

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

15th February, 2022

Dear Alison,

Re: Churchill and Blakedown Parish Council Meeting – 15th February, 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

Regarding the junction signage on Perriford Lane and the A456 and any junction safety improvements, Paul Green reports that the road markings and SLOW markings on the road have been refreshed and the road safety team are satisfied that there are no other concerns.

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. I did chase when I was in the Parish with Paul Green on 8th February.

As reported last month, 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 and also a response from the Asst. Director for Highways very apologetic about the standard of work and an assurance they will be completely repaired and replaced and also painted at a future date, most likely light green. A date is imminent!

As reported last month, 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 8th February and again a date is imminent!

In respect of the hedge overhanging the pavement along Churchill Lane at its junction with the A456 as I advised in my January report the pavement was obstructed. WCC have sided out the pavement and cut the hedge back but a hedge letter has been sent to the landowner to cut the hedge right back to correct fence line. The work has not been done as of yet. I suspect this may take a little while longer yet to resolve!

As reported in my January report, I stated that the worst parts of the Wannerton Road pavements will be resurfaced over the next 12 months. I am pleased that these were in fact done last week. I will be going back to inspect as I did see on Facebook that damage was done to the verge at the junction of Elm Drive,

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 and tree maintenance if the Parish Council and the local community were to work collectively as a joint project.

I met with Claire and Roger as your PC representatives on 3rd February, together with Alvan Kingston from WFDC. Most of the trees are in good health, save for the third tree along a Chestnut, which needed a little bit of work to remove some dead parts and the fifth tree along adjacent to 2 Lynwood Drive, which is going to be pollarded as parts of it are dead and Alvan will see how the tree reacts to this. A site notice should be placed imminently. This is using WFDC's powers purely on the basis of making the trees safe.

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.

Paul Green has now had an officers meeting between the road safety team, the traffic management team and himself and officers have been out to inspect. There will be some additional road markings painted on the road namely the shape of two pedestrians, one on either side of the crossroads. I think we should just keep this situation under review.

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. Last week Paul told me a date for the work is imminent.

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 Paul is chasing a date still.

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 there is nothing further to report from my report in January save to remind everyone that a formal planning application is scheduled to be submitted in March and the pre-engagement was published by WCC in fact the day after last month's Parish Council meeting, which I know you will have seen.

There have been one or two comments on Facebook regarding what my views are. I will not rehearse the again in this report as I have been very clear, open and transparent and consistent right from the very start in respect of the proposals.

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 and the timeline has slipped again as there is some further consultation on a matter to take place go to either the May or July 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

I have repeated the financial information that I included in January's report again for completeness 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



Cllr. Marcus J. Hart
County Councillor – Chaddesley Division

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

Marcus Hart
Cabinet Member with
Responsibility for
Education

Electoral Division
Chaddesley

County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

Home
Silkwood Barn
Crundalls Court
Crundalls Lane
Worcestershire
DY12 1BN

Tel: 01299 402424

Email
mhart@worcestershire.gov.uk
