

LINDRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

13th January 2016

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

- **Happy New Year**

I would like to wish all parish councillors, and your hard working clerk, a very Happy and Prosperous New Year. We can look forward to 2016 with a degree of optimism with the economy in reasonable shape, unemployment steadily declining and there being the possibility of some improvement in our relationship with the EU.

Sadly, you will also have heard of the resignation of the council leader, Adrian Hardman, after he failed a breath test just before Christmas. He accepts, as we would all agree, that this was a serious error of judgment, and he will be in court on the 18th. The penalty can be 6 months' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, and a driving ban for at least 1 year. I would estimate that a fine and a driving ban is likely in this case.

I would also like to pay tribute to Adrian for his exemplary leadership over the last five years, and in particular his careful management of the County Council's finances, a job for which he was responsible before the additional burden of the leadership.

The Conservative Group meets tomorrow, Friday 8th, as I write this report, to elect a new leader of the group and, by virtue of that office, leader of the Council. It is widely expected that the current deputy, Simon Geraghty, will be elected and will take office the following Thursday, 14th January at the next full Council meeting.

There will be other adjustments to the Cabinet following this change and these will become apparent in due course.

- **Review of the WCC budget**

The local government financial settlement came in late in December and has been factored in to the Council Tax assessment for 2016/17. You will know that the Chancellor has given Counties the responsibility for increasing the budget for Adult Social Care by allowing a 2% increase in addition to any other tax increase the County might be contemplating. This allows for local fund raising to reflect local need, rather than a blanket demand from all areas.

In our case, the full 2% will be raised, given the increasing percentage of our population over the age of 75, coupled with a 3.7% drop in the percentage in the under 25 age group. This will be added to the 1.94% increase in Council Tax, to cover all the other needs of the budget, in particular increasing numbers of children being taken into care and the commitment to maintain and improve the condition of our roads.

Despite this increase, Worcestershire will remain in the bottom quartile of counties, in terms of its council tax. You will also remember that the County is third in the country in terms of productivity growth behind Oxford and London. We aim to see that this situation is maintained or improved by the economic policies adopted by the County and the LEP.

- **Flooding**

In the recent period of heavy rain, we have been fortunate not to have suffered any serious flooding, with the Teme being some way below the height of its banks. You may have been aware of two places locally where flooding of roads extended over at least half the carriageway, on the A443 in Eardiston and to the east of Great Witley. The former was caused by a blocked gulley, and I have recommended that the cause be investigated and the utility company responsible for letting the grit and dirt into the gulley during the recent works be reprimanded.

The problem in Great Witley seems to have been caused by a gulley being tarmacked over and successive searches have not found it. I have requested a serious search and the instalment of a gulley, should the old one remain lost!

I hope the improved drainage conditions in Lower Frith have coped with the recent rainfall as intended and that the steep bank on the Clows Top road has not suffered any further subsidence.

Should any of you know of such repeated flooding events, please report them on the WCC website and, if you can, let me know as well, so I can add a second line of pressure to seek resolution.

Some of you may be persuaded by certain sections of the media to believe the current weather extremes are related to concern about climate change. The Met Office are guilty of playing along with the current belief that matters are getting worse. They are fond of quoting UK records that only go back to 1910, while they also have records for England and Wales that go back to 1766 and they show the wettest December was 1876. That could not be reasonably attributed to recent industrialisation and the use of fossil fuels, whatever the COP21 meeting in Paris has concluded.*

You may be interested in taking part in the consultation currently in progress on the latest Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, 2015 - 2021. This is undertaken by the County Council as the Local Lead Flood Authority. That means the County has a responsibility to see that adequate precautions are taken across the County.

The consultation period ends on the 29th February and I would urge those who have a particular interest of concern about flooding to read and comment on the plans.

- **Potholes**

One of the regrettable results of the recent excessive rainfall is the proliferation of potholes. These can cause a lot of damage and distress, and I would request all councillors and others to report them as soon as practicable.

The WCC online reporting system is now pretty easy to use, and will result in the most rapid response. Having said that, I am very happy to hear of any such problems and will do my best to see that action is taken quickly and effectively.

Despite the warm and wet December, we may still get a harsh winter, as happened in 1947 after a mild autumn. I trust we will be able to keep the roads open, whatever is thrown at us.

- **Street lighting in Tenbury Wells**

In common with the rest of the County, Tenbury will soon be subject to the partial night time switching off of street lights. This will take place between midnight and 06.00am and

affect two out of every three lights in the town. Major routes and important junctions are excluded from the scheme in the interests of road safety.

In other areas, there has been concern expressed about the safety of citizens under this scheme and others have been concerned about road safety. The County is reassured by the police's evidence that neither of these perceptions is upheld in practice.

We may expect to see the adjustments being implemented in the next couple of weeks. While I have been at pains to reassure residents that there should be no increase in crime or any reduction in pedestrian safety, the County officers will be monitoring the situation, as they have elsewhere, and will be willing to respond positively to any specific suggestions for improvement.

I would be grateful if any problems can also be forwarded to me, so that I can monitor the situation.

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07.01.16

*: For those interested in reading more on this, I can recommend the blog written by Paul Homewood under the title "Not a Lot of People Know That". He publicises Met Office records that otherwise seem beyond the reach of journalists and the Met Office itself!