



Summer 2026 Update

Goodrich and Welsh Bicknor

Walford

Whitchurch and Ganarew Group
Parish Councils

From

Kerne Bridge Ward County Councillor

Simeon Cole

Dear Residents

In accordance with my allocated duties within the Council I have attended the following committees

- Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee (3)
- Planning Committee (5)
- Scrutiny Management Board (4)
- Full Council (5)

The figures in brackets indicate the number of meetings attended.

In this 'Year of Delivery' as announced by the Council, there have been many other discussion groups with, in total, a meeting virtually every week.

oooooooooooo

Ward Activity

I continue to attend to many emails and telephone calls relating to ward matters. Lengthsman and Highways matters continue to dominate with potholes always on the agenda.

Recently I have finally been able to resolve the issue of Satnav sending lorries in the wrong direction with the installation new signing at Kerne Bridge.



As you may have seen in the local press the contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places BBLP has been terminated with day-to-day oversight now delivered in-house and works carried out by new delivery partner M Group assisted by a range of approved local contractors through a new framework.

This work includes highways inspections which are supposed to provide early warning of pothole and other problems. I will be doing my best to see the improvement which is promised.

I continue working on schemes to improve safety and structural issues on the B4234, especially alongside Kerne Bridge. I am also exploring restoring the bridge itself where some of its old features have been removed.

As ever, planning matters continue to be prominent.

If you think I can help with any matters relating to Herefordshire Council please do not hesitate to contact me, my email address is simeon.cole@herefordshire.gov.uk

With best wishes

Simeon

County Matters

The Big Economic Delivery Plan

A new county-wide roadmap setting out how Herefordshire will create jobs, support businesses and deliver the infrastructure needed for future growth has been launched.

The Plan has been developed by the Economy and Place Partnership Board, bringing together organisations from business, education, skills, culture, climate and nature, and the community sector.

Building on the Herefordshire Economic Plan 2050, the Delivery Plan sets out four priorities to drive sustainable economic growth.

Place

Creating thriving places where people want to live, work and invest by supporting sustainable housing growth, revitalising town centres, protecting Herefordshire's natural environment and making the county an attractive destination for investment.

People and Communities

Helping residents develop the skills employers need now and in the future by strengthening apprenticeships, supporting the Youth Employment Hub, improving access to training, developing AI and digital skills and creating better pathways into work for young people and older workers.

Business Growth

Helping businesses start, grow and invest by attracting new employers to strategic employment sites including Ross-on-Wye Enterprise Park and Hereford Enterprise Zone, supporting innovation in sectors such as agri-tech and defence, helping businesses make greater use of AI and strengthening the county's inward investment offer.

Infrastructure

Delivering the infrastructure needed to unlock growth through projects including the Hereford Transport Hub, the Western Growth Corridor, employment land investment at Ross-on-Wye Enterprise Park, improved rail connectivity, expanded EV charging infrastructure, better digital connectivity and improvements to public transport.

Local Government reorganisation

Last month the government made announcements on abolishing District and County councils and creating Unitary Councils in England. Herefordshire already is unitary. This has implications for Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Gloucestershire will become one authority with Worcestershire being split into two. The significance of this is that the government will then be establishing regional Mayors, which our new Prime Minister is a strong believer in. Having our backs to Wales, our options are limited and the consensus view is 'Worcestershire plus' is the better option at the present time.

Crime and policing

West Mercia Police want to hear the views of our rural communities around how you would like them to communicate with us. This includes farmers and anyone living in a more remote or rural location. Please take a few minutes to complete this short survey which will close on Monday 31st August. Copy and paste -

- <https://survey.neighbourhoodmatters.co.uk/Survey/HASH/FE2A0BCBFEBD9ADBD9930CF973D894AF>

Fire Service Report for 2025/26

Hereford & Worcester Fire service operates across the two Counties and in 2025/26 attended 8,665 incidents which represented an increase particularly in outdoor fires due to the dry weather. The service has 34 fire engines based at 24 stations with a budget of £44.7 million (raised by Council tax £30.3m, Government grant £9m, Business rates £3.2m and special grants £2.2m) with 689 staff. The two counties have a joint population of 812,000 in 342,000 households and 36,500 businesses.

Last year in Herefordshire (population 186,000 and 80,000 households) there were 2,047 incidents of which 536 were fires, 662 special incidents including Road traffic, flooding, missing persons, gaining entry etc and 849 false alarms. Of Herefordshire's 13 stations Hereford is the largest and busiest attending 979 incidents or 48% of all call outs. The Fire service is building a new station in Hereford which should be open in Spring next year.

In addition, the service carries out fire safety inspections of 1,103, nearly 500 building regulations, over 200 fire and post fire investigations and 139 multi agency targeted enforcement operations with Police, customs and excise, immigration teams.

Apart from Hereford all our fire stations rely on part-time local people who are invaluable to us to deliver a professional and cost-effective service. The service will improve call filtering and engagement with business to reduce false alarms, work across borders, run programmes on young driver and water safety.

Championing Rural Communities

The Chair of Herefordshire Council, Roger Phillips, is also Chair of the Rural Services Network (RSN) and has responded to the publication of Defra's [Future of Rural England Report](#), having contributed to the Rural Taskforce which informed the development of the

report. We are fortunate to have this input at national level given the evidence that our rurality is not recognised enough and in many ways, Herefordshire is 'short changed'.

Bringing together government departments and organisations from across the rural sector, the Rural Taskforce was established to identify the opportunities and challenges facing rural communities and businesses, helping to ensure rural considerations are embedded much earlier in policy development

The RSN recognises the report as an important milestone in strengthening the cross-government approach to rural policy. It welcomes the commitment to establish a new cross-government Rural Board, bringing together senior officials from across Whitehall to oversee rural proofing, alongside the introduction of clearer measures, metrics and annual reporting to strengthen accountability and monitor progress on rural priorities.

These commitments have the potential to improve how rural considerations are embedded across government and how outcomes for rural communities are measured over time.

The report also reinforces the important contribution that rural communities make to the nation's economy, environment and society, recognising that thriving rural areas are essential to the UK's future prosperity with a new Prime Minister who talks about growth in every postcode.

Dealing with Homelessness, and vulnerable families in Herefordshire

The Council has a statutory duty to address homelessness and supply suitable accommodation of vulnerable residents across Herefordshire. Demand for temporary accommodation has increased steadily, with the number of households accommodated rising from 93 in January 2023 to 184 in January 2026. The costs of providing emergency accommodation continue to rise, with a single room in a local hotel costing the council around £85 per night, equivalent to more than £31,000 per year, while housing benefit payments do not fully cover these costs.

Recently the Council approved a 4.1 million capital funding programme to improve experience and save money. A key element of the new programme is the introduction of an Empty Properties Grant Scheme to bring long-term vacant homes back into use. Herefordshire currently has more than 1,800 empty properties, including over 600 homes that have been vacant for more than a year. Grants of up to £50,000 per property will be available to support refurbishment, with funding tied to agreements that make homes available at below-market rents. This will enable the council to move families out of temporary accommodation and into more stable housing. The funding will also support the development of accommodation for groups whose housing needs are particularly difficult to meet, including large families, disabled residents and households requiring accessible homes.

The programme also provides transitional accommodation for homeless young people and care leavers, helping them move towards independent living. The council intends to purchase at least four properties for this purpose, creating a stepping stone between supported accommodation and permanent housing. Supported housing placements for looked-after children cost the council on average £61,000 per year. Investment in transitional accommodation has the potential to improve independence while delivering significant long-term savings.

Highways

As you will have seen there has been a lot of activity in recent months resurfacing some of our 2000 miles of highways.

While there are still highways that need investment it is important to understand that the degree of investment over recent years is a choice of the current political administration in office at the council. It is largely paid by borrowing capital with the revenue account paying the interest and repaying the capital over a substantial period. If we relied on central government funding we could not do the programme we have and are doing.

Children's services

I am pleased to report that the Department for Education has made the decision to end government intervention in Herefordshire children's services and has revoked the statutory direction issued to the council in September 2022 under the previous administration.

This decision follows significant improvements across children's services over the last three years and represents a major milestone in the council's work to deliver better outcomes for children and young people across Herefordshire. The latest decision builds on the progress recognised by Ofsted, which announced Herefordshire's children's services to be "Good" with "Outstanding" leadership in January this year. This is a significant achievement and tribute to the work of staff, partners and the council's political leadership.

Affordable accommodation

Investment in new housing to change young people's lives has just been announced.

The development in Ross on Wye completes £2m+ Council programme for 18-25 year olds facing major challenges

The first specialist supported housing in Ross on Wye for young people who have faced major barriers in life, such as care leavers, rough sleeping, and being homeless has been opened by Herefordshire Council.

It's the culmination of a major three-year £2million+ social housing programme to give often vulnerable 18-25 year olds the chance for stable, safe accommodation of their own - and support to help them move forward in life.

The conversion of a property in Ross on Wye completes a total of 15 new units in the county dedicated to young people including care leavers, those who have been rough sleeping for months, people previously housed in temporary accommodation and have faced other challenges. They are charged social rents and get support from specialist officers and housing provider CCP to live independently, manage their tenancies, and prepare for the future.

Heritage assets - Update on Shirehall and Hereford Museum & Art Gallery (HMAG) Projects

This follows consideration of the council's Year of Delivery capital projects programme, including updated redevelopment proposals for Shire Hall and Hereford Museum & Art Gallery (HMAG).

Since the last public update, there has been significant public, stakeholder and media interest in both projects, generating considerable discussion and debate about their future.

The council welcomes and recognises this strong public interest and is committed to providing further information as proposals continue to develop.

As previously outlined, the council remains committed to securing a sustainable future for both Shire Hall and Hereford Museum & Art Gallery, ensuring these important heritage assets can continue to serve residents and visitors for generations to come.

However, like many heritage-led regeneration projects across the country, both schemes have faced significant challenges. Long-standing structural issues, construction cost inflation, rising delivery costs and other unforeseen issues identified during project development have all had an impact on the proposals. Due to the complicated nature of major projects on historic building with protected status, these problems took some time to fully investigate and understand; to develop viable options to address them and produce final proposals to put forward.

Given these challenges, the council has reviewed and refined the schemes to ensure they remain deliverable. This has involved considering options to reduce, re-scope or phase some elements of the projects while protecting their core purpose, public benefits and intended outcomes. While these have been challenging decisions, they have been necessary to create proposals that are financially sustainable and capable of being delivered.

Alongside this review, progress continues on both schemes.

Local Emergency Numbers

Environment Agency: 0800 80 70 60 (24-hours) or visit www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident

Flood alerts: Floodline 0345 988 1188. Sign up online at www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings to get Flood Warnings from the Environment Agency by phone, email or text message. If you live by a river or stream, keep a watch on current and expected water levels.

Power cut: Call 105 or visit www.powercut105.com

BT phone line issues: www.downdetector.co.uk/status/bt-british-telecom

Gas leak: 0800 111 999 or visit www.wuutilities.co.uk/services/smell-gas

Welsh Water: [0800 052 0130](tel:08000520130) (Water emergencies) or [0800 085 3968](tel:08000853968) (Sewer emergencies) or visit www.contact.dwrcymru.com/

The Citizens Advice Bureau Online at advice@citizensadviceherefordshire.org.uk for initial contact by email. Please also give a contact phone number in case we need to contact you for more information.

Parish Council Contacts

Goodrich and Welsh Bicknor Parish Council - clerk@goodrichandwelshbicknor-pc.gov.uk

Walford Parish Council - clerk@walfordparishcouncil.gov.uk

Whitchurch and Ganarew Parish Council - clerk@wagpc.org.uk