

CLIFTON UPON TEME PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

04.02.21

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

1. Corona Virus effects

In recent days, there has been controversy about the supply and use of vaccines, involving an unfortunate spat with the EU. I hope this does not interfere with the crucial matters of treating the most vulnerable first, and in this case seeing that the UK is at the head of the queue.

Please note that while this is being organised by the NHS and not local councils, we recognise that there are anomalies in the ordering of vulnerable people. It would appear that the local surgeries will be administering the vaccines and in consequence some will seem to be doing better than their neighbours.

In all these considerations, it is crucial to follow the national guidance and recognise the rapidly changing situation, which means that government advice and orders appear to change without reason or much notice. It would be foolish to imagine this is happening through incompetence or carelessness.

2. County matters

You will not need reminding that the coronavirus situation has played havoc with the state's finances, nationally and locally. We will aim to keep our council tax as low as possible but recognise the need to respond to the changed needs and priorities at this difficult time.

The budget for 2021/22 will be discussed at the Cabinet again later this week. The 154 pages of the agenda can be read on-line and you can listen to the webcast, live or later as a recording. Approval should follow at the full council meeting on the 18th of this month.

As I have observed before, we hope to be able to balance the budget, despite the difficult financial situation we are in, bearing in mind some £9.5 million being made available in special one-off grants from the government. The Cabinet are proposing a 1.5% increase in basic Council Tax, plus a 1% surcharge for Adult Social Services. This is below the maximum we are permitted to raise but is in anticipation of continuing financial constraints in the coming years.

There was a full council meeting three weeks ago, where there was a full discussion of the performance of the Council in annual reports from the Leader, Simon Geraghty, and the Chief executive, Paul Robinson.

This included reference to the budgetary situation as well as all the activities of the council over the last year. It did not include as much attention to the current concern about the climate, as desired by the nine public participants at the meeting, who all felt that more should be said about the climate change situation and its implications. None acknowledged all the work being done by the Council in this area.

Please note again that we are grateful for the Chancellor's help in getting money to our business community, in order to keep these businesses afloat during this difficult period and also to help those who may want to start or expand their enterprises. The County's Here2Help Business programme is the channel for some of this assistance, with the help of the district councils as well.

3. Local Matters

Tenbury was fortunate to escape serious flooding in the recent emergency, with Market Street closed for a short period. The planned meeting of the Environment Agency and local people was postponed because of the flooding, and now the consultation period has finished. It is worth keeping in touch with the EA to see how plans are evolving, as there has been some controversy about the details, none of which are finalised as yet.

There is natural concern about the revision of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) as under consideration at present. I represent the County Council on the Joint Advisory Panel, which is chaired by my colleague Lucy Hodgson, in her role as a Worcester City councillor.

This may affect many villages in the Clifton Upon Teme area, and it is worth looking at the MHDC website to see what is being suggested. There are major plans for new settlements, the most prominent being around the new Worcestershire Parkway rail station, but it is important to recognise that the time scale of this revised plan takes us to 2041.

In recent weeks I have been pleased to be able to help Clifton with a contribution from the Divisional Fund that I administer. It is worth noting that there is still some money left that needs to be allocated before the middle of March and I would be happy to review any suggestions for how it should be used.

I hope that the problems mentioned last month about signs and running over verges have been sorted out. These matters can loom large in local areas, and I hope reporting them has resulted in improvement.

If you have any further local concerns about highway matters, please let Hannah Davies know in the first instance, but let me know if the response seems inadequate.

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04.02.21**