

Ledbury Town Council: Thursday 20th June 2013

Herefordshire Councillors' Reports – Elizabeth Harvey

Cuts

Since my last report the county council has discovered a £9.5m hole in what I told them was their undeliverable budget. This means that many of the non-statutory services currently being delivered by the council will be severely reduced and some stopped altogether.

Opposition councillors and public lobbying managed to force an open debate of the proposed cuts programme at an extraordinary full council meeting in May. At the meeting we succeeded in getting the proposal to agree specific service cuts withdrawn and agreement to hold proper consultation with staff and residents on the level and mix of services required in Herefordshire.

We also got agreement from the administration to set a budget next year which is capable of delivering these services – even if that means going to a referendum on an increased council tax to achieve the service levels residents say they need.

Cuts in Ledbury

The coming cuts will still be huge. The council has pulled back from its original plans to cut the library services budget by 75% - because they find they actually aren't allowed to do that by law. The council has also confirmed that the Master's House project will proceed as planned, however the mix of services contained in the building may well be very different.

Cuts to library opening times are likely to be faced in Ledbury as in other towns well ahead of the library moving to the Master's House – but the council is having discussions with user groups and staff in each library to consider the service changes which best suit each individual market town/village.

Other cuts to adult and children's services will be being felt shortly – if not already here in town. The council's proposals are to slow the entry of new service users, reduce the number of current service users and narrow the range of services on offer to those who remain, but to allocate people 'personal budgets' which enable them to choose which services they receive.

Today (20th June) Cabinet will have decided upon its new Residential and Nursing Home fees structure (reduced fees and lower service levels) and its revised Housing Allocation Policy . There is a live consultation running called 'Your Life, Your Services, Your Say': Support for Adults at the following hyperlink ... I would encourage councillors to make local residents aware of this and to complete it themselves as community spokespersons:
<http://consult.herefordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/transadultcare/consultationHome>

Devolution of services

I met with officers from Herefordshire Council, the mayor and deputy mayor and Cllr Bettington to discuss this matter for Ledbury. The scope of the discussion was limited as Ledbury already does a number of things which the county is responsible for in other market towns, e.g. cemetery, park, market, and we have no currently free car parks like Ross and the county has no present intention of transferring income generating car parks.

Currently there is no option for funds to transfer to make savings on service delivery at a local level, but the topics discussed did include:

- Taking ownership of the foreign and street markets in addition to our own charter market so we could manage them as a set

- Taking responsibility for managing the public toilets in town - since the county intends to close them otherwise
- Taking ownership of the riverside park

We touched upon street cleaning, bin emptying, grass and hedge cutting, weed killing, drain and ditch maintenance. We were encouraged to continue with the consideration of a lengthsman scheme for Ledbury as a way of ensuring some of these activities could be undertaken according to urgent local need.

The meeting was held ahead of the recent announcement that Balfour Beaty are the preferred bidder for the £200m street scene contract with the county council, but we were told that the new contractor will be required to dialogue with each Locality to agree approach to service delivery and phasing - and that there may be the possibility of discussing other ways of these services being delivered when the new contractor is in place in the autumn.

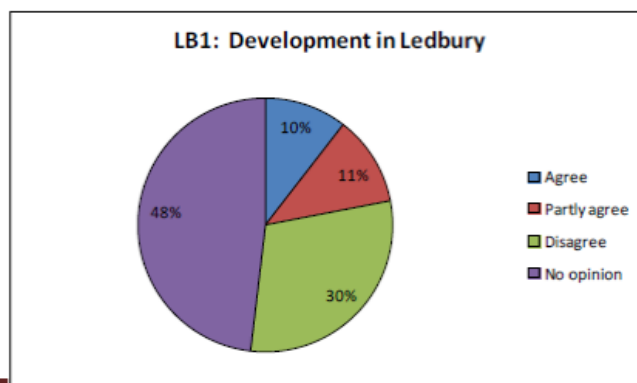
Core Strategy

I have met with the Cllr Hamilton, the cabinet member, and officers to receive feedback on Ledbury’s overall response to this consultation and to discuss their willingness to make changes to the policies for Ledbury to reflect the concerns raised by the Town Council and other respondents. I copy below the consultation summaries for the two policies specific to Ledbury and provide a hyperlink to the complete 700 page report of the raw data for the whole county – including the detailed comments for the Ledbury policies. NOTE: The charts include responses from respondents county-wide, hence the large ‘no opinion sector’ – I have requested a chart showing just the responses to the Ledbury policies provided by residents in the Ledbury locality and have been promised that these will be available next week.

Ledbury

16.a What is your opinion regarding policy LB1: Development in Ledbury?

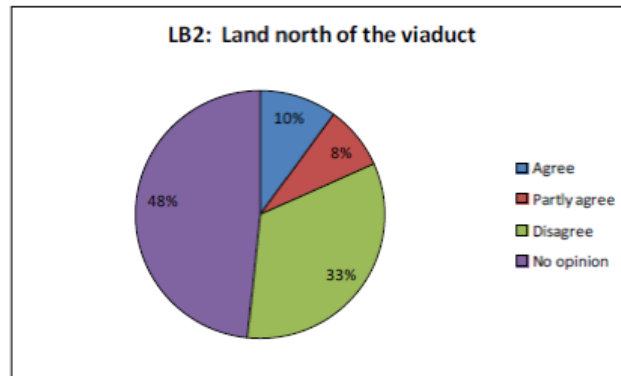
	No.	%
Agree	42	10%
Partly agree	46	11%
Disagree	120	30%
No opinion	193	48%
Total responses	401	100%
Not answered	1027	
Total survey respondents	1428	



16.b Please provide any comments you wish to make in support of your answers above.
There were 174 comments made.

17.a What is your opinion regarding policy LB2: Land north of the viaduct?

	No.	%
Agree	40	10%
Partly agree	33	8%
Disagree	133	33%
No opinion	193	48%
Total responses	399	100%
Not answered	1029	
Total survey respondents	1428	



17.b Please provide any comments you wish to make in support of your answers above.
There were 164 comments made.

Officers have identified that the main areas of concern arising from the consultation for Ledbury are:

- Level of housing proposed
- Strategic viaduct site ... for the following reasons:
 - The site being too small to accommodate the level of development proposed (housing and community facilities)
 - Housing density is too high
 - Level of affordable housing proposed
 - Location in flood zone and impact on surface water
 - How the site would integrate with the town
 - Site accessibility and reliance on Bromyard Road junction for traffic
 - Loss of employment land
- Lack of policy or additional detail for the allocation of land on the Little Marcle Road for employment purposes
- Objection to the identification of the area at Bye St/Lawnside Road for retail development with loss of community facilities

In discussions officers have agreed to:

- Reconsider current housing density proposed at 50dph
- Possibility of new primary school being accommodated on current site
- Undertake further work to develop their proposals for an employment site across the river
- Strengthen the wording requiring protection or enhancement of the community facilities in the Lawnside Road area

At the meeting they showed no inclination to modify their proposals for 700 houses on the viaduct site - but I have been in correspondence since then and ward councillors have just been invited to a last-minute meeting on Monday to discuss the Ledbury policies further. I have no indication what the content of those proposals will be at this time.

I have continued to press for officer engagement with the Town Council and Neighbourhood Planning team but these requests continue to be refused.

Councillor Liz Harvey

It's Our County – Ledbury Ward Member
19th June 2012