle the problem.

We are allocating 10m of additional investment to resurfacing 2024-6 and will be spending every penny of additional government funding, following the changes to HS2, on works to our highway network. This will mean a further 106m being invested over the next 10 years alongside the 14m per year we receive from Government currently. It's not enough but it's better than a kick in the teeth.

That's all for now.

Elissa