

Broadwas & Cotheridge February 2022 Parish Council – District Council Report

Sorry for the long report but a lot has been happening over the last month and I've also attached the report from our Chief Exec (and various other reports as asked). Much of this comes from recent full council and executive meetings just to keep everyone in the loop.

It's also worth, if you're so inclined, following my Facebook page where I do try and keep things up dated as best I can. I've also attached our Town Centre Business update which is a monthly update to businesses (sometimes more often) covering the support and activities we're involved in.

Covid

Covid cases over the last month continue to be reasonably high but are on their way down with very few leading to hospitalisation and even less new leading to the use of a ventilator. Malvern Hills has had a slight spike compared to other areas over the last two weeks but these increases do seem to move around the district and then settle back down. Whilst restrictions are being relaxed it's clear that we still have Covid in the district and could do for some time so it's still wise to be cautious.

I had my first experience of it over the last month as well but thankfully all was okay.

One of the big changes in the district is that the 3 counties showground vaccination is closing as it is administering very few vaccinations a day now and pop up centres are being introduced – including one in the council house building with the aim of ensuring that 'harder to reach' or less willing members of the public have access to vaccinations. The purpose of this is to get to those who would not travel to be vaccinated so we're bringing vaccinations closer to populations.

We await the government's longer term plans in terms of living with Covid which will, we believe, layout how vaccinations could be handled on a yearly basis. We will see.

In terms of support I have attached the business support email which goes out to all businesses in the area and that covers some of the ongoing financial support. It's also packed full of lots of other information and things we're upto.

Malvern College

At our recent full Council the District Council committed to support the potential purchase of Malvern Hills College with a £200,000 payment to ensure it's retained as a college. We are committed to helping, where we can, but as it's currently privately owned this is an ongoing development.

We want to see an arts college back open in Malvern and we know there is support for it in the community and whilst we hold the convenient we've motioned to continue to support any application to buy the college.

Car and Electric Bike Share Schemes

This past month we have also supported a popular car share scheme which has been given a funding boost of more than £100k from Malvern Hills District Council to continue to support rural communities and reduce carbon emissions.

The Malvern Hills Community Car Club is a voluntary organisation, run by volunteers and members themselves, providing access to pay-as-you-go vehicles.

The scheme aims to improve accessibility to transport for residents in rural areas as well as to help households reduce their carbon footprint by not owning a car and having more consideration about their car use.

There are clubs already set up in Malvern, Bransford, Colwall, Ledbury, Leominster, Fownhope and Kington.

The council has provided £101,995 from its priority commitment to Community Transport and is calling out to communities to get involved.

This funding will go towards setting up four 'satellite hubs' to help facilitate the clubs, with the small town and larger villages of Tenbury, Upton, and Kempsey being specifically targeted.

As well as this, the money will fund the set-up of an online booking system, as well as upgrade three community cars to electric vehicles.

The council has a priority within its Destination Zero plan to encourage low carbon travel across the district, including car sharing. This forms part of the council's vision to go carbon neutral as quickly as possible, but by 2050 at the latest.

As well as this, the scheme fits in with the Connected Communities Strategy where the council is supporting communities to become strong, resilient, and sustainable.

Alongside their car share scheme, they are rolling out an electric bike hire scheme which could be used to support people taking careers in rural areas. I know where I'm based that we are restricted on who we can employ because there is no public transport. An electric bike rental scheme will be a great support and will be launching soon.

You may have seen the launch yesterday in the newspaper and information can be found at Malvern Car Club. Finally, we have Transport Summit this Thursday from 10am to 12:30 – which I'm chairing – and features contributions from First and local community schemes.

Altogether it's important we ensure we have good rural transport links and access to various types of transport. I'm particularly excited about seeing Electric bikes rolling out (literally) across the district.

Further Apprenticeship and Training Support

Alongside this and alongside our current financial support for Apprentices payments of £500 are on offer to anyone starting an apprenticeship or training course as part of a new incentive scheme.

The 'golden hello' has been introduced by Malvern Hills District Council to encourage the take up of apprenticeships and trainee programmes, which help many people take their first steps in the world of work or embark on new careers.

This incentive forms part of the Malvern Hills and Wychavon Upskilling Project, which has been given £283,000 from the UK Government's UK Community Renewal Fund.

New apprentices or trainees of any age are eligible to receive the one-off £500 payment if they meet the criteria.

Support payments of up to £1,000 are, still, also available to help apprentices and trainees cover the cost of travel, equipment, clothing and other associated expenses.

Applications for this scheme must be made by 31 March 2022. Other funding schemes to help with training costs will still be available after this date.

The Revised 5 Year Plan

At our recent Full Council meeting the revised 5 year plan for 2022-2027 was set out.

Mental health education, more investment in flooding prevention and encouraging sustainable travel are amongst the priorities that could be added to Malvern Hills District Council's Five Year Plan.

The plan, which is reviewed annually, sets out a number of actions to be completed by 2025 under its three priority areas - Our Communities, Our Economy and Our Environment.

Its aim is to achieve the council's vision of enhancing the Malvern Hills District as a destination to explore and an outstanding place to live and work.

New actions have been added and other actions have been amended where circumstances have changed or the targets have been updated. This comes following the recovery of the district from the impact that Covid has had both on the community and the economy.

The priorities include the adoption of the Connected Communities Strategy and work is progressing on an economic strategy both of which are funded from earmarked reserves.

The council has also included the action of doubling the amount of renewable energy generated in the district by 2030 and providing 20 new EV charging points on council car parks across the district by 2025.

Other new additions include supporting Malvern Hills District Youth Forum to improve mental wellbeing education in schools, investment in the refurbishment of five town centre toilets by 2025 and the investment £150,000 in major flood alleviation schemes, including Tenbury and Severn Stoke.

I've attached a copy. One of the biggest advantages is that a lot of the waffle has been removed and all points have clear targets.

Business Plan

I've been asked specifically about financial planning at MHDC so I've put together a brief summary and attached our Business Plan main document and also appendix which collectively shares all the information which has been passed at both Executive and Full Council meetings unanimously. I hope this is useful.

It has been a difficult time and will continue to be so but the expected funding gap over the next 5 years is expected to be £0.4 million. However, it is expected that we will be able to continue to deliver a fully balanced budget every year.

The Council has a strong track record of financial planning which has been recognised externally. This has enabled the Council to improve its financial sustainability at a time of record reductions in government grant whilst protecting front line services.

The operating context that the Council finds itself in with expected reductions in local authority funding and the long term effects on the economy as a result of Covid means that we need to continue to plan for a different organisation in 5 years time.

Therefore it is critical that that we have produced this updated Business Plan, to safeguard our financial sustainability and to protect services where possible. It is necessary to set out our business planning over the medium term, which is complementary to our MTFP and corporate strategy.

In the period 2010/11 to 2026/27 the total cumulative reduction in government funding will be over 70% in real terms or around £5.9m.

Councils will have changed markedly over that period with Council Tax increasing in importance from 43% to around 74% of the total funding.

The Business Plan identifies the impact of reducing grant funding at a time of increasing costs as creating a budget gap of £0.4m by 2026/27.

Updating last years plan, the proposed plan seeks to close the funding gap with an ambitious mix of growing the business, joint working, identified savings and reasonable charging in specific service areas. Finally, the Government settlement announced in December was broadly in line with that assumed in the MTFP. Any detailed changes will be built into the 2022/23 draft budget for approval in February.

As our Parish Council meeting is just before Full Council in Feb I can take away any questions with responses for March's meeting.

Rural Working Hubs

We've been talking with Village Halls around the district to set up our first rural working hub based from a village hall. This concept gives local residents a space every week where they can come together with local businesses and

entrepreneurs to work together and share a space. It's particularly good for those who have been working remotely or have set up a business recently.

The first test centre will be Lindridge and more details will follow.

The Boundary Commission Review

As you'll have seen the Boundary Commission has published its initial thoughts and the consultation is now on so please submit any thoughts. As it stands Lower Broadheath would become its own one member ward – with Rushwick leaving to join Bransford as another one member ward. Broadwas and Cotheridge would join a larger Martley and Teme Valley ward.

For myself and David our ward is being split into three but due to the growth of both Lower Broadheath and Rushwick the changes have to be welcomed to ensure that each area has the correct level of representation.

I do think it benefits Broadwas and Cotheridge to be partnered with Martley and Teme Valley as the villages are far more rural than Lower Broadheath or Rushwick. I also agree with reducing the number of Councillor, especially in more urban wards and ensuring there is a better balance to serve the electorate.

You can see the plans and have your say at:

<https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/24708>

It is recommended that Parish Councils and individuals have their say.