

As of 1st September 2021

Leader's newsletter

Welcome to my newsletter and trust that you have had an opportunity to relax over the Summer.

Activity in the Council doesn't stop, nor continue in its variety. Councils across the Country are helping to accommodate the refugees from Afghanistan, but at the time of writing this no Council knows how many they will be expected. Herefordshire is no exception. We are also aware of our responsibility towards personnel who served in Afghanistan and may have issues arising. Thank you to everyone who cares for those individuals.

What I consider to be at the other end of the spectrum, I had an email from a Wiltshire County Councillor commending the Council with regard to the Three Shires Rally which he had attended, applauding our foresight in working with the organising club to enable the event to take place. I confess I knew nothing about it but on enquiry it is clear that officers had worked hard in the background to enable this event to take place. Thank you to officers who are engaged in many activities which are hardly noticed.

I've also had a number of visitors this week who commented on how attractive Hereford and Herefordshire is. Also an MP who was visiting took a walk along the River Wye. We are so fortunate to live in a lovely place.

Cllr Harvey will mention the consultation which has begun for the budget for 2022/23. It would be good if as many people as possible could participate in one of the zoom sessions. For details please see Cllr Harvey's section.

I will be attending an event on Friday at the Shellstore helping the Councils engagement with business, and seeing how we can work together on Covid recovery. It is in all our interests to work together.

Please also take advantage of the free bus travel at weekends. Details are on this link: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/bus-it>

Children and families – Cllr Diana Toynbee

I understand that many colleagues are interested and concerned about changes and developments in our Children's Services, and hope you will contact me directly if you would like a conversation about it. Putting together our Improvement Plan is a huge and vital task, and Donna Vickers has been running workshops to ensure that a wide range of people can contribute to making it meaningful and clear. We're also having productive conversations with our local partners to ensure that they share a sense of ownership for the plan with Herefordshire Council.

As you are all aware, Paul Walker commissioned a very comprehensive audit programme to look deeply at our children's social care cases, and this has now been underway for 8 weeks. A lot is being learned from this process, and the information gathered is being used to analyse the quality of our social work.

It's invaluable – and overdue – to be systematic about reviewing our practice and structures, and ensuring that staff can give their best work. There is a lot of good work going on with families, and we commend and celebrate that. The colleagues doing the auditing are experienced social workers, so central to the work is supporting staff through this process, including extra workshops and training.

There are some serious concerns around some of the findings, which are naturally challenging and sensitive to deal with. Where staff are being moved, this is being addressed appropriately with the support and advice from our HR colleagues, and it's very good to now have a senior HR officer dedicated to the directorate.

This is a challenging time - we are all acutely aware of how unsettling it feels to some members of staff are finding this, and are sensitive in our communications. It is inevitable that this sort of deep change will create worries, however well we try to hold the workforce. You will understand that our priority must be to ensure that the children of Herefordshire receive safe, supportive and effective services, and that as we move through this process our day to day work continues to improve.

Adults and Communities – Cllr Felicity Norman

Hoople Care

The learning disabilities residential and respite service formerly delivered by Fitzroy at Southbank Close and Ridgemoor Road has transferred back to the council and is now being run by Hoople from 1 August 2021.

The council made the [decision to transfer the service](#) on 17 May 2021, and this has enabled Hoople to further extend their services into the care sector as a provider and has seen the creation of Hoople Care, which is jointly owned by the council and Wye Valley NHS Trust.

ASC Commissioning, ASC Operations, Fitzroy and Hoople worked together to ensure the transfer went smoothly. There have been no changes to how the care is delivered and all service users have continued to receive the same level of care and support that they need. All staff at Fitzroy have transferred over to Hoople through the TUPE process and will be offered a programme of training that is part of an overall plan to improve future services.

This is an exciting opportunity for Hoople and follows on from the successful introduction of Homefirst and Hillside Care Centre at Redhill, Hereford.

Hoople's Chief Operating Officer, Audrey Clements, said: "We are thrilled to welcome the former Fitzroy team to Hoople. The team bring with them a wealth of experience and an energy to provide high quality services.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for Hoople to work with two of our shareholders, Herefordshire Council and Wye Valley NHS Trust, on an exciting development in the care market."

Hampton House closure

Herefordshire Old People's Housing Society Management Committee has made the difficult decision to close Hampton House care home at Hampton Bishop on 24 September. The care home currently has 23 residents, 17 of these are self-funded and 6 are supported by the council.

We recognise how difficult and upsetting this situation is for the care home residents, their respective families and the care home staff. Our staff are working closely with the management of Hampton House to assist with minimising the impact on those affected by the closure. We are also working closely with the care home residents and their families to ensure they find a new home and their move is completed as safely and smoothly as possible. We have offered the care home staff recruitment and training information to help them secure employment in the future.

Talk community hubs

The latest addition to the 24 Talk Community hubs is Ross-on-Wye Community Garden. It's one of our more unique hubs, because although it's located in the centre of Ross-on-Wye, it's within a beautiful community garden, which provides a safe and tranquil space for people to relax and take some timeout from the busy hubbub of daily life.

To read the full story, visit <https://www.talkcommunitydirectory.org/talk-community-directory-news>

Holiday Activity Fund

The holiday activity and food programme is well under way and what a fantastic summer it has been so far. We have been working with so many great partners across the county to provide enriching activities and healthy food for children eligible for free school meals. With over 7000 places on offer across a wide range of providers we've had feedback that children have been having a great time and it's not finished yet!

<https://www.talkcommunity.org/holidayactivities/>

Money on Your Mind

We've received fantastic feedback following the launch of the Money on Your Mind signposting webpage. An easy to follow site providing clear, practical information, advice and signposting to people facing financial hardship enabling them to take positive steps forward.

<https://www.talkcommunity.org/money-on-your-mind/>

Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey

Budget Consultation

Herefordshire Council is continuing to consult on its budget and Council Tax proposals for 2022/23 and is asking residents to participate and have their say. Please can ward and parish councillors raise the profile of this consultation in their communities and encourage local people and community groups to participate and share their views.

This year, the budget consultation is focused on how the council can best support post-covid recovery in Herefordshire and informing how the council can transform its services to ensure they are delivered in a way that is effective, affordable and environmentally friendly.

You can take part in the budget consultation on the council's website:
www.herefordshire.gov.uk/budget-consultation

The budget consultation will run until Monday 4 October 2021.

Capital Injection Options for Road Network Improvements

During preparation for the 2022-23 budget the council will be exploring options to make a further major investment in improving the existing road network of the county. In 2019 we inherited a road network has been in a state of 'managed decline' which is not a sustainable approach. Within the last decade a capital investment of an additional £20m was made and this was directed towards improving C & U-class roads specifically in rural areas.

A further significant capital injection (£20m-£40m) may well be needed to try to bring the general condition of the network to a level which means that the current revenue repair budget is sufficient to maintain a reasonable overall condition.

We are interested to know whether there is support from parishes and the wider community for such an initiative. If we do go ahead with such an investment we would want to undertake much broader engagement on the priorities for targeting the funds than the approach which was used previously.

Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler

Strategic Housing

There is news of further development of new affordable housing in the County, in partnership with one of our preferred registered providers.

A former poultry farm will be transformed into dozens of homes after a multi-million pound deal for the land in Herefordshire has been finalised.

The 3.38 acre site on Roman Road, in Hereford, will become a development featuring 42 brand new homes, 28 for affordable rent and 14 for shared ownership. Bromford secured the deal at the beginning of July, paving the way for a £7.9m investment into the local area, £1.5m of which is from its existing strategic partnership with Homes England. Situated to the north west of Hereford town centre, the derelict land had been home to a residential bungalow and a number of poultry houses in a former life. Bromford Developments Limited (BDL) will commence demolition and clearance of the site in the next month, ahead of construction work starting in early 2022. The land has retrospective planning permission from Herefordshire Council which was granted in November 2020. Once building work starts, the site will be known as The Paddocks and new customers are expected to begin moving in during the early part of 2023.

Senior land manager, Nathan Deen, said: "We're really pleased to have acquired this piece of land on Roman Road, which will provide dozens of quality new homes for a range of customers and help to meet a growing demand in the local area. "The cathedral city of Hereford is an increasingly sought-after place to live, and the site itself is just a short drive from the town centre with its many open spaces, pubs, restaurants, and other amenities. As one of the largest housing associations in the region, we know we have a responsibility to help tackle the country's housing crisis and we believe this multi-million pound investment will help reinvigorate the nearby landscape whilst being sympathetic to the rolling countryside right on its doorstep."

Commissioning, procurement and assets – Cllr Gemma Davies

One Public Estate Programme

Herefordshire Council is the lead body for the One Public Estate (OPE) partnership in Herefordshire. Partners include Wye Valley Trust, Police, Fire, Clinical Commissioning Group, Taurus Healthcare and the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust.

OPE is an established national programme delivered in partnership by the Office of Government Property (OGP) within the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association (LGA). It provides practical and technical support and funding to councils to deliver ambitious property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners.

At its heart, the programme is about getting more from our collective assets - whether that's catalysing major service transformation such as health and social care integration and benefits reform; unlocking land for new homes and commercial space; or creating new opportunities to save on running costs or generate income. This is encompassed in three core objectives:

1. creating economic growth (new homes and jobs)
2. delivering more integrated, customer-focused services
3. Generating efficiencies, through capital receipts and reduced running costs.

Herefordshire's OPE Partnership has shown the value of working together across the public sector and taking a strategic approach to asset management. Since the initial successful bid

in Wave 5 2016/17, we have successfully bid in 3 further rounds and secured a grant value of just over £1m. To date we have delivered the following outcomes:-

- Capital Receipts (£5,343,524)
- Reduced Running Costs (£56,253)
- Land Released for Housing (3.2ha & 330 units (includes student accommodation)
- Case Study on LGA website <https://local.gov.uk/case-studies/development-using-public-land-support-housing-delivery-across-hereford>

The Partnership reports into the One Herefordshire Partnership Board and is currently feeding into each other's estates strategies which are all under review post the Covid19 pandemic impact. It is also considering projects for the next Wave 9 funding the prospectus of which is to be announced soon. For further details or information please contact Tracy Ricketts on Tracy.Ricketts@herefordshire.gov.uk.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Ellie Chowns

Economy

Visitor Economy Support – Over the last year I have mentioned on a number of occasions the fantastic visitor economy marketing and PR campaign that has been implemented through the £444K funding provided by the Marches LEP to support Covid recovery. The funding came to an end in July, and the project Steering Group met to review the impact. The project has significantly exceeded all of the initial targets, generating over 1.3 million social media impressions, reaching 8.3m people with the advertising campaign, securing significant coverage in a wide range of national newspapers and magazines, and netting over 100,000 unique visitors to the redeveloped website (www.visitherefordshire.co.uk) since March 2021. As a great conclusion to the campaign, the first ever Herefordshire TV advert was launched at the end of July. It can be viewed here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4OhqUxjRLM>. The advert ran in target market areas on ITV, and on the Sky Food channel. To continue this good work the council has included some further funding in the Covid Recovery Plan until the end of March 2022, allowing some time for the proposed Destination Business Improvement District to be fully developed. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Marches LEP for the funding, and the Visitor Economy Steering Group members who freely give up their time and whose commitment and drive has made a real difference to the county at a time of real difficulty. On 8th September a Visitor Economy event will be held at Hereford Cathedral to reflect on the successes so far and look forward to the future.

Business Summit – we are currently organising a business summit event to be held at the Shell Store on the Hereford Enterprise Zone on the 10th September. We will then hold further events in other parts of the county in the coming weeks. The events will focus on how we can all work together to develop a future long term vision and 'big plan' to help address some of our significant economic challenges, building back better and creating a greener & fairer society for all in the future. My fellow cabinet members and I are keen to enhance our engagement with businesses of all sizes from across Herefordshire to better understand the barriers and opportunities and how we can all work together to make the step change the county needs.

Environment

Accelerating action on the climate and ecological emergency: On 29th July cabinet allocated £360k from the Council's dedicated climate reserve to accelerate action on the climate and ecological emergency. Here a number of significant new and exciting projects were approved including:

- The creation of a new countywide Climate and Nature Partnership where we are inviting all residents, businesses, communities and organisations to sign up and support our shared journey to a carbon neutral and nature rich county by 2030.
- To help lead and steer this new partnership we are currently seeking applications to a new Climate & Nature Partnership Board. We're looking for people from a wide variety of backgrounds - including people from big emitters, enablers, experts and community representatives. Please encourage anyone you think would be good to apply! Full info is here: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2/climate-change/6>. Deadline is 16th September.
- A new Climate & Nature Grant scheme to empower community action on carbon reduction and biodiversity net gain – more details will be available shortly.
- The development of a new Housing Retrofit strategy and business case to help improve the energy performance of all housing in the county.
- The development of a new Nature strategy to protect and enhance our local biodiversity.

Marches Renewable Energy Scheme: Over the past month this scheme has successfully supported the following renewable energy projects across the county:

- Ross-on-Wye Town Council, Red Meadow car park public toilets, for solar panels;
- Border Oak, at Kingsland, for an air source heat pump;
- Vipassana Trust, at Pencoyd near Ross-on-Wye, for solar panels;
- Leominster Construction for solar panels.

Combined these projects received grant support totalling £44,139, installed 129 kWp of additional capacity of renewable energy production and will make annual carbon savings of 26 tonnes.

There's also some good news on sustainable transport:

Active Travel Facilities Grant: Herefordshire businesses can now support employees to walk and cycle to work with a new Active Travel Facilities Grant. The grants can fund up to 100% of the cost of the new workplace facilities, up to a maximum of £3,000. The deadline for applications is Wednesday 29th September. Find out more and apply at: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/travelfundgrant. Please help spread the word to businesses in your wards!

Capability Fund Grant: We have recently been awarded £144,636 through the Department for Transport's Capability Fund Grant. This funding will enable a 12 month extension to our current "Destination Hereford" programme of walking and cycling activities and includes workplace travel planning support, business travel grants, free led walks/rides, active travel events, cycle loan schemes, child cycle training and dedicated new support for all schools to support with school travel plans.