**GREAT WITLEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**

**08.07.20**

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR’S REPORT**

1. **County Matters**

We must hope that the impact of the coronavirus outbreak is diminishing and that we may soon be able to resume what me might refer to as normal life. The County has suffered just over 500 deaths from Covid 19, with around 57% of them in hospitals. The most recent figures I have to hand show there are 15 confirmed cases in our acute hospitals and just one in intensive care. There had been no deaths in hospitals in the previous 3 days.

We have stood down our reserve provision, to make it unnecessary for patients discharged from hospital to go to a care home, with the risk of infecting other relatively weak residents. This arrangement might have been usefully duplicated around the country, with a little more understanding from hospitals and county councils, and a stronger resistance from care homes to acting against their better judgement. Two thirds of the county’s care homes have had no cases of Covid-19 among their staff and residents.

Meanwhile, we are trying to revive the local economy with help from a number of government schemes to get money in grants or loans to local businesses. Details can be found on the Worcestershire Business Central website. The County’s GDP has fallen by 20.4% and 75,700 workers are currently on furlough. Meanwhile, traffic has risen to about 77% of normal pre-Covid levels.

At this time, it is unfortunate that for many people the solution to reduced use of public transport in London has meant strong pressure to assist cycling and walking in Worcestershire. So far, we have not seen the sort of temporary measures suggested as worthy of implementation. Our established policies, set out in LTP4, give us plenty of schemes to follow, where the funds allow.

I am sure Great Witley residents will appreciate the problem of adding cycle lanes to the A443 and A451, to make cycling in the village safer. The same problem applies on many of our county’s roads.

One example of the county’s aspirations in active travel is under consultation just now. We are asking for views on a new pedestrian and cycling bridge at Kepax, mirroring the Diglis bridge that has proved so popular. It would run from the Kepax site on the west bank to Gheluvelt Park in the east, and provide a useful connection for recreation and commerce for all who wish to walk or cycle across the Severn, without needing to go into town to the Sabrina bridge.

1. **Local Matters**

The county has been keen to follow the government’s guidance on returning pupils to schools. Until recently this has been confined to vulnerable children and those of key workers. We are grateful for all the efforts by teachers attending schools and those who have contributed to providing education for children at home.

At present there are many schools who would not be able to accept all pupils back to school in September, as is planned, unless there is a relaxing of the social distancing rules. Reducing the normal separation to 1 metre as from last Saturday is a help, and one must hope that in two months’ time, even that can be eliminated.

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I am very conscious of the impact on businesses of all types, and of family incomes, of the need for one or other of the parents to be away from work, looking after their children. Nothing could be more important, but the economy will be greatly boosted when all that want to work are back doing their normal jobs.

Touring Tenbury last Friday, it was encouraging to see so many businesses open again, and I hope all residents will seek to follow the idea of “shop locally”, to help these relatively small enterprises. That said, it was encouraging also to see the Tesco’s car park nearly full, indicating that many shoppers are staying within Tenbury, rather than needing to go to neighbouring towns for their regular shopping.

In the meantime, it is worth observing that our highways personnel have been able to take advantage of the much lower number of vehicles on the road to complete a lot of routine maintenance, pothole filling and surface dressing, so that our roads are in a better condition facing the summer.

You will be aware of the overnight work, patching and surface dressing on the A443 between Great Witley and Eardiston. The road closures were obviously inconvenient for a while, but the end result is clearly beneficial.

Similarly, we are spending £8 million on repairing and restoring footways, the footpaths that run alongside the carriageway. At present there are 7 crews working on this, but the number will increase to 10 this month. Note, this does not excuse the trip hazard in Powick, highlighted in the Worcester News last week, but it does indicate that the County Council is not oblivious to this problem, which we hope will be dealt with quickly.

I would be naïve to think that all such problems are behind us, and I would be grateful if you could let me know of any such matters that need our attention.

1. **Speeding in Great Witley**

The question of speeding in the village has occupied a lot of time for councillors and residents recently. It would be fair to say there have been no startling new ideas on how to deal with the problem and there is some disagreement as to the extent of the problem itself.

There are two players with the powers to act in this matter, the police and the County Council. The police have been sensitive to the needs of the village, deploying camera vans and motorcycles on A451 and the A443 at various times. These catch some motorists and act as a deterrence to others.

The County Council can measure speeds with rubber strips on the road and the most recent results seem to indicate the problem is more apparent than real. More such measurements in slightly different places will be carried out in the near future.

Deployment of fixed cameras taking photographs as evidence for prosecution needs a certain level of accidents, speeding and the like to trigger action. So far, Great Witley falls below that threshold.

There remains the question of widening the pavements, or footways, as they are termed to distinguish them from carriageways (for vehicles) or footpaths (across open countryside). The county highways personnel will carry out this “siding out” on the 20th an 21st of this month. It is to be hoped that in many places this will result in a sufficiently wide strip of tarmac to avoid the sort of accident that befell a local resident walking between Fountain Court and Glendower Way recently.

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Regrettably, it may be that there is insufficient room in places for this operation to give a sufficiently wide footway. That would mean the paths remain dangerous for pedestrians being passed by the sort of HGVs frequently found on the road.

If this proves true, the next step would be to seek to purchase some land from the residents on those stretches of road, so that the path could be widened, and the hedges moved back away from the road. This would be expensive and maybe unpopular with some, or all, of those residents. It may be that the Parish Council would like to sound out those residents to gauge reaction to such a scheme.

There is a further possibility that could also be deployed on the A443 for motorists approaching from Holt. We are familiar with the yellow lines across the carriageway on the A449, when approaching the Claines roundabout from J6 of the M5. These stand proud of the tarmac and are painted at shortening intervals. They thus provide an audible and visual warning to slow down.

It may be that such a scheme could be deployed to the east, as a further warning to motorists to slow down before entering the village.

I hope this rehearsal of the options concerned with speeding will help understanding, and I will be keen to hear of any reaction to these comments.

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