



## Birch Ward Councillor Update – Toni Fagan July 2025

**Corporate Peer Challenge** - Herefordshire has just been through a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) week. The conclusions are yet to be formally received but the panel gave a good account of Herefordshire Council as an organisation - how we work together across the council and with our partners. Overall, the outcome of the peer review was positive and the wide range of partnership working in Herefordshire was particularly noted. The summary findings are:

- This is a good council, which is striving hard to improve further.
- There is a level of political maturity.
- Herefordshire Council has developed an identity that is respected by partners.
- The latest Ofsted monitoring has shown children's services improving at pace.
- Performance in most other service areas is on or around that of its statistical neighbours.
- Transformation, on the scale required, will require substantial new skills and resources.
- The council's finance are in a good base position and it would benefit from a refresh of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and scenario planning for 2026-2027.
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**Local Plan Call for Sites** - Landowners, developers, parish councils and other interested parties are being invited to suggest sites that may be suitable for a range of future uses.

As part of work on the new Local Plan (2025–2045), the Council is conducting a Call for Sites to identify land that could potentially be used for future development. This includes housing, employment, renewable energy, community facilities, and environmental improvements. This is a technical information-gathering exercise, and submitting a site does not guarantee it will be developed. However, it helps the Council plan for growth and understand what opportunities exist.

Key points:

- Target housing requirement: 27,260 new dwellings over 20 years (increased to 30,000 to allow flexibility).
- Types of land sought: Housing (including self-build/affordable), employment, renewable energy, green/blue infrastructure, biodiversity, and community uses.

Parishes are encouraged to consider submitting suitable land to help shape the future of the county.

**LTP5 Consultation** – the draft Local Transport Plan has been out to consultation. The Green Group have responded in detail and are continuing to push for improved bus services. The council recently held a Bus Summit to discuss how we can improve the county bus services. Despite having 53 councillors, the summit was only attended by six elected members - four Greens attended, one unaligned and Cllr Price (the cabinet member for buses). The Greens have also asked for more specific consideration of the transport needs of children and young people in the county. Some of our group comments around the transport plan include: Over-concentration in Hereford City: Despite 70% of the county's population living outside Hereford, infrastructure and transport investment remains heavily focused on the city. Neglected Market Towns: Areas like Ross-on-Wye and Ledbury have seen minimal transport improvements since 2018, despite their size and needs. Flawed Planning Criteria: The draft Local Transport Plan (LTP5) overlooks towns like Ledbury as investment priorities, relying solely on population size rather than transport potential or connectivity opportunities.

Call for Rural Solutions: The draft plan should strengthen rural focus by promoting services like demand-responsive transport, community transport, and shared mobility.

Inclusive Planning Needed: LTP5 must involve rural communities directly in co-designing transport solutions to tackle social isolation and improve access to essential services.

**Healthwatch Herefordshire to be abolished** - The government has announced plans to abolish Healthwatch England and its local branches, including Healthwatch Herefordshire, as part of a major NHS and social care reform.

This move is part of a wider effort to reduce duplication and complexity in health oversight. Over 200 bodies—including Healthwatch England and the National Guardian's Office—are expected to be dissolved. The government proposes replacing face-to-face engagement with digital tools like the NHS app for collecting patient feedback.

Christine Price, Chief Executive of Healthwatch Herefordshire, has spoken out strongly against the decision:

*"I am shocked and hugely disappointed by this news. My concern is for our staff, volunteers, and for the people we support. We don't just collect feedback—we listen deeply, especially to those least likely to be heard. Healthwatch is not just a feedback system; it's a bridge between people and power."*

She stressed that digital-only solutions cannot replace real conversations—especially with people who are vulnerable, marginalised, or digitally excluded.

- Healthwatch Herefordshire will continue operating until at least late 2026, when the government expects legal changes to take effect.
- The team remains committed to delivering their services locally and will share further updates as more information becomes available.

**Key Concerns for Herefordshire** - Healthwatch Herefordshire has played a vital role for over 12 years—reaching people others don't, offering trust, empathy, and time.

- Loss of independent scrutiny over local health and care services.
- Reduced visibility for the voices of older people, carers, rural communities, and those less digitally connected.
- No clear alternative for meaningful public engagement in health service planning and delivery.
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### **Loneliness in Herefordshire:** Listening to Local Voices

Loneliness is a quiet but widespread issue affecting people of all ages across Herefordshire, from busy city streets to rural communities. This research, led by the Herefordshire Together Collaborative—including General Practice, the Local Authority, Public Health, and Healthwatch Herefordshire—set out to better understand the lived experiences of those feeling isolated. By listening to personal stories and perspectives, the project highlights the reality of loneliness in our county and explores how it differs from social isolation

[Loneliness - Report | Healthwatch Herefordshire](#)

**Free Scything Course** - Herefordshire Council is offering a free course in the traditional skill of scything for anyone interested in volunteering to help make hay and make a difference for wildlife. Hereford cemetery is a significant area of greenspace in the city, providing a tranquil setting for people to not only connect with their thoughts, but to also connect with nature and wildlife. The wildflower areas at the cemetery support biodiversity by providing food and shelter for pollinators and wildlife. They are managed in a traditional and environmentally friendly way by hand-scything the grass to harvest. The hay is then composted for mulch. As harvest time is fast approaching, a free scything course is on offer for anyone interested in volunteering to help make the hay.

The free course, which is being delivered by Wild Meadow, is taking place on Thursday 31 July 2025, 10am at Hereford Cemetery, Westfaling Street, HR4 0JE.  
Spaces are very limited. To book, please email Tracy Morris in the Cemeteries Team at [tmorris@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tmorris@herefordshire.gov.uk) or call 01432 383 203.