

**Dear Parish Councillors and Clerks,**

**Please find the Birch Ward Cllr update for July 2020. Apologies if you find it long, there is a lot to report.**

**Covid-19 update:**

**Infection Control Fund** Herefordshire Council has a share of the fund totalling £2,718,590, grant conditions specified that 75% of the total payment was to go directly to care homes with the first payment being made within the ten days of receipt of the fund by the council. The council as per grant conditions has worked with the care home market to do this and upon agreement to the terms and conditions care homes will receive a total of £963 per bed within their care home to spend on strict infection control measures

As part of a national training programme, the council quality and review team and Wye Valley Trust teams were trained to roll out Infection prevention and PPE training for care homes. To date this has been rolled out successfully to 76 care homes across the county and the quality and review team are now rolling it out across other social care sectors such as home care and supported living providers. 6 providers have been trained with a further 11 planned, this will be part of an ongoing training programme across the sector over the coming weeks and months.

**PPE** - supply now stable including gloves which had been an item of concern for a couple of weeks. Previously ordered bulk deliveries are now arriving at the new PPE store.

**Schools** - DFE announced that all schools are expected to reopen from 01 September to all pupils. This will require further guidance to implement, including for example secondary schools face the challenge of subject specialist teachers teaching multiple groups. Use of school transport will also be a key issue. Government announcement expected.

**Construction** - Building Control have reported that construction work in the county is increased significantly over recent weeks and the services engagement with builders, architects and agents is in line with the levels normally expected for this time of year.

**Parking - To support the recovery of our city and town centres and allow time for a further decision by the cabinet member, it was announced this week that free parking will again be available on and off-street from 27 June 2020 up to and including 24 July 2020**

**Workforce** - For the third consecutive week, Herefordshire council has no staff absent with coronavirus and the number of staff self-isolating remains consistently low at 0.7% of the workforce. In comparison a neighbouring local authority reported this week that over 25% of their workforce are currently self-isolating

**Covid-19 secure sites** – work completed and sign off for Covid-19 secure compliance at Plough Lane and Town Hall. 2 metre social distancing to be retained at these sites for the foreseeable future.

**Outbreak Control Plan** – the plan published on 30<sup>th</sup> June, details how we will manage outbreaks and engagement with communities as we move into the next phase – living with Covid-19 in our communities. Available on website: [www.Herefordshire.gov.uk/outbreakplan](http://www.Herefordshire.gov.uk/outbreakplan)).

**Maylords** - securing control of this strategically significant site the council can ensure that we maximise its role in supporting the short term economic recovery of Hereford, and in the medium to

long term consider how we can diversify the area to enable the development of a vibrant city centre for the future such as opportunities for inner city living, leisure/ culture and the arts, places for learning, flexible business space, for food and drink and hospitality etc.

Over the next few weeks the council is keen to make currently vacant units in the shopping centre available for short term low cost rental periods for local pop up businesses and social enterprises from across the county to showcase their products and services, which will also drive new interest and socially distanced footfall into the city centre. Any businesses or social enterprises that would be interested should please contact Andrew Haughey (020 7866 7627) and John Prestwich (020 7312 7494) at Montague Evans (site managers).

Services launched during lockdown, include **Kooth – an online service to support emotional wellbeing for 11-25 year olds**- online support and services for young people in Herefordshire. It is a new, confidential, safe, online wellbeing service offering counselling, information and forums for young people.

**Support to the Visitor Economy** – a steering group has been formed to oversee this £444k LEP-funded project. It will commission a marketing and PR campaign over the summer and autumn to encourage day and 'staycation' overnight visits to the county. Tourism is a sector that has enormous potential in Herefordshire and Cllr Chowns keen for it to have the support it deserves.

**Strong pipeline of economic development projects** being developed that support County Plan priorities of connectivity, wellbeing and sustainability. 'Green New Deal' type projects – such as building retrofit programmes to improve home insulation – offer many win-win-win opportunities to create jobs, tackle inequality and promote sustainability.

Cllr Chowns is pushing for every Council project to include provision for **apprenticeships and skills** development; the skills sector is going to play a key role in helping us build back better. At the same time, work on developing the county-wide Action 2030 plan to tackle the climate and ecological emergency continues apace and there are many areas of crossover with our economic development work. Engagement taking place with construction industry partners re the phosphates issue, and with parish councils and BBLP regarding safe management of verges for wildlife.

**Finances** - To date government funds provided have fallen significantly short of the costs incurred by this and many other council's. Presently we are experiencing a £15m+ shortfall and, allowing for what is anticipated to be further financial support from central government, are still forecasting an operating shortfall of getting on for £10m. A working group of cabinet members and officers has been set up to consider options to close this gap in-year and to accelerate plans to deliver services in new ways and to realise new income streams for the council.

**River Pollution:** The Leader and Cllr Harrington had a very useful and friendly meeting with the Leader of Powys Council, Cllr Rosemary Harris and her Cabinet Member, James Evans, to discuss the pollution of the Wye, Lugg and Teme catchments. It is frustrating that Natural Resources Wales (the amalgamation of the Welsh equivalent of the Environmental Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission) seemed far less concerned about the state of the river than Herefordshire Council and Natural England – although they do now appear to be responding to pressure from us, the public and groups like the Wye and Usk Foundation

**Flood damage:** Work progresses to repair the flood damage at two points on the Fownhope Road. At Lechmere Ley, where the landslide occurred, Golden Valley Construction have removed spoil and rebuilt the bank with membrane, artificial terrace sheeting and new material to keep the structure as dry and stable as possible in future. In terms of funding, the government will not pay for the works via the Bellwin Scheme and so far refuse to offer us any further help. We continue to press them and our MPs on this, it is completely unreasonable to expect a local authority hit by historic flooding to take a financial hit of nearly £12 million on their own.

**Waste and recycling:** We currently have three of our recycling centres open. The booking system at Ross on Wye has worked fantastically well and looking to increase the amount of bookings available to more than once a week for residents and more than the current amount of bookings per hour. Due to the success of Ross on Wye the waste team have worked up a plan to open up the remaining sites.

**Libraries** online continues to be a huge success and a few weeks ago we reintroduced the delivery service of books which has made a huge difference to those residents who are currently shielding. We are looking to reopen libraries on 16<sup>th</sup> July (tbc) in a staged approach although this will be a quick phasing. To start off with we will be opening Hereford, Ross, Leominster and Ledbury

**Social Value:** The social value project is going incredibly well and we should be in a position mid-July to start looking at some quick wins. Some of these quick wins include reducing the procurement burden for contracts under £25k and identification of local suppliers within our supply change, including tier two and three contracts (sub-contractors). Cllr Davies said: **'I am genuinely excited about the change that this will mean for Herefordshire as this is about ensuring that contracts we award are not based on best value alone but instead on how contractors can help support our social vision and County plan objectives'**.

**I currently have a newsletter going to every house in the ward thanking residents for their tremendous efforts to support each other during Lockdown. The key message to me is that strong communities are resilient communities and we are going to need a lot of resilience – without trying to be too pessimistic!**

**Please do get in touch if you have any queries or need assistance in getting information about services.**

**Kind regards**

**Cllr Toni Fagan**