

BORDER GROUP COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT JAN 2020

Firstly, may I wish you all a Happy New Year. The last four months have seen a great deal of rain and I am afraid the impact on our highways is beginning to show with the erosion of surfaces and new potholes emerging. Please can I encourage you all to report any EMERGENCY defects by phone to 01432 26180 or for non-emergency defects, by logging on the Herefordshire Council website <http://myaccount.herefordshire.gov.uk/report-a-pothole>.

Across Herefordshire, there was and is continuing to be significant flooding in many areas and some residents, including Mortimer ward faced the awful situation of having to be rescued from their car or their home by the fire brigade, whilst others are having to live upstairs whilst dehumidifiers are being used to dry out the lower floor. I cannot imagine how stressful it must have been for those having to leave their properties with the possibility of not returning for months or even a year. Each parish in Mortimer ward was effected to a lesser or greater degree and I arranged a meeting on the 6th Jan at Wigmore Village Hall with representatives from each parish, officers from BB and HC and 3 representatives of the Environment Agency to look at what measure could be put in place to reduce the impact in the future. We will never be able to eliminate flooding but I am sure that some improvements can be made. I think the meeting was helpful. Unfortunately due to the Chairman of Leintwardine being in hospital and nobody else from that parish being aware of the meeting, not all parishes were represented but a representative of the Environment Agency present had been on the ground at Leintwardine during the first flooding as they had been warned that the water level at Leintwardine would exceed 2007 and there would be significant flooding. Fortunately, that did not happen but he was able to go and speak to many residents whose homes had been flooded. I have also arranged for a Drop-In session at Leominster Library 3.30 – 6.30 pm on Thursday 16th January, this is primarily for those whose properties were flooded and in particular those residents who have had to vacate their homes, but anyone affected by the flooding can attend. Officers and the Environment Agency will be present to offer advice on how to protect homes and whether particular residents are entitled to council tax or business rates discounts. If you know of anyone who suffered in such a way please pass this information on. I have managed to speak to the lady who was evacuated from Walford by the fire brigade and she hopes her daughter will take her to the meeting. I unfortunately will not be able to attend as I shall be dealing with issues relating to the death of my mother.

At the meeting on the 6th it was agreed that the first meeting with local residents should be those from Walford as there were probably more homes in that area affected than elsewhere. Tom Dixon agreed to ascertain what time of day would be best for such a meeting but I have heard nothing further. I agreed to talk to Dave Tristram the HC officer responsible for funding grants as we were advised that although there are no grants (other than what HC has already announced) to date we have been left out of all grant funding from the government for businesses, residencies and farms, although we are pursuing this, there is funding we can apply for to improve our natural environment which would also alleviate flooding. I have also agreed to arrange with officers a further meeting open to all parish councillors

towards the end of Feb/beginning of March at Aymestrey VH to gain an update on actions from 6th Jan meeting and for the Environment Agency to outline what flooding preventions parish councils should promote to their local residents which includes not just conventional sand bags. I am also wanting parish councils to consider the setting up of one or more flood wardens (not necessarily parish councillors) who could be registered with the Environment Agency, receive alerts, know where the "sand bags" are kept, check on their quality and be aware of where the most vulnerable residents in their area reside. There is training provided for flood wardens. I have also got a contact from Bodenham Flood Group and I intend to speak to them about possibly coming to a parish council meeting to explain the work they do.

I have no news yet about the field at Birtley despite chasing Adam via voicemail!

A new contract has been signed between Herefordshire Council and Gigaclear to help get better broadband into our more rural areas. The present contract is running significantly behind schedule.

The General Election has delayed the announcement of the government settlement to local authorities but hopefully we will shortly be obtaining the settlement figure for Herefordshire plus the rural sparsity grant, which last year was £5 million. I will be pushing for more money to be spent on rural roads and am in fact meeting with Paul Shipton of Balfour Beatty on the 5th of March to discuss with him Balfour Beatty's Annual Plan for 2020/21.

The Cabinet were due to make an announcement on the future of the bypass on the 16th January but I am not holding my breath.