

Mrs Alison Cartwright
Clerk to Churchill and Blakedown Parish Council
churchillandblakedownclerk@gmail.com

9th January, 2022

Dear Alison,

Re: Churchill and Blakedown Parish Council Meeting – 11th January, 2022

Please find my report for reading at the meeting and circulation to Parish Councillors.

Happy New Year everyone and I hope you and local residents had a good festive period.

Churchill and Blakedown Issues

As reported at the last meeting the traffic calming/speed reduction scheme for the B4188 Belbroughton Road has now been implemented for a couple of months and from my observations and feedback I have received is broadly welcomed. It is fair to say that I have received communication from a couple of residents who are not happy with the scheme and do not feel it is having the desired effect. However, since the last meeting report this has now abated.

I previously advised that the tubes were put down outside the Equestrian Centre and asserted that this was not the agreed location as this is what I was told however, this has now been clarified and was indeed the correct location as this is where they were placed in advance of the scheme implementation to assess the speeds for the survey between 5th-12th May 2021.

I can confirm that the location I referred to previously which was between the bridleway and the first set of bollards installed was used only once and it was some years ago in 2018. Why this survey was carried out at this point and all the others haven't been Paul Green is unclear and he apologises for the confusion caused. In essence near the Equestrian Centre outside no. 72 Belbroughton Road has been used multiple times which was why it was used again and WCC now have the data to be able to compare the before and after.

The 5th-12th May 2021 data which I shared at the time is as follows:-

Belbroughton Road, Blakedown

From 05/05/2021 To 12/05/2021

	Daily Vol.	Mean Ave.*
Westbound	2446	34
Eastbound	2234	31

Combined

Westbound is leaving Blakedown for all surveys.

WCC then undertook the survey at exactly the same location post installation between 17th-25th November and the data is as follows:-

Belbroughton Road, Blakedown

From 17/11/2021 To 25/11/2021

	Daily Vol.	Mean Ave.*
Westbound	829	28
Eastbound	873	30
Combined	1,701	

Whilst the speeds were positive I am advised that WCC had concerns over the daily volumes as this did not show like for like and after further investigation WCC found that actually there was a road closure in place sometime between 22-26th, therefore rendering these results less accurate and WCC have written off this data but I share it for completeness.

WCC then undertook the survey again in December which showed a much more accurate daily volume.

I have set out the May Pre-installation and December Post-Installation data to easily compare the difference as follows:-

Direction	Total Daily Vol.	Mean	85 %ile
Belbroughton Road May 2021			
E	1946	34.4	41.2
W	1829	31.3	36.2
Belbroughton Road December 2021			
E	1587	29.1	35.9
W	1565	28.2	32.9

From this data (and even the data WCC have discounted from November) it shows a positive reduction in speed and a potential overall success for the scheme.

The speeds have fallen nicely which, given the scheme works better when there is a larger volume of traffic, this is a good outcome given there are still less vehicles using this road than before and overall I genuinely believe this is a pleasing result.

Regarding the junction signage on Perriford Lane and the A456 and any junction safety improvements, these are ongoing but I have chased Paul Green again and the road safety team still have this to assess.

The trees on Churchill Lane at the A456 and the Churchill end have been reported for inspection and this is still ongoing, there is a long wait on non-urgent safety work.

The railings by the stream in Churchill have now been the subject of a repair however I have received a complaint about the state of the repair and I have now inspected this myself and agree and it has as a result of me complaining now been reinspected for repair. I have discussed this with Paul Green but am awaiting the report back following the re-inspection and will update you for the next meeting.

The concrete post and fence under the viaduct at Churchill Lane, Blakedown is still awaiting a permanent repair; I chased this with Paul Green at our meeting on 6th January.

In respect of the hedge overhanging the pavement along Churchill Lane at its junction with the A456 as I advised in my December report I met on site with Paul on 2nd December. Since then I have been in liaison with Paul, inspectors have been out and are liaising with the WCC searches team. They are certain the pavement is being obstructed but are just considering to what extent as there is a metal chain link fence in the hedge in front of what appears to be the original fence. There is a site meeting next week between various WCC officers to agree the next steps ie how far the hedge and pavement is to be cut and sided out, but rest assured it will be and we are getting closer to sorting this situation out as at present the pavement is substantially obstructed whichever fence is taken as the boundary line between the public highway and private land and it is not acceptable,

As previously reported, the worst part of the Wannerton Road pavements will be resurfaced over the next 12 months. I am advised that more of Wannerton Road should be done at this time as well being funded from the core pavements budget.

Regarding The Avenue, as I have said previously I would be happy to make some of my devolved funding available to assist with issues such as bollards and maintenance by chippings and shrub clearance. I know you discussed this matter last time and are looking at and considering options, in particular in respect of the trees and indeed I am in liaison with your clerk and several Parish Councillors in respect for a date for a site visit and as I write this report I think we have agreed one for 3rd February.

I will pursue some further gateways in Ismere as I have been contacted by other local residents and I will liaise with Alison about these in due course.

As reported previously, on 2nd December, Paul and I met with Cllr. Hayward regarding the Churchill crossroads junction on site to discuss the speed of the traffic and road safety issues at the junction. We have agreed to get the road safety team to come out and assess the location and see what if, anything else can be done. I have requested that the hedge which was obscuring the signage be reported for attention.

Paul Green has formally requested an officers meeting between the road safety team, the traffic management team and himself and will update me when this has happened, hopefully for the February meeting.

I am dealing with a flooding issue at a property at the top end of the Belbroughton Road with rainwater coming off the highway and flooding the driveway of a property and WCC propose a minor scheme to deal with this matter and I am chasing Paul for a date for implementation.

I am also dealing with a flooding issue at a property along Mill Lane as a result of the road level being affected due to the road resurfacing work. WCC propose a minor drainage scheme to deal with this matter and I am chasing Paul for a date for implementation.

I have been made aware of some blocked drains by a member of the public along Belbroughton Road and these have all been reported.

Regarding the Station Yard car park proposal I duly did have a briefing with officers on 17th December on the proposed next steps by WCC. I can report back that I am advised that there were a number of constructive comments made by members of the public in respect of lighting and noise mitigation and the proposed pedestrian route for example that WCC would take on board and consider in respect of any planning application. I am advised that the plan is to still proceed to submit a planning application and this is planned for March 2022 with a view to the application coming before the WCC planning committee at either the July or September meeting. This planning application will of course be the subject of full public consultation and there is a statutory process to follow. There are still a lot of details to be finalised, for example what the land in front of the Railway cottages will be used for but it appears it may be left open. It is proposed that that there is no pedestrian or vehicular access past the Railway cottages to the car park and just past these there will be a fence. The official pedestrian access is at present along Station Drive and Lynwood Drive, but The Avenue between Station Drive and Lynwood Drive is being explored.

I am acutely aware of the WCC tweet on 31st December regarding a number of strategic projects that WCC is embarking on in 2022 or proposing to. They are at varying stages of the process. I met personally with the two most senior people responsible for this project at WCC, John Hobbs the Director of Economy and Infrastructure and Cllr. Alan Amos the relevant Cabinet Member. I expressed my extreme displeasure at the words 'will take place' as this suggests things are a 'done deal' and that the matter has already been decided which is far from the case as the planning application hasn't even been submitted let alone approved. They advised this was not the intention and it was meant to be a statement of intent and that of course all of the caveats apply but I stressed this wasn't said and it did not come across and nor was it perceived in this way by the local community. This was accepted and acknowledged and there was an apology for any misunderstanding and an acceptance that this should have said subject to planning.

I will keep everyone posted when I have a further update.

Wyre Forest Issues

The planning application for the proposed Quarry at Lea Castle, Wolverley, has still not been determined yet but it may be getting closer as it likely to go to either the February or March planning committee at WCC.

Strategic Issues County Wide

The County Council has been heavily involved in the response to the Coronavirus pandemic working with our other statutory partners.

Worcestershire has a fantastic website Here2Help which is a community action response to Coronavirus. There is also a dedicated phone number 01905 768053

for those without access to the internet. There is now a Here2Helpbusiness scheme as well. (simply google Here 2 Help Worcestershire and it comes straight up.)

WCC received £1.6 million from central government to support free school meals and fund holiday activities over the

We are approaching that time of year when it is time to set the budget and council tax levy.

The Cabinet met on 6th January and approved the draft budget for consultation. Full Council will debate and formally set the final budget at its meeting on 17th February.

It is proposed to increase general council tax by just .094% but to precept 3% for the social care levy, 1% for this year and 2% which WCC chose not to levy last year so this can be levied this year, so in simple terms overall council tax is proposed to increase by 3.94%. The maximum it could be increased by under Government rules is 5%. In money terms, 3.94% is £52.95 per annum on a Band D property which will mean the County Councils portion of the bill will be £1,396.78 compared to £1,343.83 last year. Remember that WCC make up 70% of your overall council tax bill, with WFDC being about 12%, your PC's share 1% and Police and Fire making up the rest.

The net revenue budget is proposed to increase from circa £355 million in 2021-2022 to £373 million in 2022-2023. The gross budget is over £1 billion.

We have had additional monies from central government this year to tackle pressures in adults and social care, a further £6 million in social care grant and a one off what is called a 'services grant' of £4.4 million, of which £1.4 million is to fund the new national insurance levy but this is still £3 million net.

We are also predicting an increase in council tax income of circa £11.3 million from the increase, 1% is worth about £2.8 million and circa £2.7 million from council tax buoyancy (new properties being built and occupied) and circa £1 million from the collection fund (ie more people coming back into paying council tax). Therefore adding everything together WCC is circa £30 million better off than in 2021-2022. That said there still are final pressures in social care and frankly unless the grant continues to go up substantially from government they will remain but the additional funding this year is very welcome and will go some way to alleviating the immediate pressure. Overall those pressures amount to £44.2 million so there is a gap of £14.2 million to be plugged by use of some reserves, £2.7 million, £8.1 million of income and efficiencies and use of some adult social care external funding of £3.4 million.

We have also had substantial grants to use for our Covid -19 response.

We have a large capital programme and through the period 2020 to 2024 it is proposed to spend £439 million.

So what are we spending your money on, well £155 million in our People Directorate (Adult Social Care, Public Health, Communities, Libraries, Countryside Side Service, Registration Service etc...), £109 million in Worcestershire Children First, (Children's Services, Social Care Placements, Education, SEND etc...), £57 million in Economy and Infrastructure (Highways, Waste Contract, Trading Standards, Public Rights of Way, Major Projects, Passenger Transport) and £55 million on Corporate services, (Finance, Legal and Democratic Services, Administration, Buildings and Property Management, Interest on Debt ie paying for the borrowing on capital schemes and many other things.

In broad terms we spend circa £260 million of the £373 million net revenue budget on vulnerable adults and vulnerable children, this is circa 70% of our budget.

We are proposing spending an additional £12 million in both 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 on road resurfacing and a further £4 million in both 2022-2023 and 2024 on pavement resurfacing.

We have also created a pot of money, £500,000 in both 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 to fund small scale schemes such as creating new pelican and zebra crossings.

There will be an uplift in the budget for Parish Lengths man. I am awaiting the specific details of this ie whether is a straight percentage uplift for each Parish across the board or not. I am aware the level of funding that each Parish receive has been frozen now for about 10 years.

There will be an additional £1 million for drainage including small schemes to support flood alleviation.

Each county councillor will be allocated £22,500 in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 to spend on capital local highways schemes. I have spent all of mine on resurfacing pavements and this additional money will allow me to get even more done.

We are also allocating an additional £1.1 million to extend for a further 2 years the Councillors Divisional Fund allocating each County Councillor £10,000 per annum to spend on projects and community organisations within their electoral division

In terms of school funding whilst we still are one of the more poorly funded areas and the Government has not yet changed how the formula works nationally, the quantum of cash is at least going up nationally which translates into more money for Worcestershire pupils. Under the parameters of the National Funding Formula which Worcestershire uses, there will be a minimum increase per pupil of 2%.

The dedicated school grant has increased from £371 million in 2021-2022 to £383 million in 2022-2023 (this is for mainstream schools) and the Higher Needs Block (this is for special school funding and SEND) has increased from £68.5 million to £75.5 million which is a step in the right direction but there is still a substantial overspend in special needs which needs addressing.

There is much more I could say but these are the highlights.

The CQC and Ofsted have published their report following their reinspection in the latter part of 2021, further to their 2018 inspection that found serious weaknesses in 12 areas relating to SEND. The re-inspection has confirmed that an appropriate level of improvement has been made in 8 out of 12 of the areas. The areas still of concern, which WCC and Health are already addressing relate largely to integration in mainstream schools, the appropriateness of an individual's placement and the quality of their ECHP and the interface and liaison with parents and carers.

Keep Safe.

With my best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. J. H. S.', written over a horizontal line.

Cllr. Marcus J. Hart

County Councillor – Chaddesley Division

Copy to: District Cllr Ian Hardiman, Wyre Forest District Council
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