

Ledbury Town Council: 6th November 2014

Herefordshire Councillors' Report

Cllr Elizabeth Harvey & Cllr Terry Widdows

Another Consultation – lead Cllr Harvey

Herefordshire Council is proposing to reduce still further the relief applied to council tax for the least well off people in the county. This year CTR was reduced from 92% to 84% for claimants of working age. Next year it is proposed to be reduced to 76%. In Ledbury there are 4,417 properties incurring council tax. Of these 777 are in receipt of CTR -20%. This figure includes pensioners who remain on 100% CTR.

This reduction in CTR is intended to raise £158k across the whole county.

People in receipt of CTR are x10 more likely to receive a summons for non-payment of council tax than people paying full council tax. To date at county level 5255 summons have been issued this year for non payment, which at a charge of £85 per summons adds a further £450k to the council tax demands of CTR households – without accounting for staff time in administering the scheme.

The table below shows the county level distribution of CTR recipients across council tax bands. Even Band A households will be facing >£80 p.a. increase in their council tax bills with this relief reduction compared to a capped maximum of £30 p.a. for even Band D householders. This is iniquitous.

Examples to Show Potential Amounts Payable by CTR Claimants

Band	Annual charge (£)	CTR per band	Based on 76% Estimated CTR before debt	CTR Payable		
				2014/15 84%	Break Even 2015/16 80%	Proposed 2015/16 76%
A	1,037	40%	496,896	166	207	249
B	1,210	37%	537,240	194	242	290
C	1,383	15%	248,940	221	277	332
D	1,555	5%	93,300	249	311	373
E	1,901	2%	78,840	595	657	719
F	2,247	1%	60,180	941	1,003	1,065
G	2,593	0%	-	1,287	1,181	1,411
H	3,111	0%	-	1,805	1,867	1,929
		100%	1,515,396			

The General Overview & Scrutiny Committee this week recommended that the level of CTR remains at 84% for 2015-16. A consultation on this proposal has been launched which will run until 10th December. Please will councillors consider commenting on the proposals. The decision will be taken at full council in Hereford on 12th December: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits/council-tax-business-rates-and-benefits/council-tax/reduction-scheme-consultation>

Community Infrastructure Levy – lead Cllr Harvey

We are quite popular here in Ledbury with developers at the moment and likely to become more so if whispers of an application coming forward on our strategic housing site are to be believed. Given that CIL is most unlikely to be in place until June 2015 at the earliest - it's likely that developments will come forward, in outline at least, under the current S106 framework.

We have both parish and neighbourhood planning on the go presently, and have a good bank of data from public consultation regarding community facilities and improvements people would like to see.

If the Town Council is to miss out on upwards of £1.5m CIL, we very much want to provide Herefordshire Council officers with the necessary information to ensure developer contributions deliver the local improvements such housing schemes will require.

Thank you to those Town Councillors who have responded to the request to provide useful suggestions regarding the range of possible infrastructure requirements for the town.

Community action on services – Love Ledbury – lead Cllr Harvey

Coin operated locks were fitting in late October and accept coin denominations for donations from 5p-£2 although the entry charge is only 20p.

Lighting repairs have been carried out free of charge by another local business keen to support the initiative: Bits & Bobs Property Maintenance of Ledbury. A big thank you for the continued support.

A tender specification for the cleaning contract will be available shortly for interested businesses to bid for the work. Herefordshire Council still have a number of outstanding snags to repair which will hopefully be addressed before Christmas.

The Extraordinary General Meeting of the charity is delayed pending receipt of the registration paperwork from Cooperatives UK Ltd. and in order to avoid clashes in the run-up to Christmas, will probably not now be held before the New Year.

Meanwhile members have supported the Town Council's 'Business Week' initiative on anti-dog fouling and are providing a team for the Friends of Ledbury Library quiz night later this month on 21st November.

Street scene update - Lead Cllr Widdows

Having initially being told about the Balfour Beatty annual exhibition at Shire Hall myself and Cllr Harvey attended with the intention of discussing the annual plan and what this means for Ledbury we were both extremely disappointed to find out that all the exhibition was BB showing us what service they provide. There was no detail on the plans for any of next year's services nor people on hand with the advice to be able to answer our queries. We did express our disappointment to the team that were there and also pressed for when we will see the plan to be consulted on. With regards to grass cutting we have a meeting couple of weeks with BB to go through the cutting plan for next year to see how we redistribute the current schedule alongside our community efforts. It seems BB are awaiting the proposed figure from the Cabinet to see what they have to work with next year before letting councillors see the plan much to our annoyance as we feel local knowledge is key to delivering the services and should be consulted on these first.

Planning matters - Lead Cllr Widdows

My early introduction into planning matters has obviously been dominated by the speculative housing applications that the county find itself under. The reason behind this is because of the lack of core strategy the council cannot demonstrate a five year land supply which is leaving it open to applications that are not community led but are purely speculative and are for large developments on sites that are not identified for housing either now or under the new strategy. There are also a lot of emerging neighbourhood plans that are now underway and starting to get to the latter stages of completion that also do not rank these sites within the community of areas where they want to see development of this scale. With this in mind and the area of flux that the committee finds itself in at the last planning meeting it was argued by IOC members about the officers recommendations not containing enough "weight" to the community plans. I followed this up after the meeting with the head of planning and as a consequence there is going to be a new briefing paper for officers regarding how much consideration the views of the neighbourhood plan and the new core strategy can carry as the further they are down the line the more they can be considered. This should mean that we start using new policies hopefully and is also a good kick to moving forward the completion of our own neighbourhood plan so that it can be taken into consideration to help decide speculative applications. The early signs from the council are that the examination is likely to be early February.

Fire Cuts Update – Lead Cllr Widdows

As mentioned at the last full council meeting despite the Full council resolving to write about the cuts as I advised this was something that I had already done as a ward member especially regarding the funding that we receive. I have now had a reply from the minister involved Penny Mordaunt via Bill Wiggin who has said it is only right that even though it is important the fire and rescue authority. Hereford and Worcester saw an average spending power decrease of ONLY 1.6% in 2014-2015. This is less than the average reduction for single purpose authorities of 2.4%. In addition the capital and resilience grants totalled 2.17million. The authority received an additional sum of £15,493. It also goes on to state that the front line cuts are up to the local authority not the government and that the specific cuts are made at a local level and should be raised with them. I will send a copy to the Clerk for her to circulate the whole letter but in summary the authority has been given additional money for new buildings but not services and the budget lines cannot be crossed over. I welcome the town councils letter and look forward to hearing their reply also.

Councillors Liz Harvey & Terry Widdows

It's Our County – Ledbury Ward Members

5th November 2014