

Weobley Ward
2017 November / December Report

University

The recent announcements/inferences in the Hereford Times about the possible use of the Shire Hall ruffled the odd feathers. Staff and the judiciary were understandably concerned about how they might be affected. Their anxieties has been largely dealt with. For clarity, no detailed arrangements have been entered into, or even discussed with the university, with regard to secondary sites.

Accountable body for the university

The confirmation of a £15m grant to the university is great news and a clear sign of government confidence and backing. With this large investment it now becomes likely that the university will request that Herefordshire Council become the accountable body for future government funding.

Road Maintenance

Congratulations is forwarded to Herefordshire Council Officers for their work in securing the £5m of additional monies, ring fenced for road repairs. One of the conditions of the award is that the money has to be used by March of next year (2018).

This exceptional grant money, and the decision to use the higher quality surfacing process, led to the need of a particular type of machinery and operation to be used – this recently created disruption on certain roads, such as the A4103 and A438.

Having chosen the higher quality surface and process, the cost of maintenance measured over the next 10 to 20 years, will be considerably lower with less pressure on future budgets and the taxpayer. Many Ward Councillors get their ears bent by people affected by road works, delays and disruption. Jam tomorrow is always a difficult sell but if it is the right decision it will have long term benefits for all residents.

Waste Management Update

New waste collection charges, in certain areas, are being introduced to facilitate the Council's intention that adequate costs be recoverable where possible.

Leisure

Negotiations are in progress in respect of a proposed cycle track at the Race Course. These negotiations involve Halo Leisure as being the potential operator, ARC Racing as the lease holder and Herefordshire Council as the landlord.

Heritage Property

Further reluctant staff reductions, to lower costs, is continuing with reference to the museums and library archives. This regrettable cost saving, by the withdrawal of staff, will mean roof repairs can continue at the Hereford Library within budget.

Small Holdings Proposal

In accordance with predictions the continued sales equates to £23m in the bank. These sales involve 16 completions from the 35 contracts issued. This represents 50% of the total small holdings sale revenue (after fees and compensation payments). Further contract sales are expected to complete before the end of December 2017.

Amey Dispute

You might recall that the Council have had outstanding disputes with the previous road contractors, Amey. This was over defective works.

A further claim for potentially substandard works has been made by Herefordshire Council to the value of £9.7m. An adjudicator has been agreed, and whilst a time table is awaited, the Council expects a decision no later than the Spring of 2018.

Weeping Window

News will have reached you that Hereford has been chosen as one of the locations for the 2018 poppy display. This is a significant honour as many other towns and cities wanted to be the West Midlands representative.

Aside from the honour of hosting this display, consider the following points:

- Herefordshire Council helps community groups, sports clubs and not-for-profit organisations like schools and charities across Herefordshire, source, apply for and secure funding for a huge range of community projects.
- Over the last two financial years Herefordshire Council has worked with communities across Herefordshire to secure over £6 million of additional funding (£6,489,158) (2015/16 £2.8m, 2016/17 £3.6m).

- This particular funding comes from a wide range of sources including the National Lottery, Government funding, European funding as well as national, regional and local Trusts and Foundations.

This is a fantastic opportunity for Herefordshire, not only as a means of remembrance, but also for our local economy. Previous locations, that have hosted the Weeping Window display, have reported a huge increase in visitor numbers (over 100%), an increased take up of local visitor accommodation (a 40% increase in bed nights) and increased spending in the local economy.

Herefordshire Council expect up to 2000 visitors a day to the exhibition.

Winter Highway Preparation

Herefordshire Council is indeed ready. There is a team of 16 HGV gritters, two quad bikes as well as several push-along salt spreaders.

The teams have completed several dry runs, where the gritters drive their routes, checking for any accessibility issues – for example checking for overhanging trees. On the dry runs they also test that the spreaders are working correctly, dispensing the right amount of salt on the carriageway. These dry runs help familiarise the drivers with their routes while the weather is good. This is in advance of them having to drive the same routes in potentially hazardous conditions. Additionally, the team have had refresher training on the systems to gauge the weather predictions and when to deploy.

Hereford Bypass

The short list of route options for the bypass will be available soon. It is hoped to go to public consultation before Christmas for a minimum of 6 weeks. The analysis of the feedback will lead to choosing a preferred route for further consultation in March - April 18.

This completes my report.

Kind regards

Regards

Cllr Mark Cooper