

LITTLE WITLEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

13.03.17

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

1. County Affairs

The full council passed the 2017/18 budget last month, including the increase to council tax by 0.94%. This was in addition to the 2% rise in tax to provide money for adult social care. Only a third of the total increase will actually go to the normal local services, while the rest seeks to cover the large demands of our ageing population.

The Labour group's amendments were defeated. They would have limited officers' salaries to £100,000, and cut the size of the Cabinet to seven from nine at present. Their proposal to eliminate the 0.94% increase in council tax would have cost £2,300,000. They also wanted to increase the budget for Children Centres by £1million, paid for by taking more fostering in house, and they would have balanced the budget by taking £2,145,000 from reserves.

The 2013 Group, made up of Liberal Democrats and Greens, proposed a further increase in Council Tax of 1%, to support council services, to make 3.94% in total. This was also defeated.

You will know that we have had ministerial approval for Worcestershire Parkway station in Norton and contracts for that work have now been signed. Ten days ago, I was able to take part in a small ceremony of "sod-cutting" to mark the start of the work at Norton, just the other side of the M5 from Junction 7. The plan is to open the station in the winter of 2018/19. Last week, I was at Norton Juxta Primary School awarding a prize to the child who designed the best poster to go on the temporary fencing alongside the building site during construction.

A full business case for the new Carrington Bridge and causeway to Powick roundabout was submitted recently, and we are hopeful of a positive response by the summer. The plan there is to start work in two years' time and have the bridge and dual carriageway open in the spring of 2021.

After the disappointing Ofsted report into Children's Service that rated the county as inadequate, a comprehensive programme has been started to improve performance in all areas. Ofsted agreed the current leadership was good and heading in the right direction. We now need to demonstrate in the near future that the pace of improvement has accelerated and that all our children are being properly safeguarded.

The £12 million programme of highway repairs is underway under the Driving Home banner. The £6 million work on pavements is also progressing, largely in urban estates. In addition, £5 million has been allocated for small congestion hot spots, where relatively minor works may be expected to have a large benefit on relieving congestion.

As well as the broadband stakeholders' board that I chair, that seeks to facilitate the extension of broadband as fully as possible, a new connectivity board is being established to seek better mobile connectivity across the county. This will aim to get better coverage from

all the suppliers, applying pressure nationally and locally. This may include the adoption of 5G technology, and last Thursday I joined a small delegation visiting the University of Surrey to see how their research in this area is progressing. We hope that Worcestershire will be a pilot for this latest development.

I am sorry to read of your difficulties with Airband and will happily offer support, if you feel this would be helpful. The company is undergoing the problems of expansion but this should not excuse neglecting existing customers.

2. Speeding in Little Witley

I noted the two speed measurement installations in recent weeks, and I believe you have now received a report on the speeding levels. I would strongly support your seeking to persuade the Safer Roads Partnership to visit the village on an irregular basis, to deter drivers from exceeding the 40 mph limit. There are places where a van or a motorcycle can position themselves to catch speeding motorists, although you may be content with the effect of deterrence by their occasional presence.

3. Liaison Engineers

Next week, Roy Fullee will be giving up his role as a liaison engineer for this area and will move to other duties. The County will be recruiting two new liaison officers, probably in May, and Gerry Brienza will be adding Roy's area to his existing one in the interim.

Gerry is familiar with the area, of course, but I do not think we can expect him to be as available during this period of doubling up as we might wish. I am sure you will appreciate this problem.

4. Housing in Great Witley

Last week a Parish Council meeting was held in Great Witley to consider the new application for 175 houses in the central triangle of the village, with the developer Stannard Harrison. Your Chairman and District Councillor, Paul Cumming, was there, but is constrained from making comments by his role in the ultimate planning decision.

He may safely expand on the content of the meeting, but suffice it for me to say there was not a single vote in favour among the 150 or so people present and the Parish Council voted to oppose the application.

The County Council is not involved in planning, but I was able to comment that there will be no improvement to Holt Fleet Bridge, being a listed structure, and that any relief in that regard, crossing the Severn, will have to wait for the completion of the Northern Link and that won't start till after 2030. It will not, therefore, offer any help with the anticipated extra congestion that might come from a large increase in housing in Great Witley.

5. LTP4

In the context of the last item, you might note that the consultation period for the Local Transport Plan 4 ends this Friday the 17th March. This means that should you wish to make any comments on the plans therein outlined, they need to be decided upon at this meeting. I

hope you have had a chance to look at the plans on the website and I would urge you to comment thereon, if at all possible.

6. Tesco's in Tenbury

You will know that Tesco's have announced that their new store in Tenbury will open on April 27th. This replaces earlier plans to open in February after strong representations were made from various organisations and individuals, including myself.

Before then, the company's contractors will be completing their contribution to the Public Realm work on Teme Street. The final section will probably be finished in the autumn by the County Council's contractors.

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13.03.17**