

Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst Nov/Dec 2024

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

I've just had a very interesting week and felt it was worth delaying this report so it could be included.

As has been reported in the press Herefordshire Council is being challenged in the High Court by the NFU over the policy included in the Minerals and Waste Local Plan which is putting some control over agricultural waste where planning permission is required.

The policy in question is

Policy W3: Agricultural waste management including for livestock units

1. Waste management method statements will be required for proposals for livestock unit(s) on agricultural holdings that:

a. for non-EIA development, demonstrates that both natural and non-natural wastes generated by the proposed development will be appropriately managed both on and offsite;

or b. for EIA development, demonstrates that both natural and non-natural wastes generated by the whole agricultural unit will be appropriately managed both on and offsite.

2. Anaerobic digestion will be supported where its use is to manage only natural wastes generated primarily on the agricultural unit within which it is located.

3. All proposals for livestock unit(s) and anaerobic digestion and any other waste management proposals on agricultural holdings within the River Wye SAC or the River Clun SAC will be required to demonstrate at least nutrient neutrality.

It seems to me that it should go without saying that waste should be managed appropriately and this should therefore not be something to challenge but it seems the NFU take a different view and we will wait for clarification from the court.

Herefordshire Council was joined by the Secretary of State and River Action in defending W3 as it is a policy that was expressly included because of the impact that arisings (especially poultry manure) are having on the freshwater environment (see Lancaster University RePhokus report).

I also attended a meeting with Minister Emma Hardy at DEFRA and – for the first time – this was a meeting that also included the Deputy First Minister of Wales, Huw Irranca Davies, who is taking a keen interest in the water quality of the River Wye catchment. The meeting also included two of local MPs, Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) and Catherine Fookes (Monmouthshire). Although it was only an hour long it was very positive and focussed. Hopefully this is the start of something meaningful.

Full Council

The Full Council met on the 6th December. If you are struggling to get to sleep you can see the meeting on the Council's You Tube channel (along with a load of other meetings). The majority of the business conducted was by way of routine and so the meeting highlight was probably the garland of twinkly Christmas lights that adorned one councillor. I introduced a decision on IT infrastructure investment which was not controversial.

Stormy Weather

Storm Darragh certainly left its mark with more than 250 fallen trees and flooding across Herefordshire.

Unfortunately this is the second storm in just three weeks, and the fourth weather-related incident affecting communities in our county this autumn.

If you know of anyone who has been affected by flooding please encourage them to get in touch with the council so we can get a better understanding of the specific issues and ensure that they are supported.

Each flood is different – some are from rivers and some are surface water (fluvial or pluvial) – the remedies for river flooding also include actions to direct, control and reduce the surface water flooding (as all water ends up in the river). It is important to note and, where safe and practicable, record, where floods are coming from if this is surface water. This is information that is helpful to the Environment Agency and Herefordshire Council.

Climate Conference.

I was really pleased to be able to host the first schools climate conference at Herefordshire Council. This came about because a young person came to see me and asked if the council could do more to highlight climate change with schools and young people. The day was based on a mock COP meeting where delegates from different countries made their case to the assembly. I was really impressed by the knowledge and engagement of the young people who really got into the event and participated fully. It can be quite nerve wracking to speak in front of a room full of people so well done to all the delegates for doing so well!

CCN Conference

The County Council Network Conference was held in November and I was asked to attend. It was very useful and a way of meeting other councillors from different parts of the country to share ideas about the delivery of services. There was a very strong emphasis on the social care element of our work, in particular SEND (Special Educational Needs) and supporting residents to age well. As the budget setting draws ever closer we are always faced with rising pressures in children and adult services which we have to meet. The budget setting this year will also be impacted by the change in NI contributions and the increased minimum wage which opened up a 10m gap which will require extra savings on top of the 19m savings already targeted.

Planning

As you will probably be aware the new government has now published the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework). I will be going through the details of this with officers in the next week but the basic headline is that our housing delivery requirement has increased to 27,260 (from 16,100). In order to plan where the extra housing is going to go we will need to re-run the options around place shaping in our local plan. We urgently need infrastructure in Hereford so the mandated growth can come forward where we have the best services – the most obvious shortcoming is in road capacity. As an administration we are determined to do all that we can to deliver the bypass that is needed; we will be making the argument to government that in order for us to build the houses they are asking for we will need to build a road (as well as all the other infrastructure requirements). The short term impact of the new NPPF is likely to mean an increase in applications that are determined

by appeal as the 5 year housing land supply is challenged. Parishes without an up to date NDP (less than 5 yrs old) are going to be more vulnerable to speculative applications.

Local News.

We have been hit by successive storm systems. Some parishes were very proactive and surveyed all important drains before the storms to ensure that they were not covered over with debris. An up to date resilience plan can be a useful tool to organise local response to a severe weather warning. Making sure that the road drainage is as good as it can be and all ditches and culverts are clear, is a sensible first tier of precaution to protect residents from flooding and drivers from dangerous road conditions.

I went out and cleared most of the grids on the A466 at Welsh Newton and once the leaves were cleared from the grid the drains all flowed well and cleared water from the road. Water and soil was principally coming from one area of fields which had been recently harvested.

The disruption to the local road network due to local traffic re routing around the Leys Bend rockfall is something that we are going to have to live with for a while. The official diversion routes clearly avoid our local roads but that doesn't mean that people who know routes round the lanes are not going to use those routes.

Finally

Ofsted have published their most recent monitoring report on Herefordshire Council Children's services. We have been putting a great deal of effort into improving the situation with Children's services after they were found to be 'inadequate' during the last administration. The current report has some positive comments that support the contention that the situation is improving under the current administration -

A significant focus on improving performance management is enabling leaders to understand the areas that have started to improve and where further improvement is needed to ensure that developments are embedded with continued pace and momentum.

Staff are consistently positive about the leadership of both the new DCS and wider senior managers. They report a sense of an improving service. Staff like working in Herefordshire and are positive about the range of suitable training and development opportunities. Caseloads are manageable, and staff recognise that their workloads have started to reduce, enabling them to see children more often. They feel well supported and are positive about the recent changes and feel that the service is changing for the 'better'. They feel that there is a 'drive to improve' and that this is shared across the workforce. They report a visible and approachable leadership in recent months that seeks the views of staff, meaning that they feel invested in and listened to.

But there is still a great deal of work to do...

Happy Christmas.

