

Leader's Newsletter March 2022

david.hitchiner@herefordshire.gov.uk

Welcome to my newsletter covering activity in March 2022 and also looking forward.



News is of course dominated by the situation in the Ukraine. Some of our local response is set out in this letter. For the many in Herefordshire who have offered accommodation there is frustration as they are keen to help, but the system is not helping. The Cabinet will receive a briefing on Thursday by which time the Council hopes that the process will be clearer. As soon as we have clarity this will be communicated.

Some of the good news in the newsletter is about the opportunity for the County to acquire the Herefordshire Hoard. The news is so good that three Cabinet members have mentioned it in their sections. All are welcome at the Viking Fun Day on April 10th at the Rowing Club – details in this newsletter.

The management of Public Rights of Way (PROW) and Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) has now moved from BBLP to Herefordshire Council, who will work in partnership with Hoople to deliver these services. Bringing these services back in-house gives us the flexibility to deliver and develop these services to respond to changing requirements. There will now be a review to consider future developments. Stakeholders, including parish councils and user groups, will be consulted to make sure the needs of communities are fully considered.

I'd like to draw your attention to the explanation of how Council Tax is spent which is in Cllr Harvey's section. This shows clearly how much is spent on social care, and what is left after that, a message which seems to be far too difficult to get across. I will be printing this out and providing it to all those who attend the Parish Council Meetings I attend. I believe it is important that Ward Councillors get this message across, whichever party we are from.

David Hitchiner

**Councillor David Hitchiner
Leader of the Council**

Children and families – Cllr Diana Toynbee

Newly Qualified Social Workers

It was very good to present eight of our newly qualified Children's social workers with their certificates a few weeks ago, to hear that they are settling in well to Herefordshire and their new teams, and how they are supporting each other and building relationships with local families. Improvement Plan



We had a meeting of the Improvement Board on March 11th. It was pleased to hear that our workforce is feeling more settled and stable, fewer people are leaving, and more people are joining us.

An important theme of the meeting was partnership working, Safeguarding of children, and supporting families, isn't just the work of the council, so it's good that our partners in schools, health and the police are feeling more engaged in our Improvement Plan.

Darryl has completed the refreshed Improvement plan, which includes Measures that Matter for all 4 areas, which will make measuring the impact of improvement and the plan overall simpler.

Schools

It's been a very difficult term for schools, and they have done brilliantly to stay open in the busiest COVID time yet. They continue to serve our children admirably, in the face of many challenges, notably Covid-related staff absence, and we still haven't had a full school closure. Free tests ending in a week will mark another huge challenge for them.

National Developments

You will have seen that the government has just published a White paper on education. It includes some significant changes, some of which could weaken relationships between schools and councils.

It's important that we carefully consider the implications for us in Herefordshire, and we're planning a conference for schools to do this on June 14th – our first face to face Headteacher conference for over two years.

Today has also seen the publication of the SEND Green Paper. It will take some digesting, as nationally the Special Educational Needs system has been under huge pressure – and this has increased significantly post pandemic. This is also true locally, and we are seeking to expand our capacity accordingly.

Support for families

Our free school meals and activities scheme will be running again during the Easter Holidays. It should ensure that over 3,900 children and young people in nurseries, schools and colleges will receive financial support.

Health and Adult Wellbeing – Cllr Pauline Crockett



Holiday Activity & Food Programme (HAF)

The Easter HAF Programme is preparing to launch and we are delighted to welcome a number of new providers to the provision. 1800 sessions are available with a fantastic range of exciting indoor and outdoor activities, such as stand-up paddle boarding, circus skills, dance, rugby, forest school, cooking workshops, den-building, science activities, football, boxing, cooking, crafts (plus so much more), along with a healthy meal during each session.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/haf>

Herefordshire Hoard

The fundraising campaign to bring the Hoard home to Herefordshire has been announced with a target of £776,250. The majority of the funding will be raised from heritage and arts funding bodies. A smaller public campaign to raise £70,000 is being launched on Sunday April 10th with a Viking Day at Hereford Rowing Club. The public fundraising campaign is being supported by Herefordshire Museum Service Support Group.

Additional grants to support Covid 19 Recover Plan

The second round of grants to support voluntary and community organisations as part of the Community and Personal Resilience Grant Scheme will be launched in April. The grants will support services and activities to improve the wellbeing of Herefordshire residents, especially those adversely effected by Covid. Applications are particularly welcomed for projects supporting families, children and young people; prevention and early intervention to improve health outcome; as well as those helping to address long term issues exacerbated by Covid such as fuel and food poverty. Grants will be a maximum of £10,000, with the scheme administered by Herefordshire Community Foundation.

The council has also been able to provide grant funding to two local organisations (Severn Wye Energy Agency and Herefordshire Community Foundation) to support households struggling to pay energy costs. Both organisations can provide financial payments to help with energy bills, taking referrals from local organisations such as CAB, foodbanks as well as social prescribers and social care staff.

Response to the War in Ukraine

In response to the War in Ukraine the Council has taken a lead role in Herefordshire's response.

We quickly established the Three Elms Trading Estate as a drop off and dispatch site for donations. The Association of Ukrainian Women are running the site with support from volunteers and Council staff. The site has seen a steady stream of helpful goods and cash donations and multiple lorry loads of equipment has left for the Ukraine and the Polish border to support the people displaced from their homes.

The Council is now entering the next phase of our response in facilitating and supporting local residents who have been kind enough to offer to open their homes to refugees. The arrangements for matching accommodation offers with people wishing to travel to Herefordshire is now starting via the national database. A new team is to be established to continue the Councils response to the war in Ukraine



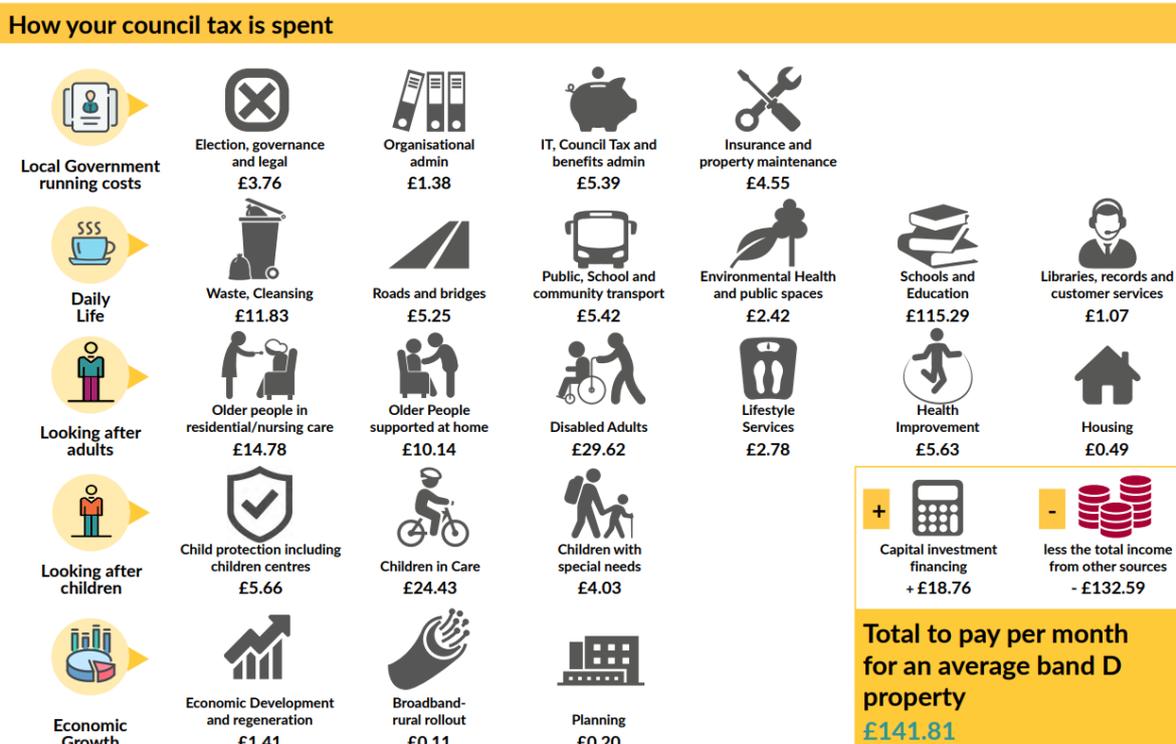
Finance, Corporate & Planning– Cllr Liz Harvey

Finance

Council tax and Business Rates information has been issued to all qualifying premises over the last month. Many of the smaller business premises will benefit again this year from exemptions approved by central government as part of the ongoing package of Covid recovery support.



For Council Tax payers, information is now available online to explain how the county portion of the tax is used to support the service mix. The graphic below is an example of the ways in which information is being presented to help residents to understand how their money is spent.



The full booklet: Your Council Tax Explained is available to download online here:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/23619/your-council-tax-explained-2022-23>

Further information on all aspects of Council Tax and how it is calculated and collected is available on the following web pages.

- <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council-tax-1/council-tax>
- <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council-tax-1/council-tax/2>
- <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council-tax-1/council-tax/3>

Corporate Services

Herefordshire Council Delivery Plan 2022-23: Herefordshire Council cabinet on 31st March 2022 will be presented with the Delivery Plan for 2022-23. The plan celebrates the many achievements of the council over the last two years and looks ahead to the deliverables planned for the coming 12 months to meet the strategic objectives set out in The County Plan 2020-2024.

The Delivery Plan represents a key position in the joined-up approach to planning and delivery which has been introduced to Herefordshire Council by the Coalition since May 2019. This comprehensive and co-ordinated programme of work sits alongside the introduction of robust and professional project management throughout the council to address the issues of overspend and delay for which the council had, quite rightly, been criticised.

The last two years have been difficult for everyone. Here in Herefordshire, along with having to respond to Covid impacts to support communities and aid recovery, the delivery plan reflects on what has been achieved to date along with the ambitions for the forthcoming year specifically challenges within social care, contributions to address the climate and ecological

emergency, investment in service areas and local infrastructure, and how the council and its partners are working to support residents experiencing health issues and financial hardship.

The Delivery plan can be found within cabinet report at the following link: [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday 31 March 2022, 2.30 pm - Herefordshire Council](#)

Website snippets: [Herefordshire Hoard website](#) launched this week to raise funds through donations to bring the hoard home. Please spread the word!

There will be a fabulous [free family Viking fun day](#) on **April 10 at Hereford Rowing Club** with a whole range of amazing activities will be taking place! Including -

- Viking camp
- Viking shield & combat practise
- Viking life explored
- Display about the Herefordshire Hoard
- Replica hoard and Viking objects
- Hands-on activities & dressing up
- Metal detecting displays and 'Have a go at metal detecting'
- There will be refreshments available at the bar for the event.
- There will also be Viking re-enactors - Brumvik and The Black Crow Vikings of Hereford



Ukraine: A reminder of the information we have on support for Ukraine

We have information on the Herefordshire Council website and on the Talk Community website

Both have the short url/Ukraine

- [Herefordshire Council support for Ukraine](#) – information for residents.
- [Talk Community support for Ukraine](#) - information for community groups and individuals.



Special Offer for Young Families: Next week (April 4) we are launching our [reusable nappies scheme](#)

This incentive will help residents discover the benefits of reusable nappies, and in the process reduce waste and save money.

We are **offering parents/guardians a £200 voucher to spend on reusable nappies** from one of our partner retailers.

We have **75 vouchers to issue** – so please spread the word



Planning

Development Management: The backlog of planning applications, which has consistently stood at around 300 applications since early 2021, has now been reduced to 90 applications and continues to decrease. This is due to the recently engaged planning consultants and our own excellent planning team who, in addition to handling the current planning pipeline, are also managing the consultants.

Local Plan 2021–2041 Policy Options Consultation: Following the conclusion of the Spatial Options consultation in February, the next stage in the preparation of a new Local Plan for Herefordshire is a consultation on the range of general planning policies which apply

across all parts of the county. This consultation on our general planning policies will take place from **4 April to 16 May 2022**.

This Policy Options Consultation will include consideration of the range and content of existing countywide planning policies to determine their effectiveness locally; their consistency with national planning policy and whether they deliver key aspirations of the Herefordshire County Plan.

The need to include any additional new policies where there are gaps in the current Core Strategy will also be considered, alongside wrapping into the main policy framework the appropriate aspects of any Supplementary Planning Documents which have been generated since 2015.

These general policies will be key in determining planning applications and so it is important that this consultation provides the opportunity for everyone to have their say at a formative stage of plan making.

Ward Member and Parish Council events have been arranged. Copies of the consultation documents will be placed in libraries and an extensive social media campaign is planned.

The documentation accompanying and informing the consultation sets out a summary of the context around each of the policy areas and includes range of possible approaches that the new local plan could include. This consultation will not refer to specific places or areas within Herefordshire which are covered by what is termed the Place Shaping Policies.

The detailed Place Shaping Options, including the rural settlement hierarchy, will be influenced by the analysis of the responses received to the first consultation on Spatial Strategy Options (Feb 2022) and a detailed consultation on the revised Place Shaping Options will be undertaken later this year.

The responses received to this consultation, together with a number of evidence base studies, will inform the preparation of the draft Local Plan.

Housing, Regulatory Services and Community Safety **– Cllr Ange Tyler**



Talk Community

Hubs

We are ecstatic to have achieved the target of 50 Hubs by the end of March with 53 already live and several more about to launch. Each of the HALO sites are now Talk Community Hubs running weekly social sessions at the centres along with ICT access for information and signposting. We have great coverage across the county now and are working to increase awareness and engagement.

Environment and Economy – Cllr Ellie Chowns



Environment

I'm delighted that four **community car share clubs** have been set up in Herefordshire since last summer, thanks to Council support. A community car club is a local, member-based initiative that provides access to pay-as-you-drive vehicles. Community car clubs are typically run by local groups to support their communities. Car clubs can improve accessibility to transport provision for residents particularly in rural areas. They can also help households reduce their carbon footprint by

not owning a car and having more consideration about car use. Herefordshire Council is working with Malvern Hills Car Club to support the new car clubs, for example by:

- Purchasing and loaning pre-owned cars
- Covering insurance, breakdown, MOT, servicing and repairs
- Providing online booking systems and other administration

There is still scope to support more new clubs, so if your community is interested, please contact Judith at climate@herefordshire.gov.uk. More info here:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public-transport-1/community-transport/5>

Dozens of community groups have recently benefited from our **Community Climate and Nature Grant Scheme**. A total of 32 grants have been made for projects including community gardens, sustainable transport, recycling, energy audits of community buildings, and much more. Details: <https://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/2022/march/climate-and-nature-grant-making-a-difference/>

This week, the '**30 for 2030**' initiative has been launched to encourage employers to plot their journeys to meet the county's zero carbon ambition by the end of the decade. If you know a business who would like to get involved, please point them here:

<https://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk/get-your-business-to-net-zero/>

This is part of the wider countywide **Greener Footprints** campaign

<https://greenerfootprints.co.uk/> - which everyone can get involved in – so please do share the link with your communities and encourage everyone to sign up to help the county become zero-carbon and nature-rich J.

The **Marches Renewable Energy** project has helped over 50 businesses and organisations with renewable energy projects over the last couple of years, giving out nearly £1million of grants. There's now an interactive map here showing all the projects, and links to case studies: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/MarRE>

The recommendations of the **Citizens' Climate Assembly** have been published, and officers are now developing proposals for projects responding to the assembly's recommendations, to be funded from the Climate and Nature Reserve. These proposals will come to Cabinet at the end of April. The recommendations of the Climate Assembly can be found here <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/citizensassembly> along with links to videos of the sessions, and a short video summarising the process.

I'm very pleased that we have now signed a contract for provision of a large number of new **electric vehicle (EV) chargers** in council owned car parks across the county. The contract will see more than 100 new chargers installed in the next two years, marking a step change in the availability of EV charging infrastructure in Herefordshire.

Economy

Levelling Up Fund

Government launched the second Levelling Up Funding (LUF) round on the 23rd March following the spring budget. The prospectus can be found here: [Levelling Up Fund Round 2: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/107111/levelling-up-fund-round-2-prospectus). To apply eligible applications must submit their full bids, with all supporting documentation by 12:00 noon Wednesday 6 July. Projects seeking funds must be able to start spending in 2022/23. The good news is that Herefordshire's priority level has changed to level 1 (from level 2). We are reviewing potential projects that could meet the prospectus criteria and timeframes for delivery. Government are due to publish technical guidance providing further details of what we can apply for.

Shop Local Covid Recovery

The council's innovative prepaid card scheme has received some very positive feedback from local businesses. Over 60,000 cards have been issued, and a further £10 was recently

allocated to each card to bring total available to spend locally (it can only be used in Herefordshire) to £25 per household. Of the funds allocated onto the cards so far £825,000 has been spent to date, in over 1,850 local businesses.

Hereford Museum and Art Gallery Redevelopment

I was really pleased to hear on the 21st March that our second stage application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund for £5m towards the redevelopment of the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery project had been approved. The project will transform the current museum and art gallery into a world class attraction, creating new exhibition space, event space and hopefully the home of the Herefordshire Hoard. The project is aiming to achieve the highest possible 'Enerphit' environmental standards. To fund the £15m project we are seeking £5 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £5 million from the Stronger Towns Fund and a £5 million council loan. The Stronger Towns Full business case needs to be submitted for consideration in June, and the third and final Heritage Lottery application later in the summer.

Fastershire progress

Work continues in north Herefordshire, with the project now reaching 50% of subsidised premises passed. In Ledbury the project has reached the 30% milestone.

New website

Fastershire's new website is now live, making it easier for users to find relevant information. The changes now place more emphasis on current activity and reflect project achievements through case studies and videos.

Broadband take up is addressed in a new 'Broadband Explained' section which features helpful information and videos to help people understand how to make the most of their internet.

Digital Inclusivity

Fastershire's free monthly 'Introduction to the Internet' digital inclusion workshops continue in main libraries, offering help using smartphones, tablets, WhatsApp, email and Facebook. Workshop details can be found [here](#)

Community venues or organisations who would like to host a free workshop to help local people or groups get more from the internet – by learning how to make video calls, send emails, shop online, search the internet safely, etc. – email jennie.morgan@herefordshire.gov.uk to find out more. Parish Councils and Talk Community Hubs can also arrange a free Digital Visit by our Advisor for help with their online presence and digital communications, whether it's social media (Facebook Pages or Groups), website maintenance, email distribution mechanisms or sharing documents online. Details are [here](#).

Faster Farmers

In March, working with Herefordshire Rural Hub, Fastershire's Faster Farmers project delivered a Managing your Digital Farm Office workshop which helped to enable people to safely manage their digital office, gain confidence with online systems, and protect their business. More free workshops will follow during the year. Details are [here](#).

Digital Household Grant

The Digital Household Grant is being made available to the 2,324 premises in South Herefordshire descoped by Gigaclear and has a broadband connection of less than 30Mbps. A new [webpage](#) has now received 109 expressions of interest to the grant, which will cover the installation cost of a 4G LTE internet connection using external directional antennas. A low earth orbit satellite solution will be explored with the resident for properties where a 4G signal is not available. The grant is in the final stages of procuring a provider with the evaluation of tender responses taking place on Tuesday, 29th March.

Community Broadband

Since 2020 Fastershire has operated a community broadband scheme that is finding solutions for clusters of premises with no existing or planned superfast connections. To date, the grant has contracted Internet Service Suppliers to deliver ultrafast broadband to 538 premises in 11 communities. A further 12 communities are at various stages in the grant process.

Business Grant

Businesses can now register for a grant to part-fund the installation of fibre or alternative faster broadband connections via the postcode checker at <http://www.fastershire.com>. The Business grant will allocate up to £20k per eligible premise with a 20% contribution from the business.

[Click here](#) to watch a short film about how Fastershire supported a Herefordshire business.

Environment and Economy – Cllr Gemma Davies



Culture

Incredibly exciting news for Herefordshire in that we can finally start the campaign to bring the Herefordshire Hoard home. Hopefully you will all have seen the press release stating that the final valuation for the Hoard is £776,250. As the Hoard was found in Herefordshire then the British Museum have given us, as the local authority for the area, the first opportunity to raise the funds to purchase. We hope to raise the funds by applying to heritage and art funders, corporate bodies and other interested parties. Herefordshire Museum Service Support Group (HMSSG) will also be hoping to raise £70,000 from the public towards the purchase of the Hoard. This fundraising campaign will be kicking off on Sunday 10th April when Vikings invade the Hereford Rowing Club. This free, fun family day event will be held between 10.30 – 3.30pm where there will be a Viking village offering a range of activities, food and drink. Treasure hunters will be able to meet members of a metal detector club, who will offer advice on declaring valuable finds. Visitors will be invited to dress up in traditional Viking clothing and try their hand at everyday Viking crafts and enjoy displays of shield and combat skills. And experts will be on hand to explain the hoard and tell you about the Anglo-Saxons and the Norse invaders during the event.

You will all hopefully have attended the Stronger Towns briefing where you will have heard about the two culture-led projects of the new museum and the Maylord Orchards library and learning resource centre. Consultation shall soon start with the public and we are hoping for good results by actually going out to people rather than them just looking on the website. We are especially keen to gain the opinions of young people as to what they want to see cultural services to look like. We hope to further the brilliant events at Powerhouse and with the Talk Community work with children and families.

Given the huge focus on these two projects myself, Amy Pitt and Jon Chedgzoy met with the Friends of the Archives, The Herefordshire Museum Service Support Group and the Joint Action for Libraries last week. We had a fantastic discussion around how we embed culture within Herefordshire. We are going to be launching a new Cultural Strategy within the next 6 months which will fully endorse our commitment to the cultural sectors in Herefordshire, for which we are incredibly lucky to have. We have agreed to meet every month to work in partnership to get the Stronger Towns bids and the strategy right. We are also hoping to get a youth group set up so that they can be part of the cultural future of the County.

Waste: We are launching the reusable nappy scheme on 4th April to encourage parents and care givers to ditch the single-use nappies and start using reusable ones. WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) state that a child typically uses between 4,000 and 6,000 disposable nappies by the time they reach 2.5 years of age. This is absolutely staggering

and I would say that this is the most requested service/change I have received from the public. This is a truly great project and as such I authorised a decision to offer £200 vouchers for parents and guardians to use at selected suppliers to purchase nappies, liners and nappy buckets. It's estimated that the savings per child could be £1000!

Procurement: I had a briefing this week with the procurement team and they talked me through the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and what this may mean for supplies and contracts. One of the supplies that we need to be aware of is paper. We are working with our contractor to source supplies as Russia are one of the biggest suppliers of paper. Please therefore could I ask that we only print paper when it is absolutely necessary. There are a number of tools on your laptop which can help you look at the reports better and annotate them. If you need any support with this then please do contact governance support who will be able to help.
