



Agenda Item No. 8

Leader's announcements Council, 26th September 2018

The District and County Council have launched an opportunity for the public to learn about proposals for the investment in regenerating Worcester Street. The exhibition is open at Kidderminster Library until 5 October. This £2 million project will bring traffic back into the street, with short stay spaces for on-street car parking, and see the public realm significantly improved. It will make Worcester Street a more attractive place to visit and invest and help sustain local businesses. Work is currently scheduled to commence before the end of the year and be completed by autumn 2019. We are just awaiting the sign off on the funding business case from the GBSLEP. I see this as a vital component to getting landowners to act differently in this area and kick start the much needed regeneration of this area.

We are moving closer to a key stage in the preparation of the local plan. Following consideration by the Local Plans Review Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet will be asked on 30 October to approve the pre-submission version of the plan for consultation until the end of 2018. Mike Parker will give a presentation on some of the important factors affecting the plan at the Members' Forum on 11 October and I would encourage all members to attend. No doubt there will be a high level of interest in the latest iteration of the plan. It is an unavoidable fact that, in order to meet housing need over the 20 years to 2036, significant areas of green belt and green field land will have to be released for development in a strategic way. Future growth simply cannot be accommodated only on brown field sites and previously developed land in the green belt alone and it is essential that we do have a properly adopted and up to date local plan.

In order to allow Councillor Ian Hardiman sufficient time to devote to this high priority work on the local plan, I made changes in August to his portfolio and that of Councillors Chris Rogers and Nathan Desmond.

We have continued to make progress with the capital portfolio fund. Since the last meeting of Council, we have made our largest acquisition to date, Stratford Court, an office development near the M42 in Solihull. I would like to pay tribute to officers who have done a massive amount of work in a short period of time to complete the due diligence and secure this important acquisition, in particular Charlotte Beswick, Mike Parker and Tracey Southall. This investment brings in a significant revenue income to the Council.

Colleagues may have seen that the County Council is predicting an £18m overspend on services in the current year. The report to the County Council's Cabinet can be seen at this link:

<http://worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s17526/Cab%2020180927%20Resources%20V9%207.pdf>

In spite of offsetting savings and other management actions, the report estimates that the County Council will overspend by £5.2m this year. The main reason for this is the spending pressures in adult social care, an issue being experienced by most social services authorities. It underlines the need for the Government to take action to address sustainable funding for social care, as it has done with the NHS. As part of our shared commitment to sustain the local government structure and services in Worcestershire, all district council leaders have committed to working with the County Council where possible on further joint working initiatives. It is too early to know when any formal proposals might come forward for decision-making.

I would like to welcome Paul Spooner who has joined us on an interim basis to lead North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, after Dean Piper left us in August for his new role as director with Cannock Chase District Council. The recruitment exercise for a permanent replacement is under way and closes on 1 October. I am pleased to report that there is a high level of interest in the role and it is hoped to make an appointment at the end of October.

Finally it is a pleasure to welcome Councillor Anna Coleman as the new ward member for Bewdley & Rock, following the sad death of Councillor Rod Wilson in July. I look forward to her contribution to the work of the Council. Turnout in the by-election on 20 September was well below what was achieved in this ward in May and it seems the poor weather will have been a factor. I would like to extend thanks to the returning officer and his staff for the smooth running of the election, the result for which was declared well before midnight last Thursday.

Cllr Marcus Hart
Leader of the Council