

# Ledbury Town Council: Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013

## Herefordshire Councillors' Reports – Elizabeth Harvey

### Cuts and Consultations

**Budget & Services 2014:** I have made recommendations to Council Leader Tony Johnson, concerning significant improvements which need to be made by Herefordshire Council in better communicating with, preparing for discussions with, and building relationships with parish councils generally – but especially the 'super-parish' councils represented by the market towns and city councils.

A budget briefing to parish councils took place last week on 5<sup>th</sup> December – I do not hear good things about how it went generally. Cllr Francis represented the Town Council and can comment from his own perspective.

More effective working amongst ward members representing urban wards and between the County Council, the County Councillor Urban Forum and the Parish Councillor Market Towns Forum is becoming a matter of urgency.

I would encourage all councillors on the Town Council to use any and every opportunity to engage with councillors in our rural parish cluster and to strike up dialogues with councillors from other market towns and the city. Building good working relationships on activities we share in common now will stand us in good stead for the discussions to come.

The budget consultation on 2014-15 services closes on 20<sup>th</sup> December, to-date only ~150 responses have been received and Cabinet Members are using this low response to a difficult consultation as evidence that no-one is really bothered or interested in the service cuts that are coming.

### Car Parking this Christmas

I have been unsuccessful in convincing either of our supermarkets to join the county council in sponsoring a day's free parking in the town centre car parks. This is a shame given the many millions of pounds of business each supermarket enjoys receiving from local residents throughout the year.

I hope I can rely on the press to prominently publicise the one day's free parking the town is to enjoy which is coming up on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> December.

### Congress to the Council of Europe

I have just been appointed as the only Independent councillor on the UK delegation to the Congress of the Council of Europe. I shall be sitting on the committee which is presently studying the state of democracy in the UK. The committee will also be observing the European elections next year and the local government and parliamentary elections in 2015.

Councillor colleagues may allay any fears that they might have that I shall be 'doing a Kay Swinburne'. I would like to state, for the record, that I have no intentions of using the town and county council membership as a launch-pad for a career in European politics. My interest lies solely in learning about and bringing home useful localism initiatives from other parts of Europe for consideration by the Local Government Association here in the UK and especially by local government here in Herefordshire.

## **Double Standards**

Last month the result of the standards board adjudications were published on complaints made by two officers of Herefordshire Council against me in my role as chairman of a scrutiny task and finish group on Community Infrastructure Levy.

All the grounds for complaint cited by both Mr Andrew Ashcroft, Assistant Director – Economic, Environment and Cultural Services and Mrs Yvonne Coleman, Planning Obligations Manager, were dismissed as without foundation, except for the material fact that I had not copied Mrs Coleman into an email sent to all parish councils alerting them to the existence of the scrutiny investigation and requesting their views on the council's proposals for implementing this new development tax. This was considered disrespectful to her role as planning obligations manager and I have apologised in writing for the omission.

Throughout the scrutiny activity both these officers repeatedly prioritised activities for the administration over their obligations to support the scrutiny of the work in which they were engaged.

It is worth noting that the written responses I have received to supplementary questions asked of the new Cabinet Member responsible for the Core Strategy, indicate that parish councils will be constrained in how they are to be allowed to spend their CIL monies – should the property tax eventually be implemented in Herefordshire. It is also worth bearing in mind that under the Core Strategy as it is presently drafted, all of the local infrastructure necessary to offset the impact of development in Ledbury over the next 20 years is left open to negotiation and none is due to be covered by CIL payments gathered by the County Council as a result of those developments.

All CIL monies raised in Ledbury, except for the parish's share, will be spent on county level infrastructure – primarily the relief road around Hereford. It now appears that the parish proportion may be directed to pay for local infrastructure traded away in negotiation between planning officers and developers in order to ensure the developments come forward to meet the Core Strategy's development targets.

Despite these recent complaints, I shall continue to work to ensure that the impact of county policies on local communities is adequately communicated to their parish councils. I shall also continue to undertake my part in the robust scrutiny of this administration's activities and shall expect the full cooperation of all officers involved in supporting this statutory process.

## **What a Waste**

This week I have been involved in the scrutiny of the council's plans to become a minority partner in building a waste incinerator jointly with Worcestershire County Council. This involves the counties committing to old-fashioned, inefficient and dirty technology costing in excess of £165m through public borrowing right at the time when the next generation of high-efficiency, new technology energy generating waste-to-power plants are coming on stream at a third of the price. We shall, once again, put ourselves 20-years behind the times rather than catching the next wave. #typical

## Lawnside Road

*Dear Ward members,*

*Apologies that this request is not in writing seven days before the meeting but I would appreciate your help on this. I am slightly confused and extremely worried about the reports regarding Lawnside road, the reason for this is I have been sent a copy of the press released by Mr King regarding what is going on and in it he implies that he is about to enter pre application advice. Yet in the paper this week it is stated he has already sought this advice from Herefordshire Council. There is also the mounting speculation about the deal that is currently being brokered with regards to the swimming pool moving.*

*The questions that I would like to ask for Thursday nights full council meeting to present back to the full council is as follows:*

- 1. Can any of you confirm if there has been a pre application meeting between Mr Kings company and Herefordshire Council regarding Lawnside Road?*
- 2. If there has can you confirm who was present and in what capacity at those meetings. Just to be clear I also mean officers.*
- 3. Are Halo in active discussions with Mr King around moving the swimming pool and is Mr King providing any financial support to Halo at present or indeed in the near future?*
- 4. Are any of you as ward members involved in these discussions?*
- 5. If there are talks going on were any of you aware that these were happening?*

*Appreciate that you all may be just as in the dark as the town council and indeed the public is on this matter but would appreciate your comments and thoughts on it.*

*Kind regards, Terry*

*Mayor of Ledbury, Councillor Terry Widdows, Ledbury Town Council*

My response:

- All ward councillors have been advised by planning officers that Mr King has formally applied to receive pre-application advice from the Planning Department of Herefordshire Council.
- All pre-application advice is provided on a confidential basis between the applicant and planners. All ward councillors are made aware that correspondence has been exchanged, but not whether any face-to-face meetings have taken place. All ward councillors have received a copy of the confidential written response given by officers to Mr King.
- Ward Councillors are not privy to any discussions Mr King may be having with land owners and tenants. However, as Chairman of the Town Plan Steering Group, which has registered a number of land blocks in the Lawnside Road area as Community Assets, I can say that Mr King has definitely not approached the Steering Group on the matter.
- See above
- I'm aware from comment in the press that tenants and land owners have been being approached by Mr King while he has been developing his plans. The only discussion I have been notified of is that of the formal pre-application advice, and the presentation Mr King gave to the Town Council back in the summer.

Councillor Liz Harvey

It's Our County – Ledbury Ward Member  
12<sup>th</sup> December 2013