



**Council**  
**24 June 2020**  
**Item 8 Leader's and Portfolio Holders'**  
**Statements**

**Joint statement from the Leader of Warwick District & Stratford on Avon District Councils**

[Taking a fresh look at local government in South Warwickshire](#)

The Stratford on Avon District Council Cabinet met informally with the Executive from Warwick District Council to explore ways to work together for the benefit of the people of South Warwickshire and indeed the wider County.

The purpose of these discussions was to consider the best way for our local government to evolve for the benefit of our residents ahead of an expected white paper in relation to devolution scheduled to be released by government later this year.

We already have successful experience of working together, through the South Warwickshire Health Improvement Partnership; the South Warwickshire Crime reduction partnership and Shakespeare's England, our destination management organisation which we jointly founded to promote our local tourism offer around the World. The two authorities share a number of characteristics and a large proportion of our residents live in one authority area and travel to work in the other.

As we look to the future of our communities across South Warwickshire now is the time to capture the lessons learnt from the current COVID crisis and review the way our Councils could better meet the needs of our residents, taking advantage of new opportunities that are emerging for our communities and businesses.

Local government is playing a significant role in positively addressing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our way of life. Supporting our businesses and communities as we adjust during this period of uncertainty, has required our Councils to embrace changes to the way we work.

Like so many other organisations at this time, our Councils are looking to be more agile and efficient, to address the emerging economic challenges and capitalising on the issues around the climate emergency, all the while providing the best possible services to you. There are also a number of opportunities which could be developed quickly including jointly procuring contracts; addressing a number of vacancies at senior officer level that could lead to the possibility of sharing posts across the two management teams, as well as the possibility of producing a joint Core Strategy / Local Plan for our communities to secure long-term benefits.

These initial discussions are at an early stage and would need to be subject to formal decisions at both authorities. However, our discussions will hopefully pave the way for a wider dialogue with other local government partners with the view of forming a common position for debate with central government as the anticipated devolution white paper comes forward, which is expected in the Autumn.

## **Portfolio Holder Development (Councillor Cooke)**

### **Building Control**

Warwick Building Control are in the process of securing the new Development for Kenilworth School and providing the Building Control Service. This is a great achievement as this site was previously awarded to an Independent Approved Inspector. The Scheme is due to change and we were asked if we could assist in the redesign of certain elements of the development in the interest of reducing overall build costs. We were able to promote that we were already working with Developer Morgan Sindall at the new Rugby Radio School Development and that we can remain competitive and practical when it comes to finding design solutions.

### **Planning Committee Back in Action**

The Council successfully delivered the first 2 full virtual Planning Committee meetings last week which included the consideration of some challenging and controversial cases. Whilst the meetings were not without technical challenge, everyone persevered, especially the Chairman who calmly kept his cool during the technical issues and at both meetings decisions were made on all of the items. There were, as is to be expected a number of learning points which have been identified and are being kept under review. Mr Leach feels he might have some solutions for some of the technical issues.

## **Portfolio Holder Finance & Business (Councillor Hales)**

### **Phased Market Return Plan**

Very positive feedback following the first food-only market in Warwick (23<sup>rd</sup> May) and Kenilworth (28<sup>th</sup>). Reviewing how these can be broadened out, following announcement by Prime Minister to re-open all markets in June (including for the sale of non-food and non-essential items). Government is using our work as a case study of good practice.

### **Local business grant funds scheme**

Business Grant Scheme has distributed over £30.5m to more than 2350 local businesses, which is over 92% of the funds that were distributed by central government to us. The Council was amongst the very first local authorities to commence these grants payments, and has continued to be amongst top local authorities in terms of allocating the funding in accordance with the scheme. This is a phenomenal achievement and I would like to thank all the hard work of officers, especially Paul Town.

In regards to the discretionary Business Grant Scheme has had 102 bids & the team are now working through those bids, with aim of funds being distributed as quickly as possible, while ensuring they follow the right audit process. Again many thanks to the team for their hard work & will keep members updated.

### **Town Centre Reopening**

WCC has also prepared some proposals for re-allocating road space to support social distancing and walking/cycling in all three town centres. Current situation is as follows:-

- **Leamington:** Road closures implemented on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> and have now been in place for a week. Very regular liaison with BID Leamington. A review meeting with WCC and BID scheduled for Friday 26<sup>th</sup>.
- **Warwick:** Road closures partially implemented 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup>. Remainder due imminently (constrained by (national) shortage of signing etc).
- **Kenilworth:** new proposal (20 mph along Warwick Road) has been proposed by WCC for implementation shortly.
- **All town centres:-**
  - o Marshalls to control street closures are in place for Leamington and Warwick. WDC has agreed that from today (22<sup>nd</sup>), WDC (Events Team) will take over running of this service.
  - o Streetscape improvements (bunting, banners, pedestrian signage, street dressing, additional cycle parking, etc) are in preparation. Will also include Acre Close in **Whitnash**.
  - o WDC website pages created to support town centre re-opening. More proactive promotional campaign planned once lessons are learned from the initial re-opening.

Teams of ambassadors will be working on the ground in each of the three towns over the next couple of weeks to support public confidence. This includes the Events Team, Rangers and staff from the Deployment Pool. Training of these has taken place in Leamington.

The team are working with other partners, including Shakespeare England & Stratford District Council, with regards to tourism and both Castles have now partially reopened, which is great news for the district.

## **2019/20 draft Statement of Accounts**

The Draft Statement of Accounts was published on website on 18 June. Whilst this is outside of the previous deadline of 31 May, it is well ahead of the new date agreed by the Government of end of August. In view of the current circumstances, and the challenge of completing the Statement of Accounts promptly, this an excellent achievement. This reflects the hard work of the Accountancy Team, and the contributions that need to be made from officers across the Council.

The Accounts are currently being audited, with the audited Statements of Accounts due to be reported to Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee on 19 August.

## **Council Finances**

Like all business and local authorities, the Council has been severely impacted financially as a result of the current pandemic. Income streams have been severely hit, notably parking fees, planning fees income from the Spa Centre and Pump Room. In addition council tax and business rates cashflow has been adversely impacted.

The Council has received £1.48m additional grant from the Government towards increased costs and reduced income. However, this one-off funding is totally insufficient to make up for the income losses that the Council is facing.

The overall impact continues to be studied. However, there is total uncertainty over how long the various income streams will be suppressed and when, if ever, they revert to their previous levels as the Country recovers from the pandemic.

Fortunately the Council does have some reserves which it can utilise in the short term to protect its position in 2020/21. However, as these reserves can only be utilised once, using the reserves now will impact on the Council's financial position for the future. Significant savings still remain to be found. Using the reserves in 2020/21 will undoubtedly make the Budget setting process for 2021/22 that much harder. In addition, the Council will have less resources to invest in various projects and initiatives.

Whilst the Council is in a better place financially than many local authorities, we as members will have to face difficult decisions in the future in terms of agreeing Council Budgets and the potential impact on services and projects.

## **Portfolio Holder Health & Community Protection (Councillor Falp)**

I would like to give thanks to all the Health and Community Protection team for their work during the Covid emergency.

Just a brief update on what they undertook since March. Co-ordinating and working in the Shielding Hub, producing policy within a daily changing regime that was used across the County, supporting our residents who had concerns, helping in awarding grants to Community groups, giving advice to businesses and enforcement. They were an important part of the health agenda and Marianne Rolfe is involved with Test, Track and Trace along with leading on the recovery plans for the District. Oh and they also wherever possible continued with the day job. This was a brilliant team effort and along with many other officers of this Council a credit to the District.

I would like to inform members that the CCTV project upgrade that had been on hold due to Covid and Falcons will commence again in July. The bell tower will not be touched until it is clear the Falcons have flown the nest. While there was a delay to the project we are now looking forward to progressing as fast as we can while still allowing for the special circumstances.

I know a number of you have had issues with residents reporting rat infestations. Can I just inform the Council that the statutory duty we have is to inform land owners they have a rat problem and that they need to deal with it. That includes District Council land and we employ a private firm to deal with our land. We would then take the land owners to court if they failed to comply. We have only one officer who gives advice and if he can, will visit the property/properties affected. There has been no charge but we did bring a paper to Scrutiny to look to start to charge for rat treatment. We currently charge for all other pest control. Visits have not been possible during the Covid crisis and a full risk assessment will be undertaken before we can consider the return of any visits.

## **Portfolio Holder Housing and Property Services (Councillor Matecki)**

Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to thank those officers who, on behalf of the Council, have worked so hard to ensure that all rough sleepers were offered accommodation to enable them to be safe during this Coronavirus Pandemic. I would also like to thank the staff of the County Council, voluntary sector and businesses, all of who have gone above and beyond to provide support, meals and goods to those coming off the streets.

Our next goal is to keep rough sleeping in our District a thing of the past. Officers have already found permanent accommodation for 8 former rough sleepers, another 6 are in the process of being matched for their new homes. The officers are now working to find more settled accommodation for the remaining 40.

Next I would like to report that at Planning Committee on 17 June 2020, Members resolved to grant planning permission for Council-led affordable housing at land East of Turpin Court, Leamington Spa. This allows the Council to deliver on its ambitions to develop affordable homes to address the District's need, whilst progressing toward the Council's wider strategy for carbon neutrality. The development will provide two 1-bedroom bungalows and four 2-bedroom properties along with associated infrastructure including electric charge points, plot-specific cycle storage and accessible parking bays.

The design of the buildings seeks to diversify the type of homes built in the District both in design and construction. The homes will be built using timber structurally insulated panels, produced by Innovare Systems Ltd. This partnership means that the new homes will be manufactured and built within the District, adopting modern methods of construction to deliver energy efficient, spacious homes of a modern design that strive toward net carbon zero.

## **Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood & Culture (Councillor Grainger)**

As you can imagine in this ever-changing situation has kept our Officers in Culture, Amenities and Neighbourhood Services fully occupied, not just with their normal WDC work now taking place from the new environment of their homes but for taking on many extra, varied and often very challenging new covid related activities

they have proved to be a fantastic team of which I'm very proud. I would like to thank everyone one of them for stepping up.

I'd also like to thank our contractors who have had to review and change their working methods to accommodate new restrictions but we got our public toilets open ahead of most LA's and apart from two weeks kept a full refuse and recycling service to our residents.

So far we have re-opened the boats on the Avon, the park cafes for take away drinks, food and ice creams, the fun golf in St Nicholas park, the bowling greens, the skate parks and as I'm sure you've all seen that our tennis courts are very busy, our car parks have been free during lockdown and remain so until 1<sup>st</sup> August. Officer are now busily trying to find extra space and time to accommodate the many local football teams who can now train not easy when school sites are still not available. With every Government announcement relaxing the lockdown our Officers are presented with a new set of issues to accommodate social distancing etc.

This week's announcements certainly came with some surprises as from the 4<sup>th</sup> July cinemas, museums, libraries and art galleries can open (we were expecting Gyms!) and David Guilding's team will be working as quickly as they can to open our culture offer to residents at the Pump Rooms. The new leaseholder of the Pump Room Café p should also relaunch toward the middle of July.

And form the 4<sup>th</sup> we can thankfully remove the tape from all play equipment and adult gyms!!!

During all this period of uncertainty the only real issue has been the rather sad instances of people leaving their litter for others to clear up. Thanks to the members of the public who have alerted us to the real problem's areas particularly in Newbold Comyn we are doing our best to keep the parks litter free – but everyone is responsible not just the council – please use a bin or better still take your litter home!!

While all this has been going on work has continued to on our major projects and we hope to bring to planning the application for both Castle Farm and Abbey Fields Leisure facilities in early autumn. There has been short delay due to the Covid situation and to ensure that final consultation with KTC and residents goes ahead as planned before submission.

Finally, this is the last week to have your say for both the Newbold Comyn and Country Park consultations; if you haven't yet completed the consultation document then please visit our website consultation closes 30<sup>th</sup> June - your views do matter