

Penyard Ward – October 24

As the clocks think of turning back, winter seems to be upon us with a vengeance. Heavens have opened and flooding has been extensive across the whole County and we are to be subjected to a first budget from the Labour Party in over 14 years. We must brace ourselves for the worst and trust that our slender resources are able to cope.

Roads, drainage and flooding

Front of my mind in recent days has been the horrendous floods from last week – where I'm sorry to say Penyard wasn't the worst I saw, or even the worst in County. There are so many aspects of this that are all interconnected, and every flooding case is both tragic and yet different. With that in mind, the County Council has asked for and been given a brief from the Leader to make a cross-directorate inquiry as to what we can do to address the drainage and flooding issue in future across the whole of Herefordshire. I'll report on this in the future. It would be enormously useful if the PC can catalogue all floods – I have some from my drive-around last week, but I won't have them all.

Parish council summit, Footpath officers and the PROW network

A few weeks ago, we hosted a parish council summit at HCC offices in Plough Lane. We reported on the support we are giving to the public rights of way network, and reiterated how vital we consider it that our footpaths and other PROWs (bridleways, "Boats", etc) are maintained. We are able to confirm that all the bids for footpath assets (replacing stiles etc) were successful and would be funded from the £250k made available across the county. There is a bit of money left, should further assets appear!

Finances

Last week we had a salutary warning about councils facing bankruptcy, this time it was our neighbour Shropshire who was in the news. At HCC, we believe we are in a stronger place than most of our neighbours/ peers, but we are keeping a very close eye on it. We are delighted to be the first county council to have our (previous year) accounts audited. This is just one indicator to make sure that we aren't walking into trouble, as the fact we have been able to get them through audit shows we have a good understanding of the fundamental position. And of course in the last year, we've had to work through huge savings to address the overspend we inherited.

But I'm afraid I can't promise any council tax freezes in the near future.

Planning department

A bit of good news – for the first time since I was re-elected last year, we now have a fully staffed team. I know that planning delays and issues have been a huge frustration; without a full team, it's been hard to argue that things should be better. But now we have a full team, we are much more confident we can get the team working as it should, and hitting those deadlines.

I trust that this update is helpful to you and would be happy to speak directly to you on harry.bramer2@herefordshire.gov.uk or call me on 07900 918384

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