

LITTLE WITLEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

10.07.17

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

1. County Council affairs

The new council met for the first time on the 25th May and approved various formal appointments. The new Chairman is Anne Hingley, the new deputy chairman is Brandon Clayton and the leader of the council remains Simon Geraghty.

Simon has confirmed his Cabinet of ten people, the maximum allowed, with the inclusion of a new portfolio of education and skills. This has gone to Marcus Hart, whose highways portfolio is now held by Alan Amos. I retain the economy and infrastructure portfolio, but lose responsibility for skills to Marcus.

We also approved the appointment of an interim Chief Executive to replace Clare Marchant who left at the end of June. He is Steve Stewart, who has held the post of chief executive in a number of northern councils, including Northumberland and York. In the former he was in charge of the conversion from a two tier to a unitary council, and led an authority which was one of only three in the country with an "outstanding" rating for their children's safeguarding.

One of Mr Stewart's principal jobs will be to see how we can carry the council forward on the reducing budget that we expect to be available. He will be on a fixed term contract, paid the same as the former chief executive, and we expect him to be in place for between 6 and 9 months. During that time, the council will be considering the nature of the job, and whom we might wish to appoint on a permanent basis.

2. WCC Website

I note that you have an agenda item concerning a parish website. This may be based on the concern that the County Council website may cease to carry parish council information. I believe this is because of information circulated by Richard Levett of CALC that has been proven false.

The software used by WCC is out of date and will need replacing, but the County will continue to provide a platform for parishes, should they wish to use it.

3. Velo Birmingham Bike Race

Councillors will be aware of the controversy surrounding plans for a large cycling event, called Velo Birmingham, taking place on 24th September. A meeting 10 days ago approved a change in the route, which will mean that the 15,000 cyclists will not penetrate further west than Great Witley.

This will be a relief to many, but a disappointment to some. Access over the Severn will still be restricted at Holt Fleet and Bewdley, though open in Worcester and Stourport.

There will still be a large section of the event in Worcestershire, though none in Herefordshire and now more in Staffordshire. This will require TROs to publicise the event and approval or otherwise by the county council, having received any objections to the closures. At present, it is most likely that the event will go ahead, but it is not 100% certain.

It is important to note that the county council has a very strong pro-cycling and walking policy, restated in the latest local transport plan (LTP4). This is demonstrated by our continued support for the Redditch bike race in May and the Tour of Britain, the last leg of which starts in Worcester on September 10th.

Velo is, by contrast, not a race but a mass participation event, called a sportive, to promote general wellbeing and appreciation of the countryside. We are assured that it will also bring economic benefits to the county, as with the Wales Velothon, held this weekend and based in Cardiff, and also Ride London, that is now well established and covers a lot of roads in Surrey.

I regret that I cannot attend the meeting to take part in the discussion with Jon Fraser of WCC and a representative of CSM, the organisers.

4. Speeding

I fully support your efforts to get the Safer Roads Partnership to deploy their van or motorcycle facilities in Little Witley to limit the amount of speeding that seems to be occurring. While the accident record might not suggest danger, the wellbeing of residents and particularly their children is a material consideration.

I trust your efforts will prove successful.

5. The Chaplin's layby

I have discussed this issue with Mr Chaplin, and can understand the residents' concerns. I believe the roadway is being inspected to see if resurfacing is justified. Clearly with few vehicles travelling at low speed it is less of a priority than many roads. I hope that appropriate yellow lines can limit the disruption caused by inconsiderate parking but it would be foolish to imagine that adoption by the residents would eliminate the use of the layby by trucks.

6. Church Lane developments

It is very disturbing to think that anyone might be threatened by fellow residents over the disruption caused by building works. We all accept that some such building can be unpleasant but it is usually of limited duration and I hope we all would be tolerant of the problem.

Threats are another thing entirely, and I trust the police will deal with such behaviour with speed and decisiveness.

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