

October 2021

Dear Residents,

## **HELLO**

It is hard to believe that over two years have passed since I became your representative on Herefordshire Council. So much has happened since then but I remain optimistic and am inspired by, and grateful to, the people I see working so hard, both voluntarily and paid, to keep our communities thriving and resilient in the face of the challenges around us.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH YOU**

I send a monthly newsletter from the leader Cllr David Hitchiner and myself to the parish council clerk and that is available on your Parish Council website in Orcop, Garway, Llanwarne, St Weonards, Little Birch and Much Birch parishes. Please keep an eye on those sites. I also regularly attend your parish council meetings as they are a crucial link to what is happening in your communities and an ideal place for you to raise issues that come up where you live. I can relay that information back to Herefordshire Council. I regularly update my Facebook page and if you are interested in the Herefordshire Coalition we have a page on Facebook and a Twitter account. Please don't hesitate to email or phone me if you need to, or if you would like a chat I will be at Llanwarne Village hall on a Saturday between 10am-12.

## **PLANNING AND HEDGEROWS**

Planning matters come up a lot in our parishes. Drastic cuts to revenue funding in the council means that households are no longer notified by post of planning applications near them. You can sign up to regular updates on news, services and planning in your area on the council website <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council/sign-alerts>. Hedgerow violations often come up at local meetings. Hedgerows are protected by law as a vital part of our green infrastructure. They support wildlife, protect livestock and provide structure within our landscape to retain water – whilst sequestering carbon. County residents love them because they also bring joy to people - and what's not to love? We must protect our hedgerows - not flay the life out of them or destroy them to widen entrances to houses and fields. People are very protective of the hedgerows where they live and are frustrated by the council's seeming inability to protect them through planning enforcement. Thank you to the CPRE for producing a booklet on Hedgerows and Verges in Herefordshire <https://www.cpreherefordshire.org.uk/our-focus-in-herefordshire/environment-and-rural-livelihoods/hedgerows/>, and to those landowners and farmers who treat our wonderful hedgerows with due care.

## **VERGES AND WILDFLOWERS**

I get many emails about wildflower verges and I know that parish councils are also concerned about ensuring that junctions are safe and that wildflowers do not pose safety issues to road users. Verging on Wild <https://www.herefordshirewt.org/projects-0/verging-wild> is a small group of knowledgeable volunteers working in Herefordshire to improve biodiversity on our roadside verges as 87% of our verge plant species face possible extinction. If you have wildflower verges you wish to protect then please contact your parish council as they decide on the verge cuts every year. If you have concerns over safety or potholes please report them on <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/report-problem> or contact your parish council, or me.

### **COMMUNITY, BUILDINGS AND BALFOUR BEATTY**

I am delighted to have a good working relationship with our public realm contractors Balfour Beatty, whilst our current administration aims to pull some services back into council control – we have an excellent team looking after us locally. James Howells, the locality steward, is extremely obliging and efficient. Balfour Beatty Living Places can assist community groups with a voluntary contribution of skills and time such as line painting for Much Birch Community Hall and recently a wonderful team helped us in Llanwarne Village Hall's garden.

Our community buildings are vital to the wellbeing of our communities. Many thanks to those who spend endless hours looking after our halls and churches. If we lose them we also lose opportunities to gather and share our neighbourly experiences, connection with our neighbours which can be very lonely, and it makes us much less resilient in times of difficulty. I support all community initiatives to protect their green spaces, their buildings, hedgerows, wildlife and waterways. In Garway a group of residents are determined to save the Old School from demolition and we are looking at ways to ensure that Garway's heritage building can remain protected.

I have helped Llanwarne Village Hall raise funding for a fantastic series of projects that have breathed life back into our beautiful Victorian school. Please come visit Llanwarne Talk Community pop-up Café and Market every Saturday from 10am-12 until Christmas. Contact Llanwarne Village Hall at 01981 540406 if you would like to promote something you do, repair Bikes, clothes swap, or sell your produce. We would be delighted if you joined us on a Saturday.

Talk Community <https://www.talkcommunity.org/> is co-ordinating community action in Herefordshire and is linking up volunteers, community groups, funding and community action. I am on the steering group of Herefordshire Green Network which is also looking at how our communities can be more resilient. HGN has established a route for parishes to develop resilience called The Great Collaboration <https://greatcollaboration.uk/>. If you are interested in how communities can become more resilient please encourage your parish council to join this initiative.

I was honoured to be asked to be chair of OWLS Good Neighbour Scheme and thank all the volunteers who offer to help with gardening , odd jobs, looking after pets, transport to appointments, collecting medicines, library visits and much more. OWLS is a fabulous free service but donations and volunteers are always very welcome.

<https://www.stw.org.uk/owl/>

## **AGRICULTURE AND ECOLOGY**

Despite being an agricultural county Herefordshire Council has little influence on agricultural activity, this is in the hands of the Environment Agency and Natural England. However, Regenerative Agriculture is a term I hear often now. I have residents writing to me about it, saying: 'For goodness sake why is the government not promoting it more?' I read James Rebank's *English Pastoral* over the summer and then toured Risby Court Farm with Richard Thomas. Like many I believe farming must balance ecology with the need to feed the nation. If anyone is practising Regenerative Agriculture in Birch Ward, I would really love to visit your farm. In the meantime I am working with local groups on protecting the River Wye Special Area of Conservation and am part of a Gamber and Garren Brook environmental group which has been established to look at flooding issues in the catchment, how land management can influence flooding and how phosphate testing can help identify places where excess phosphates are leaking into our waterways. I have joined the CPRE citizen science phosphate testing group which is being funded by the Environment Agency. If you are aware of flooding, soil loss or environmental issues in your area please contact the **Environment Agency hotline 0800 80 70 60** immediately.

I was pleased to meet Anthony Snell on his Windmill Hill soft fruit enterprise. It was a fascinating visit and I was impressed to see how seriously the farm has embraced the producing soft fruit on such a large scale in a very sustainable way. I would be happy to visit any landowners in the ward to see what initiatives they are taking to meet the challenges we face producing food, addressing climate change and ecological break down.

## **FOOTPATHS**

Lockdown increased walking in our communities and we need to ensure that our footpaths are in good order and serve us by connecting us to other settlements, bus routes, village halls, health facilities, churches, pubs and local shops. Some parishes have excellent footpath officers and active groups of volunteers walking the paths and checking their condition. Organising walks in your communities is a good way to meet people, learn about the places we live in – and keep an eye on footpaths. If there is a footpath problem it can be reported to <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/report-problem> or contact your parish council. If you are a landowner struggling to maintain a path or stile, please let your parish council, or me, know. All unrecorded paths and bridleways will need to be recorded by 1 January 2026 or they will be lost forever. The Ramblers claim there are 49,000

miles of paths that could be lost. If you believe you know of such a path, please get in touch and we can get it registered.

### **LITTER PICKING**

Last spring saw many residents out litter picking and thank you to all of you for clearing up after others on our verges and laybys. The amount of purple bags of litter voluntarily collected across the ward, and county, was astounding. Elisabeth Taylor agreed to co-ordinate groups local and writes that Sophie Morgan was out daily with her boys, Dylan and Owen.

“Litter picking makes me happy and proud of myself because we are helping the community,” said Sophie. “There is very much a sense of satisfaction filling the purple bags. The beeps from the vehicles, people waving from within and the kind community gestures have been very much appreciated.”

If you would like to get involved with clearing litter this autumn you can order litter picking sticks and rubbish bags and find out about group litter picks at [www.herefordshire.gov.uk/stophedrop](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/stophedrop). Elisabeth in Little Birch also has some litterpickers that you can borrow. 07854 629193. Some litter pickers are available for use at Carrot and Wine in Wormelow.

### **FINALLY**

I truly believe that the challenges ahead of us are enormous but that if we work together, despite our differences, for the communities we love then we will weather the storms better.

Kind regards,

Toni Fagan