

LITTLE WITLEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

11.03.19

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

1. Budget Proposals

Just over three weeks ago at full council, the budget was approved. While the outline of the proposals is well known, there were some significant changes.

Various amendments from the Labour group and the 2017 group were tabled for consideration, but were unsuccessful. Given that they proposed very minor changes to the budget, they could be taken as an indication that, overall, the budget was acceptable to all parties.

There was a notice of motion criticising the rates of charging for car parking at the Worcester Royal Infirmary, but this was rejected on the grounds that the problem was more one of capacity than exorbitant charging. When the hospital was built, provision for parking was limited to 75% of the numbers expected to need access to the hospital, building in an under-provision for parking.

2. Worcestershire Parkway and SLR4

Just after your last council meeting, we held a press briefing at the new Worcestershire Parkway railway station. We were keen to outline the progress being made towards completion of the work this summer and then, after the extensive and detailed "entry into service" process, the station should be fully functional by the end of the year.

This support for public transport is just part of our county wide policy to promote public transport, seen as complementing work on roads, to accommodate private cars and goods vehicles. In the capital programme we aim to see enhancements at several railway stations and in particular improved parking facilities.

In addition, work has recently started on preparing the embankments of the southern link road between the Ketch and Powick roundabouts, for the widening of the causeway to allow the dualling of the road. This has involved removing the vegetation on the south side of the bank, done at this time to avoid the bird nesting season.

Final approval of the government grant of £54.5 million came through recently, giving the project the green light to proceed towards an expected completion date in 2021. There will be a new separate Carrington Bridge, as well as one halfway along the 1.2 miles of causeway, to accommodate floodwater. The whole section will become four lane, and the path on the north side will be widened to allow for more walking and cycling.

During this year, three bridges will be built over the more northerly sections of the link road, one for farm traffic and the others to allow easier and safer crossing of the road by walkers and cyclists.

It is worth noting that this development will give improved travel times from the west to the M5, junction 7, and for the reverse journey. Completion of the ring road to the north, while obvious on paper, would need a further sum of around £200 million, and a large number of houses to be built to the north west of the city, to generate many millions of pounds through Section 106 agreements. This is not likely to happen in the next decade, during which time we will be able to assess the benefit to the city itself of the diversion of traffic to the Southern Link Road.

3. Local issues

I am aware that there are various drainage issues and concerns for footway clearance still outstanding. I would be grateful if any delays in these works are brought to my attention, should the normal reporting methods via the clerk, and the highways liaison officer seem not to be working.

4. School Funding

In the last week there has been national attention on the question of school funding. I am sure we would all agree that budgets are tight and schools should be supported in all feasible ways.

Last Thursday, I gave an RE lesson for year 6 pupils at Oldbury Park Primary School in St John's. It was on humanism, and the attention and interest shown by these 11 years olds was impressive. They were all very polite and well disciplined, making it a highly rewarding experience.

At the same time the Guardian published a long piece on school funding, giving instances of the sort of measures some schools have had to follow to make ends meet. They wrote:

In North Yorkshire, one secondary school is raising funds by holding extra non-uniform days – six a year, at the end of each half term – potentially earning an additional £3,000 for the school's funds.

Guardian readers clearly know that it costs each pupil a pound a day to be allowed not to wear a school uniform! I did not...

Hours are being reduced at both the start and end of the day to save money. In Birmingham many primary school pupils are being sent home at lunchtime on Fridays; pupils at one Kent grammar school are being asked to come in late one morning.

I do not understand why money is saved if pupils attend for a shorter week. Staff are all bound to be on full time contracts, heating costs would be barely altered, and the amount of variable costs in paper and pens saved would be trivial.

We know that school pupil numbers are going up, but how much more does it cost to teach a class of 30 over one of 29?

I don't normally make political points, but in this crucial area, I would advise clear thinking and fact based reporting. Oldbury Park Primary School seemed to me to lack nothing in resources or staff and was smart, well supplied with materials and apparently very successful. I hope it is typical of Worcestershire schools.

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