

# Report from County Councillor

**Russell B. Hamilton**

**May 2013**



## REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS

### Ward News for Parish Councils & Constituents

I hope that you will find my newsletter interesting as it includes a balance of information about issues in Herefordshire and Pontrilas Ward. This is important because I have responsibilities to you as your Ward Councillor both within the Ward and as a Herefordshire Councillor and Cabinet Member.

Thank you to Parish Councils, Community Groups and others who publish and share my newsletter it is appreciated.

#### Herefordshire Council

Councillor Olwyn Barnett was re-elected Chairman and Councillor Chris Chappell Vice Chairman of Council at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May.

Councillor Tony Johnson was elected as its new Leader following Councillor John Jarvis decision to stand down from this role. The Leader announced details of the new Cabinet and appointments to Council Committees and Outside Bodies were made. I retain my role as Cabinet Member for Environment, Housing & Planning.

It was an absolute privilege to be able to escort Miss June Griffiths, former Clerk of St Weonards Parish Council for the past 40 years until her recent retirement to the platform, where Chairman Councillor paid tribute to her long and noteworthy public service before presenting her with a plaque and certificate of recognition. I trust that everyone will join me in thanking her for her long and loyal service to the local community and to wishing her a very happy retirement.

The next meeting of the Full Council is on 19<sup>th</sup> July. These meetings are open to all members of the public.

#### Budget 2013/14 and Medium Term Financial Strategy

It is appropriate that I update you on the biggest challenge faced by the Council – the budget. I appreciate that I have spoken about this before but its significance to all of us warrants updating.

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You will recall that I reported that the Full Council approved the budget for 2013/14 on 18<sup>th</sup> February, when the rate for this years Council Tax was also set. Since that time the Council has been working on the challenges faced by the financial pressures previously highlighted and these pressures have been widely reported as you may have seen and heard through the local media.

As a consequence of this an extraordinary meeting of the Council was held on 24<sup>th</sup> May when the Full Council was able to consider a report entitled *Service Budget Reductions and Future Financial Planning*.

The aim of this was to progress the Council's programme of changes, to report the reviews of service plans for 2013/14 that were conducted in March / April aimed at minimising identified areas of weakness to ensure that the Council's plans are resilient and remain within its overall funding envelope of £150.296 million; and to agree the next steps. It was also designed to provide all Ward Councillors with the opportunity to participate in discussion concerning the issues given their significance to the County as a whole.

Council heard that whilst budget reductions of £21.1 million had been made over the last two years, a further £32.2 million need to be found over the next three starting this year i.e. a cumulative saving of £53.3 million in the five years to 2015/16. The Chief Executive and senior management team are currently working to address a net budget gap this year of £8.4 million. Of the £8.4 million, £4.6m was in respect of existing schemes at risk of not being delivered and £3.8m were new budget pressures. The revised savings would therefore replace £4.6m of existing savings and increase the cuts required in the budget by £3.8m, from £9.1m to £12.9m. Directorates have savings plans to offset pressures within their services.

Although this meeting discussed the overall financial position it is only right to make specific mention of the library and museum service that has engendered significant public interest.

I like many other Councillors received a considerable amount of correspondence to which I replied individually in the lead up to this meeting, mainly on the subject of libraries and museums. As a result of this I would like to confirm that as reported at the meeting, the Council will not be closing libraries in any of its Market Towns libraries nor did it ever intend to. The Council understands that libraries provide a valuable role in our communities that goes far beyond the loaning of books.

Whilst there are likely to be changes to the way in which libraries operate in future e.g. the hours of opening, range of services, introduction / extension of opportunities for volunteers e.t.c. The Council will be consulting with local communities and will continue to meet its statutory duties.

Aside from retaining the Core Library Service the Council is committed to Community Libraries (nine so far with others being considered) that replaced the mobile service (that was used by less than 1000 people throughout the entire County). The Council will also continue to support the Home Delivery Service to the housebound (currently

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provided to 260 people) some of which are already served by volunteers and nursing homes (currently 13).

In addition to this the Council has introduced the technology to enable people to “home order”. As a result of scanning all of the Council’s stock, books can be ordered online and delivered to its libraries. This service will also continue.

I wish to make it plain that I recognise the importance of these assets and believe that library services can be developed in a way that strengthens the link between them local communities and that broadens the range of services offered through such facilities. I am pleased to say that thanks to Hilary Smallwood, one of the Community Libraries is in Garway. I am hoping that discussions with the Library Services Manager on behalf of the Village Shop, St Weonards; The New Inn, St Owens Cross and The Tump Inn, Wormelow will lead to at least two more in this Ward. I would also be delighted to hear from anyone else who may wish to set a Community Library up in the area.

Returning to the Council meeting a number of recommendations were put to Council. As part of this I proposed an amendment to the recommendations set out in the published report. In summary I believe that the Council’s Cabinet of which I am a member should as part of the budget setting process for 2014/15 engage fully with people to ensure that there is a good and consistent understanding of the Council’s financial position, that it enables an effective dialogue and ensures that the Council has a good understanding of people priorities and those services that are valued by the wider community. I also believe that the Cabinet should as part of this process consider holding a public referendum on Council Tax so that local residents can indicate their views regarding the level of Council Tax necessary to meet the cost of services that meet statutory obligations, support vulnerable people and those services that are of value to the wider community. Following debate the amendment was supported by all but one Councillor at the meeting.

Looking ahead the Council is working in an extremely challenging financial climate towards achieving a balanced budget in 2013/14. It would be wrong for any of us to believe that it is possible to achieve the level of savings required without having to make some very difficult decisions or having an impact on services. The facts are simple, the level of Government funding has reduced; we have to ensure a balanced budget so we have to either reduce expenditure or increase income. The rate of Council Tax for this year has been set; the Council therefore needs to take steps to achieve the budgetary savings needed to balance the books.

Despite this the key emphasis at all times will continue to be on meeting the Councils statutory obligations and protecting those who are vulnerable.

### **Core Strategy Update**

There were 1,428 responses to the survey carried out between 4<sup>th</sup> March and 22<sup>nd</sup> April. This response is broadly in line with previous consultations on the Core Strategy. The results are currently being analysed and meetings have been organised with Ward Councillors at which they will have the opportunity to

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understand and discuss feedback relating to their locale. These meetings follow on from those that were held with prior to the consultation when all Ward Councillors had an opportunity to discuss and understand proposals to be included in the draft Core Strategy.

Next steps include a report to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> June, Cabinet 4<sup>th</sup> July and Full Council 19<sup>th</sup> July.

### **Newmarket Street**

Newmarket Street reopened a week ahead of time following work by Welsh Water on a sewerage pipe on 31<sup>st</sup> May. This work was needed to improve utility supplies and divert pipework to enable the continued development of the Old Market.

### **Old Livestock Market**

Work is ongoing with progress visible by the day. It is possible to see the site taking shape as the new structures emerge.

The temporary car park on Blackfriars Street is now in operation and there are generally plenty of spaces there.

The new hoardings have been installed and viewing panels are to follow that will enable progress to be followed more easily.

The development is on track to open early in 2014.

### **Western Power Distribution**

Western Power Distribution will be undertaking work between 5<sup>th</sup> June and 19<sup>th</sup> June. During this time Union Walk in Hereford will be closed to enable Western Power to carry out reinforcement work on electricity cabling for the hospital.

Work will also be taking place on Commercial Road and Kyrle Street and, although these roads will remain open some delays may be possible. A map of live traffic flow and current and planned road works can be found at <http://bit.ly/12ovq3S>

### **A49 Belmont Road – Asda Junction**

The Highways Agency will be making improvements to the A49 Belmont Road Junction, Hereford beginning on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June.

The work funded by the Highways Agency will involve the creation of a new link to cater for traffic coming southbound into the ASDA complex to alleviate congestion at this location.

To minimize disruption for road users, all work will take place overnight between 10:15pm and 6:30 am – Monday to Thursday, 9:45pm and 6:30am on Fridays and 9:45pm and 7:45 am on Saturdays and Sundays. Lane restrictions will be necessary

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whilst work is underway so road users are advised to plan ahead and allow more time for journeys.

More information can be obtained from the Highways Agency Information line 0300 123 5000 or by email to [ha\\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Greater Transparency – Member Voting at Full Council**

I am pleased to report that following support my motion to Council on 8<sup>th</sup> March calling for the way in which all Members vote at Full Council to be published, recording of this information began at the meeting Full Council meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May.

From now on details of Members voting can be found by visiting their individual page on the Herefordshire Council website, scrolling down to the heading “Member Voting at Council”, clicking on this and following the links. Please note that there will be a short delay following meetings before data is published to allow time for input. You can find my page on the Council’s website at <http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=818>

### **Ward Work**

I have been busy with Ward work covering a wide range of issues including among other things planning, affordable housing, road repairs, supporting rural business, road signage and road safety. I produced a special newsletter in April that I put through the door for all residents in Tump Lane regarding proposals for new housing in Tump Lane, Much Birch to ensure that they were in possession of the facts related to this.

### **Sustainable transport**

There are currently 33 Park & Share sites around the County. I am pleased to say that thanks to all those concerned I have been able to facilitate 5 of these in Pontrilas Ward at The Tump Inn, Wormelow HR2 8EJ (20 spaces), The New Harp Inn, Hoarwithy HR2 6QH (3 spaces), The New Inn, St Owens Cross HR2 8LQ (6 spaces) The Pilgrim Hotel, Much Birch HR2 8HJ (3 spaces) and The Harewood End Inn HR2 8JT (5 spaces).

In addition to this I have been able to help secure grants for cycle racks at The Tump Inn, Wormelow HR2 8EJ; The New Harp Inn, Hoarwithy HR2 6QH and Village Store, St Weonards HR2 8NU all of which are conveniently located next to bus stops.

These when combined with the scenic bus routes previously launched i.e. The Garway Bus 412, The Hoarwithy Bus 44 and The Ross Bus 32 and 33 all go towards promoting sustainable transport, supporting rural business and encouraging tourism.

I have included the postcodes as I am keen to encourage people to use park and share, park and ride and cycle and ride from these locations.

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## Road Safety

I have been liaising with Herefordshire Council's highways team, Amey and Parish Councils in pursuit of improvements in road safety.

I am pleased to report that at long last consultations are beginning on:

### St.Owens Cross

- A proposed reduction of the existing 50mph speed limit to a 40mph speed limit on the A4137 and B4521 at St Owens Cross. These proposals will not only include a reduction in speed limits but an extension to part of the area covered, improvements to the road surface at the crossroads, a base for a Speed Indicator Device (SID) and improved road markings. It is anticipated that the element related to road markings / surfacing will be addressed by August with the speed reduction being implemented soon afterwards.

### Much Birch

- Proposed prohibition of waiting, loading and unloading restrictions on the C1263 in the vicinity of Much Birch School and the intersection with the A49. This scheme is designed to prevent parking where it is dangerous, maintain access to driveways and the school, include passing places and enable parking whilst dropping children off / collecting them. I have also had speed studies carried out on this road as a result of concerns expressed by local residents. It is anticipated that any changes will be implemented by the start of the Autumn term.
- In addition to this I am pursuing further improvements to the railings in Much Birch at the designated crossing point on the A49 with the Highways Agency, as I believe that the work is incomplete and requires an additional barrier on each side. I have also discussed what if any other improvements could be made I this location with the Highways Agency.
- I also continue to highlight concerns on the C1264 - Tump Lane regarding the lack of a continuous footpath, the volume, speed and number of heavy goods vehicles using this road. This is an issue that is being considered further by the Parish Council.

### Garway

- I continue to pursue a reduction in speed and extension of the area covered by the speed limit through Garway and Broad Oak on the C1239. I understand that given its position in the list of schemes throughout the County that this is likely to be taken forward in about October or to coincide with plans for affordable housing development if before then.

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## The Pontrilas (Ward) Art's Club

Having approached The Courtyard I am delighted to have been successful in securing support for **FREE art classes** for Over 60's at two venues in the Ward.

The classes will be held at The Tump Inn, Wormelow and The New Inn, St Owens Cross as they have kindly agreed to support this initiative. They will run over a period of ten weeks with two highly skilled professional arts practitioners. High quality arts materials will be provided and participants will develop new artistic skills within these relaxed and social classes. It will also provide the opportunity for participants to meet new people and try something new.

There are a limited number of places that will be allocated on a first come first served basis as demand is expected to be high. If you would like to know more or to reserve a place please get in touch with **Alice Saunders** at The Courtyard as soon as possible. Telephone Alice on 01432 346514 or email her at [alice.saunders@courtyard.org.uk](mailto:alice.saunders@courtyard.org.uk)

- The New Inn Art's Club  
Venue: The New Inn, St Owens Cross, Hereford HR2 8LQ  
Dates: Mondays from 22<sup>nd</sup> July – 30<sup>th</sup> September, 10:30 – 12:30  
Artist: Jeanette McCulloch  
Number of places: 10  
A variety of art experiences will be introduced including: an introduction to watercolour painting, drawing/painting with watercolour pencils and water-soluble fibre tip pens. Further skills will be developed including work with acrylic inks.
- The Tump Inn Art's Club  
  
Venue: The Tump Inn, Wormelow, Hereford HR2 8EJ  
Dates: Fridays from 26<sup>th</sup> July – 27<sup>th</sup> September, 10:30 – 12:30  
Artist: Penny Allen  
Number of places: 10  
By the end of the 10 weeks you will create an Artist's Book. This could be a sketchbook, a textile book, a scrapbook or a journal. Mediums explored will include collage, stitched imagery and mark making, however specific sessions will be adjusted based on the desires of the group.

The host venue will be able to provide lunch at a reasonable price for those who wish to stay and socialise and to support one of our local businesses.

I hope that these classes will prove to be successful as I hope to be secure further support for other similar classes in other parts of the Ward.

I would like to thank The Courtyard and Pub is The Hub for supporting this project.

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## **Supporting Rural Pubs**

I am working with the owners of The Fountain Inn, Orcop Parish Council and the Friends of the Fountain in the hope of a buyer being found and The Fountain Inn reopening in the future.

I recently met with representatives of Marstons and Pub is The Hub to discuss the importance of the New Inn, St Owens Cross within the local community.

I continue to champion the place of pubs in rural communities and encourage all communities to lend them their full support in challenging times.

Your local pub is at risk if not supported by the local community as seen in many places throughout the Country. I believe that our pubs are invaluable and that we should do all we can to support and preserve them now and for the future, they have an important role to play.

## **Meeting attendance**

I have attended all scheduled Cabinet and Full Council meetings and taken an active role in these and all other meetings that I have attended both as your Ward Councillor and as a Cabinet Member. I have also represented constituents' views at the Planning Committee. I continue to play an active part in influencing policy making on behalf of constituents and people throughout Herefordshire as a whole.

## **Thank you to Parish Lengthsman and Parish Councils**

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the Parish Lengthsmen for the work that you do within your communities. Having visited many parts of the County in my Cabinet role I am conscious of just how good a job Parish Councils and their Lengthsmen are doing in this regard. I am also pleased to note that Llanwarne Group of Parish Councils has just been accepted onto the Lengthsman scheme.

## **Key Facts**

This month's key statistics are - Herefordshire

- Herefordshire Council's gross budget is £330.57 million (including funding for schools).
- The Council's net budget for 2013/14 is £150,296 million.
- Comparing like for like, it is estimated that government funding this year has reduced by £5.45 million or nearly 7%.
- Children & Young Peoples Services will require £109.41 million, a third of the Council's gross expenditure in 2013/14.
- The rate of looked after children in Herefordshire has increased year on year between 2008 & 2012\*.
- 80% of looked after children are accommodated in foster places locally compared to 75% nationally\*.
- 76% of looked after children are placed within the Local Authority boundary – this is the highest in the West Midlands\*.

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- 47% of looked after children in Herefordshire at 19 years were in education, employment and training compared to 58% nationally\*.
- Herefordshire's performance on recruiting adoption and foster carers in good.
- Herefordshire's reputation in court work is good.
- Educational performance of looked after children – GCSE Results 2012:  
5+ A\* - C :  
National Performance 83% / Herefordshire 87%  
Looked after Children National 37% / Looked after Children Herefordshire 38%
- Source – Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012

## Herefordshire Council Consultations

I am keen to encourage people to contribute to debate so that their views can be taken into account as part of decision-making processes.

You can access past, present and future consultations through the Herefordshire Council website and respond to those that are on going. You can also register to participate in electronic consultations.

You can also access the results of closed consultations and find out what Herefordshire Council has done with the information gathered through consultations. By using the 'search' categories, you can search according to specific areas, target groups and dates of consultations.

Live consultations in order of closing date include:

- **Proposed Changes to Holme Lacy Primary School Catchment Area**

29<sup>th</sup> April 2013 to 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013

To encourage a reasoned debate and to gather views on the proposed alterations to the Holme Lacy catchment area following the closure of the school on 31st December 2012

You can read more about this and comment by going directly to <http://consult.herefordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/HolmeLacyCatchment/consultationHome>

Further details of this and other consultations as they are launched can be accessed at: <http://consult.herefordshire.gov.uk/inovem/consult.ti>

I know that people often say that the Council does not listen to them but it can only work with the feedback that it receives. This is then used this alongside any expert advice, research and evidence to help formulate decision-making that is designed to achieve the best for people within the County as a whole, within the resources that are available.

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It is therefore important that as many people as possible express their views as they really do make a difference and help to shape services. I would strongly encourage everyone to make their views known whatever they are. Your views really do count.

### **Dates for your Diary**

- Three Counties Show, Three Counties Showground, Malvern WR13 6NW – 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013.
- Herefordshire Walking Festival – 15<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013.
- Fathers Day, Why not support your local pub or restaurant? – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013.
- Eastnor SOS – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013.
- LINC 3 Counties Cycle Ride 2013 – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013.
- Linton Music Festival – 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013.
- Gardens in the Wild, Stagg Meadow, Titley – 22<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013.
- Horsepower, High Town, Hereford – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2013.
- Castle Green Midsummer Fayre, Castle Green, Hereford – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2013.
- H.Art Week – 7<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> September.
- 63<sup>rd</sup> British National Ploughing Championships & Country Festival, Llanwarne – 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> October 2013.
- H.Energy, Sustainable Herefordshire Week – 12<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

Garway Post Office in the Village Hall between 9:00am and 11:00am every Tuesday.

Garway Market and Community Library – First Thursday each month between 3:00pm and 5:30pm.

Please let me know if you have any local events that you would like me to include in my newsletter by emailing [russellbhamilton@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:russellbhamilton@herefordshire.gov.uk)

### **Communications**

My newsletter is now published on a growing number of Parish Council and community websites.

If you or a member of your community would like to receive my newsletters directly, please email me at [russellbhamilton@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:russellbhamilton@herefordshire.gov.uk) with your full contact details i.e. name, postal and email address and preferably your telephone number and I will include you on my circulation list.

I have asked all Parish Council's to publish my newsletters on Parish websites and on Parish noticeboards as they are designed to inform all constituents.

If you have any views on any issues and would like me to know about them please do not hesitate to contact me as it is helpful to me know what you are thinking.

You should still respond to any formal consultations, planning processes in the normal way to ensure that your views are recorded.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this update and for sharing it with neighbours and friends throughout the Ward. Any feedback regarding the content is welcomed.

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