

Leader's announcements

11 May 2022

The adoption of the Wyre Forest local plan, 2016-2036 last month was a significant achievement. It delivered one of the targets agreed by Council in the Corporate Plan and provides certainty for developers and local residents about where development will take place in the district over the coming years. The housing growth supported in the plan will also help in delivering more affordable housing in the district, which is certainly required to meet existing housing demand. There is a likely increase in pressure for housing arising from the Government's resettlement schemes for refugees from various countries including Ukraine and its recently announced plans for dispersal of asylum seekers.

I would like to record my thanks to all staff who have supported the work on the plan over many years, as well as colleagues who have been involved in its development in the Local Plans Review Panel and other meetings. The plan is now being used to take decisions on applications, and the work on preparing supplementary documents will move forward. The Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has been published today. If passed in its current form, it will affect the preparation of the next local plan and may have impacts on how individual planning decisions are taken in the meantime. Further details are awaited.

The day after Council met in February, Russia launched its illegal invasion of Ukraine. The Council's staff have responded magnificently as usual in responding to the new tasks allocated to local government in supporting the Homes for Ukraine scheme. There are excellent joint working arrangements in place with the county council and other districts. Our main roles are in undertaking accommodation and welfare checks before and after arrival of the Ukrainian guests and making payments to the guests as well as administering the monthly "thank you" payments to sponsors. The Government has so far notified the Council of thirty four sponsors, who will be hosting approximately 80 guests, 24 of whom have arrived in the district already. Colleagues will want to join me in thanking local residents who have stepped up to help Ukraine in various ways, including the sponsorship scheme, and in thanking staff for the hard work they have done to make the Homes for Ukraine scheme operate locally in the most effective way.

The first payments of the £150 energy rebate were paid last week in Wyre Forest and the remaining payments and vouchers for those who do not pay by direct debit are being processed this month. This has been a massive task for the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service team and I would like to thank them, on behalf of Council, for all their efforts to ensure that this support is delivered efficiently in the district.

In April, the Government published the prospectus for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and announced the allocation of £3.155m that Wyre Forest District Council will distribute in the period 2022-2025. The ReWyre board will act as the local partnership group that is required to advise on the content of the investment plan, and this will come forward to Cabinet in its July meeting for approval and submission to the Government.

The Unity Park and Forest Industrial Park units on Silverwoods have both been completed. There has been an exceptional level of interest and all the units in both developments are either let or under offer and expected to be let soon.

We have been in Wyre Forest House for nearly ten years and group leaders will be aware that we are investing to replace and improve the equipment used for webcasting including the microphone system. The work is expected to be undertaken during the summer recess in order to minimise the risk of disruption to committee meetings.

Finally, I would like to thank Anna L'Huillier for her service as a councillor and her contribution to the work of the council and to the Progressive Alliance, which is missed. I look forward to welcoming whoever is elected to fill the vacancy in the by-election on 16 June.