

Broadwas & Cotheridge Parish Council Meeting – 14th September – District Council Report

Sorry I can't join you this evening. I think it's the first one I've missed but I hope this report covers most of our activities over August and I've sent a further update on planning which I'm sure Aaron will update further on enforcement during Monday.

Covid 19 still dominates much of what we are doing. We are still focused on being resilient against the virus but we are also looking at the recovery for the district at the other side of this and ensuring that much of the district tries to return to some kind of normal whilst maintaining a vigilance over what we're currently seeing.

The difference to planning the recovery phase for this crisis is that it is highly likely that it will be a prolonged one and the response phase will continue alongside our recovery.

For the local authority sector there have been many impacts and in particular for district councils there are particular impacts including such matters as governance, service delivery, financial pressures, unplanned expenditure and loss of income, workforce matters and reduced demand for some services.

Looking at recovery we are split into 4 main pillars:

1. Our communities and the local economy
2. Resetting the business of the council
3. Recovery of the organisation
4. Councillors and democracy

These four banners cover a lot of what we are doing. As well as looking to return some areas to normal we are keen to look at what we have learnt from the crisis, what can be improved and what we did during the crisis that continue to help after the crisis, as part of the recovery.

There are many things that have come from the monitoring work of our response but not least that support for vulnerable people has to remain a priority, we have to continue to support our businesses across the district and that there is concern for young people who have either had their education interrupted or future jobs hanging in the balance, as well as the disruption to their leisure time and activities.

It will be a long recovery but I'm confident in the officers and all of the councillors that we're working hard to support people.

In terms of the current, ongoing, situation with Covid-19 you may have seen reports in some media that infection rates have risen dramatically for Worcestershire. The number of cases per 100,000 for the 31 August to 6 September are as follows:

Bromsgrove	25
Malvern Hills	27
Redditch	9

Worcester	11
Wychavon	20
Wyre Forest	8

In comparison the equivalent number for Birmingham is 77. All these numbers are publicly available on the BBC website.

Data on deaths, testing and confirmed cases can be found at <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/> including a breakdown at local authority level.

One of the measures we've put in place in around care homes and the following press release was issued on Friday:

Families in Malvern Hills and Wychavon are being asked not to visit loved ones in care homes, after a rise in Covid cases in the areas.

Worcestershire County Council Public Health teams have taken the precautionary decision to close visits to care homes with immediate effect. Only essential visits will be allowed.

In the past week both districts have seen increasing cases of Covid-19.

As part of the outbreak control plan, the county has a multitude of measures and support available to help prevent an outbreak and reduce the spread of the virus. The decision to restrict care home visits is one of those options. It's considered a necessary precaution as the numbers have increased. The need to protect our elderly and vulnerable residents is paramount.

Dr. Kathryn Cobain, Director for Public Health for Worcestershire said: "The decision to stop care home visits is not one we have taken lightly. I appreciate this will cause upset and frustration for some of our residents and I recognise this is very difficult for families. Looking at the rising numbers of cases in the district, we are concerned about the welfare of our most vulnerable and the wider community. I need to protect those at risk and prevent the further spread of Covid. We will review this on a daily basis and will lift these restrictions when we see numbers falling again. This is a sensible precautionary measure; it is better to act now than later. "

Councillor Adrian Hardman, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care said; "Our priority must be protecting our elderly and most vulnerable residents. As we see cases of Covid rising in the community it is essential that we take the necessary action to stop Covid spreading. If anyone has believed that Covid has gone away, this is a reminder to us all that it remains in our community. We all have our part to play to keep everyone safe. Please keep your distance, wash your hands and wear face coverings. It really is simple to do and you will be saving lives."

Our officers and relevant members are involved in all Covid meetings which affect our district and as you'd expect this is being monitored daily.

Other bad news, but unfortunately somewhat expected, is that unemployment continues to rise. If we look at the figures from July compared to June unemployment has risen 0.2% from 4.8% to 5%. There are concerns that this will continue to rise after the furlough scheme comes to an end and figures show that a large number of employers in our district, which is obviously reliant on hospitality and accommodation businesses have a lot of people still on Furlough.

We are still under the county (5.4%) and UK (6.5%) averages, though. Figures for young people are the most worrying and we are working on this under a number of initiatives including the new government Kickstart program and utilising the work we've recently done on Apprenticeships in the area.

Some good news is that visitors to The Malverns' tourism website have rocketed as the area benefits from the number of people opting for a staycation this year. Obviously, maintaining our tourist industry and building on it is vital for the district.

The number of people using visitthemalverns.org increased by 44% during July and 66% so far in August, compared to the same period in 2019. Almost 80% of website traffic came from people visiting the site for the first time. A vast majority of the website visitors live in London, followed by Birmingham and Bristol, with people looking to escape to the countryside.

Following the January floods and the Covid-19 outbreak, the local tourism industry has been severely impacted, which has affected people's livelihoods and jobs. An increase in visitor spend will help to support the District's shops, restaurants, accommodation providers, attractions and more.

The Malverns is increasingly being seen as an attractive place to visit and stay, particularly with the large number of walking and cycling opportunities available across the district (details are available on the Visit.

The Malverns website and self-guided walks can be downloaded on the MalvernsWalks App).

As well as visitors from across the UK and the region, residents are also becoming more aware of what is available on their doorstep and are choosing to be tourists at home.

Tourism is hugely important to The Malverns attracting 3.5million day trips and 211,000 overnight stays a year. This adds more than £137million to the local economy, supporting 2,780 jobs.

Another good news story is that the £2million revamp of Malvern Splash is on course to start at the end of August. The project will involve the full refurbishment of the swimming pool changing rooms and toilets, including dedicated changing facilities for people with disabilities and additional family changing areas.

I know it's one building that's widely used by people all across our district and I've had plenty of questions on the work.

There will also be a new interactive water play feature for younger swimmers, underwater lighting, a PA system, a new flume and improvements to the pool side area.

Further works have already been completed since the Covid-19 outbreak with the installation of a new wave machine and a UV filtration system to improve the water quality and lower the levels of chlorine.

A range of environmental measures including more efficient pumps, new boilers and LED lighting have been completed and new energy efficient pool side glazing and solar panels will also be installed as part of the main project.

There will be limited disruption to the facility's current fitness users once the project starts.

With both walking on the Malverns and swimming at the Splash it's important that we're providing the means for people to keep fit and healthy – both physically and mentally.

Vic Allison has now taken over the mantle from Jack Hegarty as our new Chief Executive. As everyone had vouched for prior to him joining - Jack was a difficult person to follow but we've clearly got a great replacement in Vic.

Also, since last meeting, we have had the Annual General Meeting of the council where Sarah Rouse was confirmed to continue leadership of the council but there, we are some movement in terms of the political parties

The make up of the council is now:

Lib Dem – 5

Conservative - 14

Democratic Group (Independent and Green) – 19

Labour - 1

As you'll see from the numbers there was some movement from Liberal Democrats to the Independent Group.

On the subject of the SWDP the completion of the review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan has been delayed due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was hoped the document would be ready for public examination in early 2021. But lockdown restrictions have made it impossible to complete a number of technical assessments and evidence gathering needed to support the plan.

This revision to the original SWDP currently has the proposal to build 1,000 homes in the area of Rushwick on top of the 2,300 homes being built at Crown East.

This includes additional traffic and air quality modelling. These cannot be carried out currently as vehicle movements are still not close enough to pre-lockdown levels.

Traffic modelling is very important to the final results of the consultation given the concerns of local residents as expressed as part of the consultation.

I've also had several meetings over lockdown about this and continued to push for the need for clarity around how the County Council are arriving at their figures and what it would mean for Rushwick.

Over the next few months, the necessary assessments and studies will take place. The plan to be sent for public examination will be published, subject to approval by all three South Worcestershire Councils, in October 2021.

16 sites were submitted in respect of the Country Park Call for sites exercise and an assessment of these is taking place soon.

I did meet with Eric to discuss current planning and enforcement and I'll be sending on a further brief update as I know there has been a lot of communication over particular enforcement over the last month.