

Councillor report July 2019

The new council are still settling into their work and roles.

I am delighted to have been appointed to three outside bodies which reflect my interests and experience; they are the Lugg Internal Drainage Board (which oversees drainage works and maintenance in an area related to river catchments but excluding the main river body), the Nutrient Management Board (charged with managing water quality in the Wye catchment) and the Wye Navigation Advisory Committee (which I assume does what it says on the tin and advises on the areas of the river where navigation is permitted).

So far I have attended one of the boards, the Lugg Internal Drainage Board, which met in Leominster. We had a very interesting presentation about the Natural Flood Management scheme that is being trialled in Herefordshire at the moment and which ought to have a beneficial effect downstream in attenuating peak flows.

Local Planning Update

The 9 house site in Glewstone has been passed on appeal. I had referred this application to the planning committee and they refused on the grounds of landscape impact in the AONB. There are also a number of subsidiary points arising from the sustainability of the location (albeit an RA2 settlement in the Core Strategy), the lack of local services, the impact on the highways network and the lack of a safe place for children to wait for the bus at the cross roads. None of these arguments held up at appeal and the planning officer was shown to have been right in his initial recommendation to approve.

The Welsh Newton and Llanrothal NDP will be at referendum on the 15th August. It has taken 6 years and thousands of pounds of public money to get it to this stage. It will define the way in which development will take place and stop 'runaway' development led by appeal and speculative applications. There is an emphasis on the value the local people place on the natural environment, views and character of the settlement of Welsh Newton Common (which is the only RA2 settlement in the parish) with constraints being placed both via a settlement boundary and criteria.

Ross Transport Plan

I have attended two briefings on the emerging Ross transport plan. If early discussions are any indication this is a plan that will have the Climate Change agenda at its heart. Further workshops are going to be held and then a public consultation. As an adjacent ward member I am representing non resident interests and feel it is appropriate to support the views of the local members (who are, after all, representing the residents of Ross on Wye) whilst still speaking out for visitors. Various things were discussed including on street parking, out of town parking provision (park and ride), cycling, pedestrian space (car free town centre), increasing connectivity to sustainable transport and so on.

There is the possibility here for a bold re-imagining of Ross on Wye as a car-free town....imagine that.

And, speaking of transport....

A49 and A4317 works by Highways England.

As regular readers of my reports will know, I attended a briefing at Peterstow Parish Council where Highways England and Kier outlined their approach to the road works and closures currently taking

place on the A49/A4317. They explained that there would be a full road closure due to the scope of the works but that residents would be able to come and go through the closure to access their properties without undue difficulty.

It would appear that this is not what has taken place and a good deal of frustration has resulted. First and foremost I want everyone to be in no doubt that this is nothing to do with Herefordshire Council, Peterstow Parish Council or Bridstow Parish Council. The decision to do the works and the methodology is completely down to Highways England and Kier. They communicated to some local residents and parish councils but not to others, there was a lack of strategic wider communication to outlying areas like Sellack where residents inevitably have to use the A49. The concurrent works on the A4137 (which is the diversion) have been poorly explained and appear to be the result of a lack of sensible planning (which is not the case, they are deliberately concurrent).

The local businesses have been left feeling abandoned and ignored despite the efforts of Peterstow Parish council to encourage local people to put in extra support while the closure is in place. It is just not good enough on multiple levels and the local parish councils are having to try to manage the situation.

Of course it must be said that the A49 needed some investment – the substrata of the road is collapsing in several places and there is no alternative to substantial works to fix it properly. How often is the council criticised for not fixing roads ‘properly’ and how often do I hear complaints about potholes? Highways England decided to make that investment in the road network, to fix problems ‘properly’ but this would always have entailed a level of disruption and inconvenience.

Having said that though the situation is not being handled well, the closure has not been well designed or managed and communication has left a lot to be desired.

All (Climate) Change!

We had the first of two briefings organised by Cllr. Trish Marsh on the Climate Change Emergency. I am not someone who feels that endlessly restating a problem will miraculously produce a solution, I am, as Cllr Marsh said at the meeting ‘a person of action’. With that in mind I took 100 trees to the meeting and challenged all the members to take one and plant it. Surprisingly an initial response from a number of members was quite negative ‘I’ve no where to plant it’, ‘I have enough trees’ etc etc. because they were thinking immediately of reasons no to do something instead of finding a way of doing it. I persuaded most to leave with a tree to plant on open ground, in a hedgerow, two have gone to Much Birch School – basically you can always find somewhere for a tree if you want to and it is a more positive and useful response than clogging up the traffic in London by parking a boat in the middle of it. I remember being at school and the year of ‘plant a tree in ’73 – I’ve been doing it ever since. I’ve still got plenty of baby trees (horse chestnut) if anyone wants to plant one or two (or more), they are best planted out in the Autumn.

During the most recent planning committee meeting Cllr I’Anson asked how many people had travelled in by sustainable means of transport – one hand went up – Cllr. Milln (a Green Party councillor who lives in Hereford) and there we have the problem. This meeting had councillors present who do not support the bypass because they argue that everyone should walk and cycle more. If the councillors who think that behaviour change will solve the traffic problem in Hereford can’t get out of their cars, what makes them think anyone else will?

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