



Report of Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst

Llangarron Ward – serving the parishes of Sellack, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow, Llangarron and Welsh Newton and Llanrothal

May 2025

I am writing this on the day of the spending review. We are braced for impact as it is our expectation that rural local authorities will not be a priority for the current government. Be that as it may, it is important that the council manages finances competently and efficiently.

The [council's draft accounts for 2024/25](#) have been published a month in advance of the statutory deadline. The timely completion of the accounts provides valuable assurance over the council's financial management, and this is a huge achievement. The accounts are available to view on our website alongside a set of [Summary Financial Statements](#) which provide a snapshot of the council's financial position and performance for the year.

As a headline we have gone from a position of a predicted 13.8m overspend inherited from the previous administration to a modest, but important, underspend of 0.5m. It also includes savings in the Children and Young People directorate which continues to improve. We will be having the final Ofsted focussed visit this month with the main visit at the end of the year. We are fully committed to sustaining the improvement that has taken place, as consistent quality is critical to keeping a stable service that can deliver for the families who use it.

Our Cabinet Member for finance, Cllr Peter Stoddart writes: The budget that we inherited in May 2023 had a forecast overspend of £13.8M at Q2. Through good governance and tight controls, we got that overspend down to £8.7M by the end of the 2023/24 financial year. That was then funded for by using various reserves Last year. In FY24/25 we had planned savings of £19.5M which, as I highlighted last week with 56% delivered and 44% or £8.6M to be delivered this year. We were very transparent throughout the year that we intended to use the budget resilience reserve (that we created by transferring £11m from the Business Rates reserve) to assist those demand-led directorates such as Community and wellbeing directorate with unplanned and unexpected demand pressures. Which is exactly what we did but with other directorates coming under budget we were able to deliver an underspend on last year's budget of £0.5M. In summary we took action throughout the year to consider the impact on reserves of overspend and identified a proactive plan, rather than having to react and identify sources at the end of the year.

For those are interested the Q4 performance and budget reports are delivered to Cabinet in the following meeting on You Tube [Cabinet - Thursday 5 June 2025 2.30 pm](#)

Roads

Apart from local roads – including two roads in Llangarron to be surface dressed next month – we are seeing the 'black stuff' going down all over the county as part of the 13m investment that the council is making. I am certainly seeing an improvement wherever I go – there is more to do but the decision to place more money into the road budget is starting to pay off. When a new administration is elected (in May) they inherit the budget from the previous administration (budget setting is at the start of the year). It was only when the minority Conservative administration were able to write their own budget at the start of 2024 that the decision to put more funding into highways was made. We will continue to invest in our road network as it is critical for a rural county like ours.

We're pleased to be making significant progress towards building the first phase of the Hereford Western Bypass and are now at a stage where there is sufficient confidence to procure a

contractor to work with us to finalise designs and move to construction. As required as part of procurement legislation, we published a notice of the potential for the scheme to go to market. This will encourage interest in the proposals and ensure a competitive process that offers the best value to the council. It is intended to move to the tender phase in September with a view to commencing work in December 2026. Cllr Philip Price gave an excellent interview on BBC HW this week, which you can listen to here (at 3hrs 34mins 57secs) [Tammy Gooding - 29/05/2025 - BBC Sounds](#)

If you haven't already done so, please can I encourage you to share the link to the [Local Transport Plan \(LTP\) consultation](#). The LTP sets out transport priorities for 2025–2041. We're asking residents, partner organisations, transport providers, user groups and neighbouring councils to provide their feedback to help shape the final plan and ensure it reflects the needs and priorities of communities across Herefordshire. The deadline has been extended to the end of June.

Hay on Wye

I went to Hay a couple of times this year – first to listen to Robert Macfarlane talk about his book 'Are Rivers Alive?' and then to meet with Monica Ferria-Tinta, Nicola Cutcher and Paul Powlesland to discuss the idea that nature (including rivers) should have their intrinsic rights recognised in law. It's an interesting proposition which I instinctively support, although it is really difficult to align such systems change with embedded machinery of non-constitutional government. Would it be an act of Parliament? Do we need a Commissioner for Nature in the same way that the Welsh Government have imaginatively created a Commissioner for Future Generations. It seems odd that a system that can give rights to the inanimate (a company, for instance) cannot find a way to recognise rights for all that is vital.

I recommend 'Are Rivers Alive?' and 'A Barrister for the Earth' for anyone interested in this subject.

In the spotlight

For various reasons I ended up with a few days of public speaking recently. The first event was the Green Business Breakfast – which is a really great opportunity for local businesses to get together and exchange knowledge about their sustainability journey. We had three businesses presenting – Elite Plastics, Ledbury Ales and Allpay. All very different in scale and type but all reducing their carbon footprint and improving their bottom line in the process! If you have a business that would be interested in getting some advice and support regarding sustainability then do get in touch with the team and they will be pleased to help out.

Home - Herefordshire Zero Carbon and Nature Rich

On the same day I was asked to give a speech at the Chamber of Commerce awards in Worcester. There were about 700 invitees, and the event was a real celebration of the best in business in the region. Very chuffed that Herefordshire business won both the Highly Commended and outright winner of the sustainability award. Well done Wyevale Nursery and Wye Valley Brewery!!! Congratulations to all the winners and runners up.

The following day I was honoured to respond to the President of the Three Counties Show as he declared the show open. I spoke of the proud farming traditions of the counties, the way in which agriculture has shaped the land, the impact it has on all who live here and the challenges it is facing as farmers are being asked to 'do their bit' for nature as well as dealing with the effects of climate change and the demands of the supply chain.

Open Farm Sunday was just a couple of weeks ago and I took the opportunity to tour Square Farm in Mitchell Troy. It was a conventional farm but the owner, Rob, has embraced organic and regenerative farming practices. There is a farm shop selling his own produce as well as organic produce from elsewhere (including the brilliant Trealy Farm). It was a glorious walk around in a rainstorm but nothing was going to dampen the spirits of Rob whose enthusiasm and sheer joy in his farm is enough to make the sun come out. Really inspiring and informative.

Rob was one of the farmers who benefited from mentoring by Ben Taylor Davies thanks to a scheme run by Monmouthshire County Council. Herefordshire Council are sponsoring a similar scheme and I am very pleased to say that we have some really great farmers taking part.

And finally – Countryfile did a whole programme about innovation in farming and all of it was in Herefordshire and two of the farms featured are local. Ally Hunter Blair (Weir End) was trialling a robot seed and weed machine on his sugar beet, Mark Green (Ditton) was talking about precision farming and water use, and the stupendous Heather Gorringer (Lower Blakemere) was explaining Bokashi composting. Apparently the programme has led to a boom in sales of her Bokashi Bran – well done Herefordshire farmers.

[Countryfile - Farm Innovations - BBC iPlayer](#)

The Stately Homes of Herefordshire

I am working with the officers in heritage conservation to improve our response to heritage buildings at risk. We have a number of fine buildings in the county that are in a poor state of repair. Some of these structures are local landmarks and their current neglected condition reflects on the wider area. It is vital that we don't allow them to deteriorate any further, so we have convened a 'problem properties' board that will look to resolve each case using the powers that the council has.

That's all folks!

Get in touch if you need my help with anything

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