

April District Councillors Report – Broadwas & Cotheridge Parish Council

It has been an horrendous month for everyone. For every individual, for every business and every community. I hope that everyone is safe. I hope that everyone is following Government advice and I hope, where possible, we are supporting those who are less able in our communities to support themselves.

Across our other areas in the ward, which are slightly larger in population terms than Broadwas & Cotheridge, we've seen two of the best examples of a response by local residents to supporting residents, and in particular the more vulnerable, who may be self-isolating and can't get to the shops or a pharmacy.

In Lower Broadheath the group set up by the team at The Bell and the Community Store managed to get enough volunteers together to support everyone who needed a local person as a contact. They have 40 people working via WhatsApp and Facebook to support the community. I have kept in touch with them and passed on their details to our communities' team if they need any further help, but they have done a great job.

The shop has also done a good job in supporting people locally with supplies and innovative ways of supplying residents whilst dealing with a falling number of available staff.

Similarly in Rushwick, I've been working with Rushwick Assists, a local group of 30 or so Volunteers who, again, have shared their contact details with local residents to them via a mail out we did some weeks ago now to let everyone know they have a point of contact if needed for support. Again, they have been very busy. As I am sure you're finding, food is now becoming easier to buy – as are toilet rolls but two weeks ago this wasn't the case, so the teams have worked hard.

As well as helping how we can - we also report back and forth between the teams and MHDC to help analyse where more help may be needed. I know in Broadwas the Parish councillors have been able to support individuals as needed but if further support is needed for residents then we are definitely here to support and help how we can.

If you know of someone in need or someone who would like to help, then please ask them to fill in the forms on the Here 2 Help website <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/here2help>

I have been able to do this in other areas those individuals have been helped.

The 9th March, and our last meeting, seems a long time ago and a very different world where we were just recovering from the flooding locally. There have been very few meetings at MHDC since that point with full council opened and adjourned and everything on the agenda postponed due to social distancing.

I was involved in meetings up until the 12th December and The Chamber of Commerce Expo at the Three Counties Showground on the 12th, followed by our Task & Finish Group on Apprentices and a meeting I had to share, again, my concerns about traffic modelling by the county council was the last meeting I was involved in before we were told to stay at home.

In terms of the Task & Finish group on Apprentices in the district we have a report that will be shared at Overview and Scrutiny and hopefully I will be able to share it with you soon.

We are now very close to holding virtual meetings with the council and the Northern Area planning committee is now due to meeting on the 6th May – virtually. Other meetings are starting to be put back in the diary.

Since then we've seen the Council continue most everyday services such as refuse collection and our planning department is still operating but we're doing everything with everyone now working remotely and some of the processes have been streamlined to involve as few people as possible. We are receiving regular communications but locally a few things have been delayed for example I was due to meet the communities team last week to go through Kerb parking across our ward, to put up signs and knock on a few doors where needed. This will happen but will be well beyond the end of this virus.

There are 9 enforcement cases in Broadwas and Cotheridge which are all still being dealt with and they will continue to be dealt with. We are happy to take questions on those that are known but as you can see from those in with the

Parish Council are aware work is continuing. It is, currently, more difficult with limits on travel but we're seeing far more enforcement cases being taken on. We can see many more resolved and there are certainly more resources in enforcement.

As we hear a lot – developers build things not from plan at their own risk. If it is deemed not to be to plan, then they will be asked to remove it. Building it does not mean it will have to stay in place. I have been made aware by fellow councillors that we are seeing much more of this action from MHDC than previously, which is great to hear, but it's always important that residents continue to feed back information to us on any concerns they have. David and I will continue to work with all residents to those ends.

In terms of the planning department, as I said, we are close to being back to virtual meetings as a committee, but all applications are still being dealt with and myself and David have been working on incoming applications as they occur. Certainly, on virtual meetings, this situation has helped us bring together what may be possible in the future for the council.

You will be aware that the appeal for 19/00583/OUT will now be by written representation.

More widely in the county MHDC have worked with other councils and the county council in terms of the response across the County.

From a Council point of view, you will have received many updates. The following send out to residents covers the most recent information and can be seen via:

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKMHDC/bulletins/284bf41>

It covers how individuals can get support financially. Also, how households currently receiving Council Tax Support and of working age will receive a one-off reduction of up to £150 on their Council Tax Bill.

We have been helping people individually where food or more support is needed but I have also put some more details below on this.

It covers support for business, which has been much publicised, but its important businesses apply for. Some of this is support via the District Council, other via HMRC and the potential loan for businesses is dealt with via banks. So businesses are advised to work through each process and ensure they get the support they're entitled to get them through what is a very difficult time for many SMEs in our district.

Our Economic Development team have been excellent in supporting local businesses and are now looking to pay out all the money received.

Across our district 866 grants have now been paid out equivalent to 57% of eligible businesses. Payments are now well in excess of £20million. We are trying to get to the rest of the eligible businesses to make sure they get the support.

I have also been in contact with the Malvern Hills Small Business Forum and other groups to make sure people understand what is available to support their businesses. We have a lot of small businesses in Malvern and want them to still be there after this.

There is also a full update on waste management, on parking on the County Wide support program for people who are able to volunteer to support local residents : <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/here2help>

Finally, it also covers wellbeing at home, which is vitally important, and a link to what Staying at Home means as it appears some people, including all those people travelling from Worcester and further afield to enjoy the Malvern Hills this weekend don't seem to quite get it.

One of the major things we've seen an increase in is the number of scams associated with the virus, with many aimed at businesses but also many aimed at individuals including the text I received from 'Argos' telling me about

their £20 voucher they were supporting people with – as long as I clicked on the link. These kinds of scams are aimed to get people when they are at their weakest or most desperate and for many that is their current situation. One of our roles in putting out information is to continue to communicate these and other scams.

On other Community support:

Shielded cohort – these are the people the Government sent letters directly to who were identified by the NHS as being particularly vulnerable (cancer patients) etc and should stay indoors until further notice.

Almost 14,000 were identified across Worcestershire. More than 7,000 have requested help but there are still 6,700 who have yet to make contact and efforts are being made to get in touch with them.

Here 2 Help – this is the countywide scheme that is co-ordinating volunteers and requests for help from people who are vulnerable but are not in the shielded group.

In Malvern 209 requests for help were received. Offers of help were received from 256 individuals/organisations in Malvern.

Across Worcestershire 1,391 requests for help have been made and 1,234 have so far been completed.

The top reasons people have asked for support are food deliveries, medication deliveries and mental health issues.

Finally, at the weekend, the Home Office launched a new national communications campaign that will signpost how to access help for victims of abuse and provide reassurance that police response and support services remain available during the pandemic. We have recently seen the emergency services re-iterating that people must still report crime and certainly issues around domestic abuse.

The message shared by the Home Office reaffirmed that the coronavirus household isolation instruction does not apply to anyone who needs to leave their home to escape domestic abuse.

Last week, the Rail Delivery Group also announced those fleeing domestic abuse during the coronavirus lockdown can apply for free train travel to refuge accommodation. Tickets can be accessed through the member services of Women's Aid Federation of England, Welsh Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid and Imkaan.

Government guidance on how to get help: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help>.

Whilst the focus is on supporting people through this period, we recognise there are many other outcomes, not least surrounding people's mental health and wellbeing and we are keen to continue to address this during, and after, this pandemic. We now know this lockdown will last for, at least, the next three weeks. We expect services to remain as is and we will continue to support as needed.

Stay Safe.