

February 2026

### **Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst**

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

### **Budget**

The process of setting the budget for 26/27 nears completion with a full council meeting at the end of this week to set the council tax including the precepts for parish councils, the police and fire and rescue services.

**Herefordshire Council voted through the 2026/27 revenue budget at its meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> February. There were no opposition amendments to the proposed budget with all councillors recognising it was the best that could be delivered given the Government's reduction of financial support to Herefordshire.**

As regular readers will know, this has been a very hard year and as the government has made this a three-year settlement, 'things are not going to get better'. Those of you who attended the parish summit yesterday will have heard from Rachael Saunders, our 151 officer, about the challenges we are facing. At least we are managing to continue to deliver services and invest in the county without taking out an 'exceptional financial support' loan or increasing council tax over 4.99%. We have neighbouring authorities who are having to do both with loans of over £100m (on which interest is payable) and council tax set at 8.99%.

[Reform UK gets Worcestershire County Council budget approved - BBC News](#)  
[Shropshire Council tax is rising by 9% – how will it be spent? - BBC News](#)

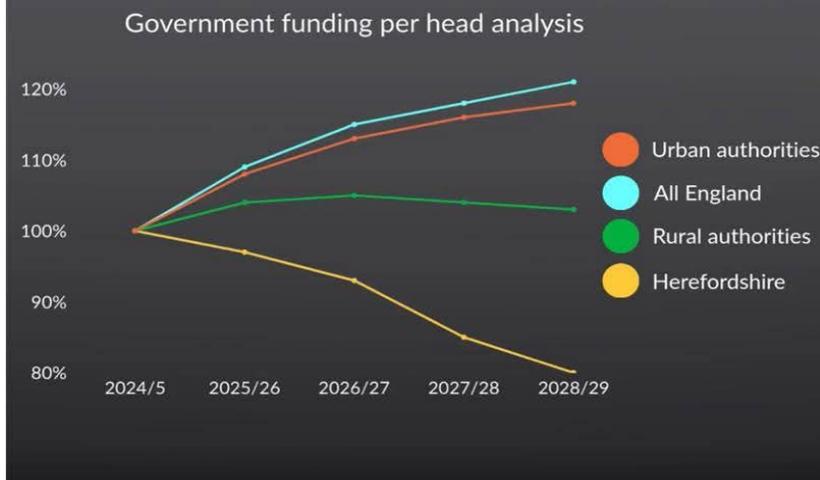
The 'fairer funding review' is particularly unfair for rural authorities and that is one reason why we are seeing these councils struggling.

Assessments by the independent Rural Services Network, indicates that:

- *Urban councils are expected to receive around 32% more per head in Government-funded spending power for 2026/27;*
- *Rural residents will pay around 17% more in council tax compared to Urban residents in 2026/27;*
- *by 2028/29, urban authorities' spending power is expected to allow them to spend around £100 more per resident on services than the most rural councils*

*By 2028/29, Government-funded spending power for the most urban authorities is estimated to rise by around 20%, compared with around 2% for the most rural councils;*

## Urban councils are expected to get 40% more funding per head



We have had to set a budget with £20m in savings due to the government redirection of funding from rural areas to urban ones. The big winners have been the Labour controlled councils including Birmingham City Council which had been bankrupt but is now boasting of being able to increase public spending by £130m due to the government giving them £300m. Herefordshire has been one of the most disadvantaged by this change of funding allocation.

People reasonably expect to see what they get for their council tax, they expect to see smooth roads and tidy public realm, they expect to have their bins emptied and for things to work. So – what do you get for your council tax? Here are the headlines of income and expenditure:

Council tax raises @ £153m  
Additional income @ £80m (and reducing)

Adult Social Care (community wellbeing) budget is £90m  
Children's Services budget is £58m  
Economy and Environment (including roads) budget is £38m  
Corporate and central budget £47m

The council, the County council network and both of our MPs have lobbied government about the funding settlement but to no effect and the settlement has been concluded with a reduction in funding of £17.3m and a £31m shortfall over the medium term which we will have to manage down in order to set a balanced budget. The funding also reduced last year including the last-minute removal of over £7m Rural Services Delivery Grant. This year it was the last-minute removal of funding for a SEND school which would have been a way of reducing revenue spend as well as giving our most vulnerable young people a better school experience and enhanced life chances.

It is, as they say, what it is and it is going to be like this for the foreseeable future.

**Our budget reflects what residents told the council during the Budget and Council Tax 2026/27 consultation, with highways being their top priority. In response, the capital programme includes one of the council's largest ever investments in the roads network, including a £5 million resurfacing program and hopefully more than £24 million in Department for Transport maintenance grants to cut reactive repairs, reduce backlogs and improve road conditions countywide.**

**Emergency and temporary accommodation received the largest addition to the capital programme in 26/27, meaning, in the future, less reliance on private landlords and reducing the costs to the revenue budget. There will also be investment in the restoration of the county's historic buildings and continued support for the Hereford Bypass.**

## **POTHOLES**

I recently had to drive to Bristol for a meeting and there are potholes there as well. There are also some absolutely massive ones in Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire and, if Facebook is to be believed, pretty much every rural county and quite a few urban ones. So, not just us.

The average number of potholes that Herefordshire Council deals with is 1000 – 1500 per month. Over the last two months that number has been 9000 per month due to the unrelenting rain. The wet weather has also hampered effective repair. We have 6 teams working 7 days a week but we are not getting ahead of the problem and won't be able to until the weather changes.

Could we do more? Should we do more?

The limiting factor is money - it's really that simple - if we had more of it we could do more roads. Between 2019 and 2023 the council was run by a Green/Independent coalition and they took the strategic decision to redirect funding from road repair to drainage (in an attempt to 'upstream' the problem) and they just didn't invest enough. Since 2023 the current administration have taken a strategic decision to invest more money into roads than ever before but, realistically, it would cost over £200m to get the roads sorted so we are always going to be 'managing' a declining asset.

We have over 2000 miles of highway in Herefordshire and receive less than £12,000 per mile in funding. On a typical A road it costs around £40,000 to do a mile of surface dressing and £250,000 to do a mile of resurfacing. In addition, the money we receive from central government also has to maintain over 800 structures, 13,000 streetlights, 18,000 traffic signs, 30,000 highways trees, 30,000 gullies and 50,000 grips.

Since 2023 the current Conservative minority administration has invested an additional £50m across our highway network and public realm. We fully acknowledge that more needs to be done.

We are changing the way that the public realm work is delivered – again, those of you who attended the parish summit will have heard the details from Cllr Hurcomb. It is hoped that this new model will be more flexible, offer better value for money and provide a better level of service.

## **PLEASE report potholes and concerns**

**[Report problems on the road –](#)**

**[www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/report-problems-road](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/report-problems-road)**

**[Check on progress of a defect](#)**

**[herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/pothole-road-defect-progress-map](http://herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/pothole-road-defect-progress-map)**

**Report a serious pothole, flooded road or highway obstruction- Balfour Beatty Living Places : 01432 261800**

**Making a claim for vehicle damage :** [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/highway-claims](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/roads-1/highway-claims)

#### Footpaths issues –

- PROW - [PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:PROW@herefordshire.gov.uk)
- PROW No – 01432 383 550

**Report fly tipping** it will be dealt with in a much quicker time frame. by either calling the Contact Centre on 01432 261800 or by logging the fly tipping via the council website on the links below as your [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/fly\\_tipping](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/fly_tipping)

#### **A bit more about ROADS**

Well done to Sellack Parish Council for raising the condition of Church Road as a locally significant road – it is now on the list for repair and surface dressing this year.

We will also see investment on the A466 between the Gwent boundary and the 40mph sign in Welsh Newton (apparently the road is poor for skid resistance), the U71014 Daffaluke Lane and U71223 Rectory Lane in Llangrove will also be surface dressed as part of the annual plan. The plan published to date does not represent 100% of the funding so I am hopeful that we will see more good news in the coming weeks.

#### **Food Waste**

The Conservative Government's 2021 Environment Act places a duty on local authorities to collect food waste as a separate waste stream from the end of March 2026. It is always the case that when a government creates a new service for local authorities that they provide something called 'new burdens' funding to compensate. This funding covers both capital and revenue expenses. Since the announcement the council have received

- 24/25 - £1,227,600 for purchase of vehicles
- 24/25 - £619,532 for purchase of containers
- 25/26 - £531,780 for transitional costs

However, the announcement of revenue funding from Government did not come when expected through the spring or summer of 2025. This will be a cost of around £2.2m p.a.

- The Government have decided that food waste collection costs have been provided for 'within the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement for 26-27 received on the 17th December 2025 – the settlement that already means that we have to save £20m...(see above) so, in reality, the £2.2m is not there.

The decision that the council took to implement food waste collection was tied to the provision of 'new burdens' funding to cover the cost of implementation. It is therefore necessary to re-visit the decision, find the additional funding – not only for the revenue cost but also for a gap in capital costs and then go ahead. This is a complex piece of work and we don't want to start off such an important service without taking the time to get it right. Finding out about the funding gap in December and trying to roll out the service in March is simply unrealistic. It is critical that the waste collection and disposal services continue to enjoy a high level of public trust – food waste is certainly something we can't get wrong if we want people to use the service and not continue to put their food into their residual waste bin. Better to take some more time and get it right.

So, it is coming, but it is not going to happen at the end of March 2026.

### **Look after your Local**

**The Government recently issued a revaluation of business rates to local businesses and some of our small businesses have seen significant increases of 50% and more. Together with rises in National Insurance, National Minimum Wage and electricity etc this revaluation puts our valued local businesses under enormous pressure. If there are any businesses who have been badly impacted in the ward please contact me so I can join my colleagues and build up our evidence base for Government.**

### **Consultation on Herefordshire Nature Recovery Strategy**

Local residents, environmental groups, landowners, farmers and charities have come together with Herefordshire Council to launch a new collaborative approach to protecting and restoring Herefordshire's natural environment.

Together they have shaped the county's first ever [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\)](#), a major new plan with 15 habitat priorities designed to protect, enhance and reconnect the landscapes, habitats and species that make Herefordshire special.

Backed by extensive mapping, expert scientific input and collaboration with landowners, charities, national agencies and community organisations over the past two years, the LNRS sets out almost 100 potential opportunities to boost biodiversity and restore natural assets across Herefordshire's 200,000 hectares. Council specialists and partners are already working with many landowners on local projects.

A public consultation has now been launched to get wider feedback and input into the plan – including potential for even more opportunities to enhance the environment for the future. An interactive online map allows people to zoom in on 42 potential habitat measures and 12 supporting actions, plus 43 potential species measures.

The LNRS is not a list of mandatory schemes. Instead it outlines a menu of voluntary ideas and suggestions, alongside existing nature reserves, wildlife sites and unique habitats, that residents, farmers and all types of landowners can choose to pursue with support from the Council and partners. Council staff are already working with landowners, environmental charities and others in the county wide effort to create healthier habitats, cleaner watercourses, richer wildlife and more resilient ecosystems.

Consultation closes on 22<sup>nd</sup> March :

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/2026/february/local-nature-recovery-strategy-consultation/>

## **Parish Summit.**

It was lovely to see some of you at the parish summit last night where we had presentations on the public realm, funding, devolution, children's services improvement and the parish charter. If any of you are not signed up to the parish charter please consider doing it – it is basically a service level agreement between the county council and parishes which gives clear timeframes and expectations around communication.

That's all for now!!

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<sup>i</sup> “The government remains committed to supporting local authorities to deliver weekly food waste collections. Ongoing funding was allocated through the Spending Review and will be provided through the Settlement, rather than as a separate new burdens grant. This funding is included within the overall uplift to local government confirmed at the Spending Review, and will be provided to local authorities through the Settlement. This approach reflects the government's wider commitment, set out in the Fair Funding Review 2.0, to simplify the local government funding system by consolidating revenue funding across service areas and reducing the number of individual grants.”