



Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst
Representing Llangarron Ward

August is never a busy time in the council and apart from business as usual there was not a great deal to report on.

I have now taken on Culture as part of my portfolio and was pleased to attend my first cultural partnership meeting. They are doing fantastic work in promoting the cultural offer of the county, tourism and education. The Partnership has benefited from the outstanding contribution of Nic Millington (Rural Media) and has really made great progress under his chairmanship. However, all good things do, eventually, come to an end and Nic has now decided to hand over the chair and step back. I wish him well and thank him for all that he has done, and continues to do, to support and champion the cultural offer of Herefordshire.

I shall continue to work on improving the opportunities for access to the arts and to support the growth of this vital sector of our economy.

I also spent a bit of time in August starring in a film the council are making to promote the local authority's role in improving water quality and delivering strategic mitigation for phosphate pollution to enable homes to be built in the Lugg catchment.

All Change

I have just been involved with the recruitment of a corporate director for Economy and Environment. This role will be critical to delivering the progress we are hoping to make in the next year or so. The big projects that are on the runway are:

The Hereford Transport Hub (ground broken and underway)

The new Museum (underway)

The new Library (procurement underway)

The first phase of the Western Bypass (land purchase underway, finance secured, due to break ground Dec 2026)

The car park on the old bus station (waiting for transport hub to be delivered)

The delivery of a fantastic nature-based flood alleviation scheme to enable housing on Merton Meadow (underway)

The delivery of an employment site in Ross on Wye

The redevelopment of John Haider building in Hereford to house people in temporary accommodation (a long-term revenue saving for the council)

As well as some important work on the public realm contract re-procurement, the roll out of enhanced waste collection services and the development of the new local plan.

Lots to do.

You may have read that Paul Walker, our CEO, is stepping down in March. He stepped into the role at a difficult time and almost immediately had to deal with devastating flooding, covid and troubled children's services. Thankfully we are now in calmer waters and making good progress in a number of significant areas.

This is not just my view. The peer review team visited us back in June for the Local Government Association and published their report this week. They describe us as a good council and mention the positive changes in our culture and the improved staff engagement. We're praised for having strong leadership, good financial management, constructive partnership working and highlight improvements in children's services, a maturing political culture, and our commitment to transformation. You can read the [full report online](#).

The CPC was then followed by a CQC (Care Quality Commission) assessment of Adult Social Care in the Council. Early soundings are positive, but we will have to wait for the report to be published in a few weeks before we know the full story. It is a challenging time for this area of the council's work, and we will have to work hard to maintain service levels without an unsustainable financial commitment.

Ofsted will be making a full assessment of Children's services at the end of the year.

It is by knowing ourselves that we can improve, so all of this reflection will, we hope, stand us in good stead as we continue to strive to deliver the best for Herefordshire.

However, some things stay the same (or get worse)

You will also have read that the government's 'fairer funding' review is threatening to create a serious financial challenge for Herefordshire. This is partly due to the way the government is not recognising the cost-of-service delivery in a rural county and, in combination with the loss of the rural service delivery grant last year, this is leaving the council with increased costs but no increased funding. The government is assuming a maximum council tax rise whereas we were modelling the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) on 3.99%, the government is also assuming a band D equivalent council tax of £2,200 whereas in Herefordshire it is lower. These things are combining to reduce our funding by about 40% compared to our statistical neighbours. We will be making our case to government, but we have to prepare for the situation to remain the same. Our early analysis suggests that the funding gap in 2026/27 will be 27 million – around 11% of our net budget. The cabinet member for finance, Cllr Peter Stoddart – is determined to rise to the challenge and produce a balanced budget – the longer term MTFS (medium term financial strategy) is going to require some tough decisions to protect statutory services. We will be looking at generating more income, reviewing capital spending to reduce revenue pressures, increasing efficiency and investing in technology to reduce costs long term. Many authorities – some neighbouring councils – are starting to buckle under the pressure but Herefordshire has acted prudently to give us a sound financial base to withstand these current challenges.

As a consequence, it is unlikely that Herefordshire Council will be able to fund the Lengthsman grant to the same uplifted standard that we have managed for the last few years. My advice to parishes is to not bank on the £120 but assume the £60 basic and make allowances in your precept for the level of service you want to provide. This will not be known until we have set the budget, and all the numbers are finalised, but I thought parishes should be aware of the risk.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE DRAINAGE GRANT WILL NOT ALLOW FOR A TIME EXTENSION . APPLICATIONS HAVE TO BE SUBMITTED BY 28 SEPTEMBER ...NO EXCEPTIONS!!

The PROW grant is not time limited but works have to be delivered by the end of March.

Water Quality

I attended the Welsh Government Summit on Water Quality with Deputy First Minister Huw Irranca-Davies. It was an excellent meeting with some really good input from the Dairy sector (First Milk), nature friendly farmers, legislators, regulators and innovators. There is a clear direction of travel to align funding and opportunities to sustainable farming practices which reflects the approach in England as the various strands start to draw together.

The River Wye has improved in terms of phosphate levels, the lower Wye is no longer failing its target and so it is only the upper Wye that still has some improvement to make. Welsh Government/NRW are investing in the upper catchment to bring it into compliance.

A recent study by Cardiff University (Rupert Perkins) has demonstrated that the role of phosphate in Wye algal blooms is not as important as the flow/temperature of the river. He is not saying that P is not important or that efforts to reduce nutrient loading are not worthwhile, but we need to see the biological response of the river in the context of a number of different stressors to understand the relative importance of all of the variables. His findings are only for the Wye and do not translate to the Lugg, Arrow and Frome which are more impacted by nutrient.

The Wye Catchment Partnership is developing and delivering the holistic solutions for the river's health, and they will be prioritising flow and sunlight/temperature, whereas the Nutrient Management Board will continue to focus on nutrient (mainly in the Arrow, Lugg and Frome).

Herefordshire Council will be hosting the third river conference on the 21 November where stakeholders will be able to hear about some of the projects being delivered in the Arrow, Lugg and Frome catchments and the innovative schemes that are developing for soil remediation in the catchment.

And finally.....

After the debates about the flag on roundabouts and lamp posts it was great to see the St George's flag flying at Plough Lane on 27th Sept to show our support for the Red Roses. A moment of real national pride in a team that has withstood and overcome, and done so with grace, courage, good humour and humility. An outstanding result in more ways than just the score line.

Please note that I will be away from the 1st Oct to the 16th Oct.