

CLIFTON UPON TEME PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

2nd July 2020,

Worcestershire County Council report by Ken Pollock

1. Flooding

Clifton Upon Teme residents may recall that after the 2007 floods, the Environment Agency designed a plan to protect Tenbury town from flooding which would have cost about £5 million. This was judged not to be cost effective.

Last month, your MP, Harriett Baldwin, raised the matter in a twice postponed adjournment debate in the House of Commons. It is worth reading in Hansard, as it makes a powerful case for some perimeter barrier to protect the centre of Tenbury that lies between the Teme and the Kyre Brook.

Harriett circulated her speech in advance to a number of local officials and councillors, and I think we were all in broad agreement that something should be done. Harriett has effectively supported five or six flood protection schemes in her constituency since the 2007 floods, and, of the remaining two, Severn Stoke has now been given the go ahead.

Only Tenbury remains, and it presents obvious problems. The net result of the debate is that further work needs to be done on the design, but that alternative sources of funds are also needed. Harriett was responded to by the Floods Minister, Rebecca Pow, and it is worth reading her considered reply. Among other things she said:

The Government and the EA remain committed to helping reduce the risk and impact of flooding in Tenbury and increase the town's resilience, whilst also enhancing the environment and the economic prosperity of the community. I know that the EA has recently met with partners at the National Flood Forum, as well as the wider community, to examine all the options, including those that have gained interest from the Heritage Lottery Fund, in line with the Government's partnership funding approach. I welcome that aspect....The EA is working to demonstrate, though, how the scheme would benefit the economic growth of the town and the surrounding area, and as such, provide an investment opportunity for partners such as the Worcestershire local enterprise partnership.

From this we can deduce that we not only have a complicated design to improve, and then approve, but we also need a secondary source of funds, for instance from the LEP, albeit that all such money may ultimately come by various routes from the Government.

This sort of work is being carried out in a number of places in the Severn catchment, and recently there has been concern about designing a scheme to protect Powick. In all of these matters, it is worth bearing in mind the importance of managing the whole catchment, and the EA are to be encouraged to consider the upper reaches of our rivers, as well as trying to mitigate flooding in a county like Worcestershire.

2. Covid 19 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 around 500 deaths from Covid 19, with around 57% of them in hospitals. At present there are 15 confirmed cases in our acute hospitals and just one in intensive care. There have been no deaths in hospitals in the last 24 hours.

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 on furlough. Meanwhile, traffic has risen to about 79% 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.

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.

3 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 this coming Saturday is a help, and one must hope that in two months' time, even that can be eliminated.

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.

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. 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 today, 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. Meanwhile, I have been alerted to the problems of the closure and resurfacing of Pound Lane, and hope to have some positive news in the near future.

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