

February Report of Ward Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst

### **Water, water everywhere.....**

Just when you thought we had seen enough rain this winter Storm Dennis arrives with 43 mm in 24 hours making 100 mm of rain from 9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> falling on already saturated ground. I have attached the Chief Executive recent statement to the Council's Cabinet which gives some sense of the impact on the whole county.

The Government has made various grants available and I am pleased our MPs ensured we received the Bellwin grant, which is the emergency funding Government gives to local authorities for one off events. However this funding has to be spent by 15<sup>th</sup> March. Cllr Roger Phillips has asked both Herefordshire MPs and lobbied via the LGA to extend this period.

I have visited residents affected by the recent floods and request all my Parish Councils to put flooding on their agenda so we can evaluate and learn any lessons. It is important to get an idea of the condition of the watercourses – especially the Garron and the Gamber – and I am hoping that landowners in the area will work positively with the parish council to facilitate a survey.

Herefordshire Council has offered free collection of water damaged items from flooded houses and waived the usual trailer permits to deposit flood debris. Over 250 hardship payments have been paid out this last week to residents and businesses affected. The Government's fund is administered by Herefordshire Council with up to £500 per resident and £2,500 per business.

If your home or business has been impacted by the recent flooding please go the website below and get the latest information.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200196/roads/345/flooding/3>

The other impact has been on our highways -- Please report any EMERGENCY Defects and Potholes by phone 01432 261800 or for non-emergency defects, by logging on the Herefordshire Council website <https://myaccount.herefordshire.gov.uk/report-a-pothole>

This has been a challenging period for our local emergency services and I would like to pay tribute to them, to the community responders, 4x4 rescue and community groups who have gone above and beyond. Two things I would hope we can all manage to do – do not drive into a flood (doh) as the emergency services are needed to deal with other things and can't spend all their time getting over optimistic motorists out of trouble. Try to clear the grids closest to you – in front of your house, through the village, whatever. The debris that collects on them – sticks, leaves, straw – really compromises the ability of the drainage infrastructure to work. It is clearly stupid for BBLP to have to send a team from Hereford to clear sticks off a grid so please – can we all do our bit. I regularly do all the grids through and around Welsh Newton but I am the only person who does this – not sure what all the other residents are up to! Perhaps parish councils might appoint a road drain monitor?

### **Full council meetings**

At the recent Council meeting we debated the budget setting for 2020/21 and the three year financial plan. The Council will set a revenue budget of 157 million pounds which will require a 3.9% increase in Council tax (including 2% for social care). There were a few proposed amendments including one from the Lib Dems for increased funding for roads in market towns which I supported but which did not get approved, one from the Conservatives to lessen the increase in council tax by 1% and one, also from the Conservatives, to spend an additional 2m on C and U class roads which was carried by majority. 2m sounds like a lot of money but if I tell you that, even if the roads were in good condition, the maintenance bill should be 8m pa. – twice what we had but half what we need.

The full council meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> March confirmed the council tax setting. There were a number of notices of motion put to the council including one to investigate 20mph zones in villages throughout the county. At the moment this is only an intention to explore the options and so it shows a direction of travel more than a destination. An amendment was suggested to narrow the action to around schools and known hotspots with a

clear action to implement rather than explore but this did not succeed. Another notice of motion was put by Cllr Rone but it had to be withdrawn as his seconder decided not to support it in the end. As the notice impacted councillors who live in the city I did not feel that it would have been right for me to second it – no city based councillor chose to do so. I was a bit surprised by the fact that none of the councillors who live in the city were prepared to give up their car parking perks in order to lead by example in our fight against the climate emergency. This is the text of the amendment:

(Proposed by Councillor Paul Rone, Seconded by Councillor Jeremy Milln)

That all elected members that represent a city ward and live in the city should not have a car park pass as this only encourages use of a motor car.

There was virtually no debate and no one seemed minded to support the motion in any case, make of that what you will.

In response to the leader's report I made a plea for consistent and clear messaging about ditches – contrary to what most people believe the local authority is not, in fact, responsible for a vast number of road side ditches. They are the responsibility of the landowner adjacent – the local authority has the right to drain water from the road onto adjacent land but the landowner does not have the right to drain onto the highway.

[https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200196/roads/345/flooding/6?fbclid=IwAR0rIKkuInlowXt1b46R68608DJZSt5Th\\_eELRT\\_x2hcuXieBAGKZLR2\\_E](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200196/roads/345/flooding/6?fbclid=IwAR0rIKkuInlowXt1b46R68608DJZSt5Th_eELRT_x2hcuXieBAGKZLR2_E)

I think I must have hit a nerve as I got a round of applause for my question.

Until the council stops equivocating and starts enforcing I doubt that our watercourses and ditches are going to improve – the condition of watercourses, partially blocked with debris, silted up and obstructed is a contributing factor in flooding – both of roads and of property. Wouldn't it be great if everyone did their bit for the good of others and without enforcement or even having to be asked – wouldn't that be fantastic? Actually it would be an improvement if we could keep the soil in the fields in the first place.

I have taken a sample of silt washed out from a local field and I am going to run an experiment – three pots – one with builders sand, one with silt from a field and one with soil, I will plant crop in all three and observe the results. I wonder what will happen.....

Ttfn.