

Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst August/September 2026

Serving the parishes of Llangarron, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow, Sellack, Welsh Newton and Llanrothal.

The End of Days

We have grown used to the need to plan for and mitigate the impact of flooding in our rural county – and it remains a key focus for both county and parish councils to keep their communities safe and protected – but this summer brought home the very real increased risk of wildfires.

Fires do not happen spontaneously – the spate of wildfires that plagued the Welsh Valleys were acts of deliberate and mindboggling stupidity – some fires are started accidentally, some through carelessness but they are all very dangerous when the vegetation is so dry. We have seen some fantastic collaboration between farmers to limit the spread of fires and to help the fire and rescue service and I would like to pay tribute to anyone who turned out to help the emergency services to protect property and life.

The public health team in Herefordshire Council hosted a webinar drawing together expertise from the Fire and Rescue Service, flooding team and climate adaptation team to explore the potential around parish level community planning for wildfire based on the experience we already have with flooding.

The event was very well attended which goes to show that parish councils are really engaged in doing what they can to reduce the risk in their local area. If you were unable to attend, the webinar was recorded and the various presentations can be shared along with the proposed template for wildfire response at parish level. Just let me know if you would like a copy.

Hopefully we have started a two-way conversation which will enable both the county and individual parishes to work together in an effective and efficient way to protect residents in both fire and flood.

Love Your Layby

Endlessly frustrated by the state of the A40 I have joined with Cllr Barry Durkin and the public realm team to mount a campaign to 'love your layby'. This is aimed at reducing littering in laybys (which is the source of most of the rubbish on the A40/A49) by using both positive messaging but also increased surveillance and prosecution.

We met with one of the fantastic volunteer litter pickers and had the opportunity to hear first hand about the various utterly disgusting things that she has to deal with. To my mind it is totally inexcusable behaviour on the part of long-distance drivers to leave waste for someone else to have to pick up. Inexcusable.

H art

The annual H art event is a wonderful reason to explore our lovely county and visit some of the tremendously talented artists we have living here. I always feel as if culture in Herefordshire is like mycelium – it is everywhere, secretly permeating our lives but every now and then it flowers and there is an eruption of beauty and skill which we can gaze at in wonder. I visited the Garron Centre (of course) and did a bit of early Christmas shopping! Then on to Canwood Gallery and various artist studios up country lanes. Marvellous.

The Big Projects

The council continues to progress the delivery of the big projects that we have on the go. You might have seen that preparatory work is now underway for the first phase of the western bypass. We are well on the way to acquiring the land although one small parcel may have to be the subject of a compulsory purchase. The next period will include some of the ecology surveys as well as fencing and site preparation. The last time we got to this stage there was an election and the new council cancelled the road (at a cost of about 20m plus the higher cost of delivering the road now) – we have an election in May.....let's hope it isn't Groundhog Day.

Two other big projects are the new museum and art gallery and the library. Both have been slow due to the complications of dealing with very old, listed buildings but we have been able to adapt and adjust to the circumstances, and both projects will be a real boon to the city and wider county. It is a shame that they will conclude after May but in my mind it is better to get something right than to rush and get it wrong. I am personally very excited about both and really hope that I am still a councillor so I can see them come to fruition.

Did you know that the British Museum and Hereford's Shire Hall were designed by the same architect?

LGR

You might have read in the press about the Government changing its mind about local government reorganisation. This was something that Westminster thought would be a good idea and it has been taking colossal resources and capacity out of the some very hard-pressed councils as they navigated some very substantial changes to their organisation. Herefordshire has, for the most part, stood still and watched this happening to others so the change of direction will not be a problem for us. The reason we were able to remain somewhat aloof was that we made the decision for ourselves a while back to become a unitary authority and that was the first phase of the reorganisation proposed by central government. What remains to be seen is how the mayoralities are supposed to work in large rural areas that aren't like Manchester.

Consultation

There is a consultation out for the proposed provision of a special school in Ross on Wye to accommodate SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pupils. Residents can find out more and respond through the [Council's online consultation](#).

Back British Farming

I visited a local farm for Back British Farming Day – we discussed the challenges of water security and visited the site of a winter storage reservoir that is under construction. A really good example of a business adapting to climate change to secure their future. The limits of what is permitted under permitted development is set by national government, but I am keen to see what else Herefordshire Council can do to support on farm water storage as a mitigation against drought but also as a way of reducing flooding and increasing biodiversity. In the olden days farms had multiple small ponds but, over time, they have been lost – either silted up or ploughed in - perhaps we need to look at some of the old ways again.