



April 2026
Birch Ward and Parishes update
Cllr Toni Fagan

Dear Councillors,

I hope you are all enjoying the Spring – it feels like we have earned it after a grey and wet winter.

Please have a look at [A Charter for Herefordshire's Councils 2025](#) and join up if your parish is not a member yet.

Following a motion I took to councillors Herefordshire Council unanimously approved the adoption of a "Child Friendly Herefordshire" policy on October 10, 2025, to place children and young people at the heart of council decisions. This initiative aims to ensure safety, wellbeing, and influence in local decisions, with planned developments including a Shadow Youth Cabinet and a new Child and Young Person Participation Strategy.

Having been intrigued by the concept of Child Friendly Herefordshire over my time as chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee (CYPSC) I was delighted that the concept was launched in March [Partners unite to support launch of Child Friendly Herefordshire - Herefordshire Council](#). Please consider in your parishes how you can begin to adopt Child Friendly approaches.

My work on the CYPSC currently involves a Task and Finish group into what Early Help looks like in the county. It is an interesting piece of work looking at how we support children and their families, either as universal support or more targeted work. The repeated concern about the impact of screens and social media and the lack of resilience in many young people and their parents is quite alarming. Also concerning to see that teenage pregnancies are on the rise again. We are hoping to have our report finished this summer.

Areas where I have raised concerns about the delivery of services include the continued problem around potholes and road surfaces. Whilst there has been a fair bit of work done recently, there are still areas where there immense problems caused by poor drainage and subsidence. As we move towards the end of the Balfour Beatty contract councillors are pushing for more information on how the highways and public realm will be managed, more responsive and communication improved. I have this week written to cabinet members and the head of highways requesting that we consider a similar scheme to Devon County Council which operates a **Road Warden Scheme** allowing local councils and community groups to take a proactive role in maintaining their local roads by carrying out or organising minor highway repairs. I cannot see how we will keep on top of minor repairs without a localised approach.

Last week I subbed for my colleague and group leader Cllr Stef Simmons at Cabinet where the [LCWWIP](#). The local walking cycling wheeling plan was passed. It's an important document because it is the one which determines how we move between and through our communities, schools, towns, for business and leisure – by foot and bike (or other wheels but not motorised vehicles). In a time of fuel crisis the LCWWIP becomes even more significant and my concern is that the rural areas are being left behind when it comes to the necessary infrastructure that enables all residents to use active travel safely. I am also furious that despite our warnings the S106 Project Management team was disbanded and the replacement arrangements are wholly unsatisfactory with enormous delays.

The Quarter Three reports were presented at Cabinet and these can be viewed [here](#).

Councillors have been briefed about the new Crisis Resilience Fund which the Government has made a three year offer for and the offer for oil and LPG support [Low-income oil and LPG heating households urged to take up financial support in Herefordshire - Herefordshire Council](#)

The council has launched its Back the Bypass with a glossy Strategic Narrative – Unblock/Unlock/Unleash! As you are well aware I am not supportive of the Bypass, however the Southern Link Road is going ahead. I wrote the following to the Hereford Times:

Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and a cornerstone for biodiversity – considered the richest wildlife habitat in the UK – utterly under threat. Whilst our planning system purports to protect ancient woodland – in reality, it doesn't. Herefordshire's new Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy speaks of protecting ancient woodland – yet in the same breath we are about to destroy two acres of ancient woodland at Grafton to make way for the link road between Belmont and the A49 - now billed as Phase 1 of the bypass. Replanting new woodland contiguous to the road looks like green-washing in light of the loss of complex ecological communities that centuries old ancient trees and woodland support. A road with no cycling or walking options (despite Herefordshire's alleged commitment to walking, cycling and wheeling. More cars, more rubbish (more bottled urine), more dead and shattered wildlife. Knowing what we do now about biodiversity loss I just cannot see this as progress.

Finally, if you wish to have a chat or are interested in Talk Community, I am running a small café in Llanwarne on the first Saturday of every month. Please see the attached poster.

Please get in touch if you have any queries or questions.

Kind regards
Toni

PS

ARE YOUR CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE?

Whilst the world of the Internet offers great opportunities for young and old alike, it also presents many risks. Children face multiple threats on-line including cyber bullying, sexual exploitation, invasion of privacy issues and other harmful content. The introduction of AI exacerbates the risks by introducing content based on their searches and profile content. So, with extra time being spent online, how can you protect the younger family members from the potential issues they may face, and make them aware?

First of all, make sure all the safety settings are set up and in place including:

- Parental controls on all devices, browsers, and Apps to filter out inappropriate material.
- Set strong privacy settings to make sure personal information is only visible to trusted individuals i.e. "Friends only".
- Introduce your child to smartphones and other devices gradually in a monitored way before giving them fuller access
- Make use of Safe Search filters such as Google SafeSearch to block out harmful content
- Set daily usage time limits for Apps and overall daily screentime.
- Explain and encourage safe searching, websites, and apps. Check what they are watching and sharing on streaming sites such as YouTube and TikTok

Always remember that anything you share online, such as images, videos and comments may hang around for much longer than you think.

You could also consider some of the following ideas to protect your children further:

- Know about the online risks such as grooming, bullying and sexting (never share inappropriate images you would not want your family and friends to see)
- Make sure your child understands what personal information they should never share including location, passwords. Phone numbers, schools, date of birth.
- Set up two-factor authentication (2FA) on accounts for a second layer of protection.
- Make them aware that most apps may collect data even when privacy settings are in place.

Not everything online will be true, so teach them how to spot misinformation, fake profiles and most important of all – never be rushed into making any decisions.

If there is anything you are not sure about, never cover it up, but do talk to an adult, or a trusted friend or relative.

Please feel free to share these messages with any vulnerable friends, relatives or neighbours

If you have fallen for a fraud,

Report it to **Report Fraud (formerly known as ACTION FRAUD)** on **0300 123 2040** or via reportfraud.police.uk

Scam Text messages can be forwarded to 7726 to help phone providers take prompt action and block numbers that generate spam on their networks. You can also report Scam mobile calls by texting 7726 with the word “Call” followed by the fraudulent caller’s phone number.

Forward **Fake Emails** received toreport@phishing.gov.uk

If you think your bank account or personal banking details have been used fraudulently, then use the short phone number - **159** - to contact the Fraud Prevention Department of most major UK banks.