

County Councillor Alan Preest's update for February 2020

Budget 20/21

1000 on Weds 12 Feb will see the County Council (GCC) debating and agreeing to the budget for the forthcoming financial year. Key elements which will undoubtedly attract extra funding will be Adult Services, Children's Services, Climate Change and Highways. Once the budget has been ratified I will circulate the detail.

GCC Revised Local Transport Plan (LTC).

The consultation period 16 Jan - 26 Jan 20 is well under way. Locally a informative session will take place at Forest of Dean Council (FoDDC) Offices on 16 Mar between 1100 and 1500 followed by an invite only session between 1600-1730.

Following the recent meeting between FoDDC Leader Cllr Tim Gwilliam, FoDDC Transport Champion Cllr Clive Elsmore and myself it was agreed to take the following five bullet points forward on behalf of FoDDC for further discussion; (in no particular order)

- 1, increased Multi Use path provision to link between our four towns.
- 2, a business study for the provision of electric bicycles.
- 3, to continue lobbying Stagecoach for increased/improved route provision.
- 4, provision of a West of Severn "Park and Ride" facility.
- 5, an increase in Rail services at Lydney.

I must thank Tim and Clive for this excellent collaborative working.

This is in no way a definitive list, all other ideas/suggestions on the LTP revision will obviously be more than welcome.

A meeting has been arranged at FoDDC "District Transport Needs", 27 Feb 1000-1200.

Unfortunately due to the GCC Meeting on Weds 12 Feb I have had to tender my apologies for the Transport themed Local Economic Meeting at Coleford which has been convened sadly at the same time.

Rail

The revised 15 Dec Transport for Wales train service from Lydney has heralded improvements on Sundays'. Lydney is now served by a 0923 train in the Gloucester direction and a 0904 train in the Cardiff direction. A welcome and much needed earlier Sunday service opening up far better connectivity to both the Midlands/North and the South West/London.

GCC Lydney Rail Station overflow car-park.

As at 4 Feb one of the two derelict caravans has been removed. The remaining one in the far LHS (facing the Station) will be removed in the very near future.

GCC Civic Vice-Chairman Duties.

Duties in and around the County continue to come thick and fast. In the last month it has been a pleasure to attend 2 more - with another on the 11 Feb, Citizenship Ceremonies at the Coroners Court in Gloucester. In addition I represented the County at St Mary's Priory Church, Abergavenny for Monmouthshire County Councils' Holocaust Memorial Day Service which was an extremely poignant and moving event. The GCC Chairman Cllr Ray Theolodou and myself also visited the Three Choirs Vineyard in the far north of the Forest.

Sometimes, I'm afraid, that the extra GCC Civic duties (circa 40 since May last year) that I attend do sadly impact on my attendance at other "booked" meetings. I would particularly like to thank District Cllr Harry Ives for subbing for me at FoDDC on occasion.

Glos Talks - Mental Health

As GCC Vice-Chairman, I am more than happy to support the Glos Talks organisation in their campaign that encourages everyone to talk more openly about mental health and their mental health experiences so those who are struggling will seek help. The campaign is focusing its work on those groups of people that are at a higher risk of suicide and for those people stigma around mental health is a barrier to getting help when they need it.

To find more about Glos Talks please take a look at their web site.

Having attended the one day GCC Mental Health Training/awareness session, I intend to attend the forthcoming two day event. Invaluable.

Mini Town Centre Regeneration.

I'm delighted to report on the excellent entrepreneurial scheme by a local business that has taken place on the site of the old "Harrys' Bar" in Regents Walk Lydney. Office space has been tastefully created encompassing flexible, affordable terms, internet-ready, kitchen and w/c facilities, 24 hour access, a meeting room and a bike store - obviously with the soon to be completed Multi use path in mind ! Very well done on this initiative.

I have invited my GCC Cabinet colleague for business Cllr Lynden Stowe to Lydney in the near future. We will be visiting and meeting many local businessmen and women.

Ex Lydney Town Councillor Kevin White.

Kevin living now in Caerphilly, has left his local employment role and is now working with a Dementia organisation closer to home. I saw first hand just how passionate that Kev was on working with others against this most awful of diseases and wish the absolute best to him and his good lady for the future.

Highways.

31 Jan. After walking the extent of the Lydney Multi-Use Path with two Senior GCC Engineers. I met with Local Highways Manager Brian Watkins and Senior Highways Manager Clive Saunders. Town Clerk Dave Kent had already met with Brian and had discussed some areas of concern.

Brian, Clive and myself then drove around Lydney and Aylburton looking at our "problem" areas. The amount of rain and its ingress into surfaces is certainly causing concern, the actual extent of the damage will become clearer no doubt as spring arrives.

I have asked for a definitive quote on the Hams Road section in Town. I am also keen to relay the paved area from Lloyds' pharmacy to Greggs with Tarmacadam.

Keep feeding in the concerns either direct to GCC Highways or myself.

I'm pleased to report that the problems with the traffic light sequencing in the A48 bus lane approaching the Over roundabout has now been remedied by Highways England after much contact from GCC Officers.

Chepstow Transport Study.

Monmouthshire County Council are progressing a second phase of the study.

GCC Officers will keep me informed of developments.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

FoDDC are the only one of the Six Boroughs/Districts in Gloucestershire not to commit to CIL.

I remain committed in my eternal quest to set up a meeting between FoDDC and GCC.

(GCC Senior Officers Anyiam and Mead remain on standby)

Lydney Growth Bid. ("new" GCC Facilitation)

I will verbally update on this,

New Developments. (GCC Highways Development Management)

I will verbally update on the plethora of ongoing developments in relation to Highways.

Lydney Town Council " The Big Picture"

I fundamentally absolutely welcome this initiative and will be attending the launch.

British Gas Workings

I have been briefed by the GCC Traffic Management Unit and I know that LTC Clerk Dave Kent is also aware of the potential of significant disruptive long term work being carried around Lydney by British Gas that commences in Mar 20. I have advised Stagecoach South West MD Rupert Cox.

"Hot off the Press"

A £642,000 boost for bus services in the county announced by the Secretary of State for Transport in Westminster on 6 Feb is good news. The funds will augment the £3m that the County Council already spends on bus services in the county and help to protect and expand existing bus services in Gloucestershire.

(GCC supports over 100 bus services in the County - although over 90% of services are run commercially with no subsidy)

Separately GCC are working to enable two bespoke Rural Bus Schemes in the County. One will be in the North Cotswolds the other will be in the Forest of Dean.

I will elaborate and brief interested parties when the finite detail has been decided upon. At that point I will also convene a Forest of Dean Bus users group meeting.

“Hot off the Press 2”.

09 Feb. Following persistent and heavy rain, around 1200 ex LTC Cllr Rose Christoulides attempted to initiate the LTC sandbag tree. I was the first Cllr that she was able to contact and armed with the sandbag store key attended the problem area around 96 - 116 Lakeside Avenue. Assessing the situation with FoDDC Lydney East Cllr Claire Vaughan who also attended and local residents the area in question at that stage was well past and unsuitable for any reasonable intervention that sandbags could have provided, therefore, I did not further attempt to initiate the LTC sandbag tree.

The problem required the pumping out of the Attenuation Pond that Persimmon had created on the Oakdale Phase 2 Development. Rose had managed to contact FoDDC Flood Officer Laurence King and also Persimmon Site Manager James - who was trying to contact his operative who is responsible for the daily watch and maintenance of the Pond.

On seeing that the situation was fast deteriorating, in the interim taking advice from GCC colleagues, and the threat of household flooding was a real possibility I took the decision to ring the Fire Service, unfortunately and understandable in the adverse weather conditions the Fire Service could not commit to the situation as there was obviously no immediate threat to life.

Thankfully around 1400 the heavy rainfall was decreasing, with it the flooding threat.

With hindsight I firmly believe that the granting of Planning Permission on this location is both inappropriate and incompetent. I really wish that those in any way responsible at the LPA whether recommending or voting in favour of the application could have seen the situation and the distress that their actions is causing to our long term residents.

This type of situation will undoubtedly reoccur.

Rose and myself will be able to give a fuller brief at the next LTC Flood Meeting.

I would like to unequivocally thank Rose for all the work and interest she continues to carry out on consistently monitoring this situation in this part of Lydney, also the help and support from Cllr Vaughan. We were all literally soaked to the skin.

Rose reported later that someone from Persimmon had attended the actual site circa 1500, but, had not made contact with the residents whose homes were under threat.

Cllr Alan Preest.

GCC Vice-Chairman

GCC Planning and Infrastructure Champion.

Lydney, Feb 20.