

Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst

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

February 2025

It's all about the money.

The endless taradiddle that is the budget setting moved towards its conclusion at the February meeting of full council. [Agenda for Council on Friday 7 February 2025, 10.00 am - Herefordshire Council](#)

Bearing in mind that we currently have a minority administration (elected May 2023) this is the time when, should opposition councillors so wish, an enormous amount of mischief might be made. I am very pleased to report that all councillors engaged with goodwill and the interests of the county foremost in their minds – the budget passed with only one vote against (from a staunch anti bypass councillor) and with no amendments.

It is not only a reflection of the tremendous effort that the administration has put in to working with the utmost transparency and collaboration but also of the great work of the scrutiny committees and opposition councillors who all contributed to a cross-party consensus. It was agreed that:

- a) **the council tax base of £ 72,816.74 Band D equivalents in 2025/26;**
- b) **an increase in core council tax for 2025/26 of 2.99%;**
- c) **an additional precept in respect of adult social care costs of 2% applied to council tax in 2025/26 resulting in a total council tax increase of 4.99%, increasing the band D charge from £1,875.76 to £1,969.36 for Herefordshire Council in 2025/26;**

Remember that there are a number of local authorities who have had to call on the government for extra funding, six who have been allowed by government to raise council tax by as much as 10% (Bradford), some who have asked but have been refused (Hampshire 15%), some are teetering on the brink of financial failure.

Herefordshire has a relatively tiny council tax base and we have proportionately high demands but because of the sensible management of our money last year, because we have made the very difficult decisions to reduce spend, reduce staffing and 'tighten our belts' we are not in that position. The extra cost pressures have totalled £26m this year – due to the indirect impact of the employer's NI changes, rising costs of care and increased demand for services. Even the late in the day decision of government to reallocate the rural service delivery grant (worth about £7.1m) to more urban areas did not stop us from being one of the first local authorities to set a balanced budget.

It is worth spending a moment to go through some of the top lines of the budget

Last year (24/25) the combined spend of adults and children's social care was £135m – the total council tax received was £135m. The bit of the council that does everything else – empties 89,000 bins, fixes 2000 miles of roads, keeps libraries open, maintains the public realm etc etc. had a budget of £38m. Total budgeted spend was £212m

This year (25/26) the combined budget of adults and children's social care is £149m due to increased demand, inflation and the impact of the employers NI. The total council tax is £146m. The bit of the council that does everything else gets a share of £42m.

Total draft budgeted spend for the year £232m. (a 9% rise). There are planned savings of £6.9m .

We have allocated more money (£10m) for road repairs to make up for a period of under investment previously, we have allocated money to enhance flood resilience, and we will continue to support the excellent work done by the parish councils and their lengthsman.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/1922/council-investing-in-flooding-resilience-response-and-recovery>

[Council continues funding for local Parish improvement schemes – Herefordshire Council](#)

The current administration was elected in May 2023 which meant that they inherited the budget choices of the previous (Independent/IOC/Green) administration. It was only when the budget was set last year that the minority Conservative administration could put forward their own priorities for spending.

Last year's increased investment in roads is finally starting to show in the ward. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the Llangarron parish council and local residents I have been able to put a good case for work on the BOATs (byways open to all traffic) in Llangrove. It is the first time that the council has invested to this degree in BOATs and I would like to place on record my thanks to Cllr Barry Durkin for his unwavering support. I will be expecting work to the roads as well but it is important to recognise progress when it happens. There have been some complaints from residents who live on the stoned part of the track which did not get a tarmac surface. The reason for this difference was that the sub surface was not good enough to lay tarmac. The wet weather has meant that the stone has not set/bound but the expectation is that as it dries it will harden into a more compact surface. If further work is needed once this process is complete I will ask for it to be done.

DID YOU KNOW the amount of money that Herefordshire Council has to spend per head of population that is government funded will reduce by 3.14% in 2025/26 compared with an average increase of 8.21% in predominantly urban areas?

[Herefordshire Council highlights critical funding disparity in recent local government finance settlement – Herefordshire Council](#)

TROs

We have a number of TRO (traffic regulation order) applications in the ward. I have asked for an update on the progress of the applications and been given assurance that they are close to the top of the list. Expected time line is that work will start early in the next financial year. Once the project is underway the parish councils will be contacted for their input on where data needs to be captured and they will remain a statutory consultee from that point.

The proposed TROs will lead to reduced speed limits and enhance road safety. I am fully in support of all of the applications.

Ash Die Back

Herefordshire Council has allocated £315,000 to mitigate the impact of ash dieback. First identified in the UK in 2012 it is a disease that can kill the tree causing the shedding of limbs and can cause the tree to fall.

Surveys are done before work to ensure that there are no nesting birds or other protected wildlife.

There will be a lengthy period of full road closure on the A466 between the 10th and 27th March for work on diseased ash trees. It will be very sad to see so many trees felled but I will be asking for replanting in line with the adopted policy of 5/1.

The closure will be from 9:00 am to 15:30pm each day with no weekend working.

The work will be undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 between Sandyway and the junction with the B4521, phase 2 from B4521 and Welsh Newton.

Access to properties may be affected or delayed so ensure you plan for this.

Works may change due to weather or unforeseen circumstances – for the most up to date list of roadworks in the county go to <https://one.network>

Also Facebook Herefordshire Highways, Twitter @hfdStreets

NPPF

Parish councils will be aware that the new National Planning Policy Framework requires a substantial increase to the housing numbers for Herefordshire. Whereas the emerging local plan had a target of 16,100 over the plan period, the new target set by government is 27,260 – a 69% increase.

In order to deliver this level of growth the Government require the delivery of 1,363 homes per annum over a twenty-year period. This is an increase upon the current delivery rate of 773 homes per annum. To put this into context, there are 5 National House Builders that operate within Herefordshire, the maximum build rate for each of these is less than 100 units per annum. There is also a requirement to add in a buffer so in the final analysis the total is probably going to be closer to 30,000 houses – almost double the original planned growth for the county.

Prior to the publication of the NPPF Herefordshire had a 5 year housing land supply of 5.79 Years. The application of the new NPPF reduces the 5YHLS down to 3.06 years. Therefore there is a Presumption in Favour of development and deviation away from the plan led process or ‘planning by appeal’.

If we cannot demonstrate a 5 yr housing land supply the government will impose a 20% uplift on the target increasing the total to over 32,000 – double the original planned growth.

It is highly likely that we will see more and more speculative applications to test the local plan and NDPs.

The lack of a 5YHLS has implications for the weight that can be applied to Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) in decision making. For plans that contain policies to meet their identified housing requirement, and where the NDP is less than five years old the NPPF allows the decision maker to attach significant weight to the neighbourhood plan even when the council cannot demonstrate a 5YHLS. However if the NDP is over 5 years old or has not delivered housing targets this is not be the case.

Repair Shop

I have to mention this because it is brilliant. I went along to the Llangrove repair shop and the amazing people there fixed my antediluvian cassette player. I am so impressed – so now it can have

a long and happy life, I can listen to a cassette or two and the whole thing won't be going to the tip.
Thanks Repair Shop!

Bonkers about Bokashi

I also had a great time visiting the Gorrings at Lower Blakemere Farm. Heather showed me round the world of the Wiggly Wigglers and I learnt all about their fantastic bokashi composting. They are one of the biggest producers of bokashi in the UK. Totally recommend it as a way of composting (fermenting) kitchen waste. They are also trialling it in their cow shed and I have to say I was amazed at the lack of 'farm smell' – it just all smelt lovely. I am seeing if there is some way we can use that for the council waste streams.

Taking a Deep Dive into Rivers (metaphorically)

I attended a conference at Llandrindod Wells to find out more about what Powys Council are doing to reduce pollution in the rivers. It was a good meeting full of positive ideas and actions. It is important that all local authorities work together to do what we can to improve the condition of our rivers.

Stop Press.

I had a mention in dispatches as Jesse Norman MP tabled a 10m rule bill to ask the government to develop and deliver a plan to clean up the Wye.

[Jesse Norman introduces Bill to restore River Wye's water quality | Jesse Norman](#)

The bill was co-sponsored by Ellie Chowns, MP for North Herefordshire – it's really encouraging to know that both our MPs are working together to help the river back to health.

As always if you need me to do anything just get in touch – I'm here to help!

Elissa Swinglehurst

Elissa.swinglehurst@herefordshire.gov.uk

Check out my facebook page Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst.