



Leader's announcements Council, 25th July 2018

I would like to begin by referring to the sad news of the deaths of Councillor Rod Wilson and former Councillor Mike Price. Both gave dedicated service to the District Council during their terms of office, and Mike in addition had the honour of serving as Mayor of Kidderminster. Funeral arrangements have now been circulated by Karen Walsh, and members will have paid tribute with a minute's silence at the start of tonight's meeting. The vacancy left following Rod's death will have to be filled as there are more than six months until the May 2019 elections, and the Returning Officer will confirm the date of the by-election in due course.

It is pleasing to see the good work that the Council and its staff do being recognised. Since the last meeting of Council, Brinton Park in Kidderminster and the QE II Jubilee Gardens in Bewdley have retained their Green Flag status. In addition Brinton Park has also received Green Heritage Site Accreditation for the management of the historic features. Opening Doors for Business, organised by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) with the support of the ReWyre Board, has won an award from the Careers Enterprise Company for its partnership between businesses and schools. The award will be displayed at Wyre Forest House.

We are making progress on a broad range of fronts with the economic regeneration of the district.

Roadworks are under way on Comberton Hill as the first phase of works prior to the new railway station, and we have invested £75k of Section 106 moneys towards the project. Cabinet agreed last week to extend for a further three years the successful local development order covering the South Kidderminster Enterprise Park, which allows businesses to build and extend various types of buildings without the need to seek planning permission. It is still the only LDO in Worcestershire.

The Cabinet has adopted a more "muscular" approach to sites that are slow in coming forward for development, being prepared to authorise use of compulsory purchase powers where appropriate. This month, we decided to give the owner of the former British Heart Foundation site in Market Street clear deadlines to obtain planning permission and commence development, failing which the Council will initiate the CPO process.

Cabinet has agreed the proposed approach for development of Phase 4 of Lion Fields, the Bromsgrove Street Car Park, and will consider the delivery strategy in November. And there is a recommendation before Council tonight to increase our financial contribution to the important scheme to bring Worcester Street back into use for traffic and improve its visual appeal.

The reputation we have built for our approach to economic regeneration and development depends in no small part on the contribution that Dean Piper has made in leading NWEDR over the last four years. He leaves us next month for a director role in his home council, Cannock Chase, and we wish him well for the future. Mike Parker has engaged Solace in Business to run a recruitment exercise for Dean's replacement and will also be making appropriate interim arrangements.

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Members will have seen that, despite 72% of companies voting in favour of a Business Improvement District for Kidderminster, the proposal failed because it did not secure a majority as measured by rateable value. Councillor Hardiman has issued a press statement to express disappointment with the result. There are many other areas including Worcester where BIDs have been successful. We will have to consider the way forward following this outcome.

We have continued to make progress with the capital portfolio fund. Since the last meeting of Council, we have announced the acquisition of our first block of property in Worcester Street and High Street, Kidderminster. Other purchases and investments are in progress. Cabinet last week approved purchase of an industrial unit that will form a new innovation centre for start up businesses. The Property and Investment Manager, Rupert Detheridge, moved on from the Council at the end of June. Mike Parker is procuring arrangements with an external company to support our property investment and portfolio management work, and I am pleased to confirm that this will be a joint approach with Redditch and Bromsgrove.

Cabinet in June agreed a revised timetable for preparation of the local plan and we envisage consultation on the pre-submission version of the plan in the latter part of 2018. The National Planning Policy Framework was issued yesterday. On our behalf, our MP, Mark Garnier, raised concerns directly with Ministers about the need for this to be published as soon as possible so that the timetable for the next stage of consultation is not jeopardised.

We are consulting on extending the public spaces protection order in central Kidderminster for a further three years as, regrettably, issues relating to street drinking continue to be a problem. Subject to consideration of the consultation responses, I expect that the order will be extended under strong leader powers during August.

I am pleased that we have had a number of new staff join over the last few months, including staff who have transferred from Community Housing Group as the homelessness support contract has been brought in house. The chief executive and I met them at a corporate induction and we have also held another round of corporate briefings for all staff. The main issues raised were reported in Wyred Weekly, and I would encourage all members to look at that each week on the intranet "Colin" – which has been superbly rebranded and redesigned recently by the web team.

Finally, I wish all members an enjoyable summer and, for those who are travelling in that period, bon voyage. As usual, there is a range of summer events held in our parks that members are encouraged to attend such as Bands in the Park, and the Play Day on Wednesday 1 August in Memorial Park, Lickhill. Full details can be seen at <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/events.aspx> and <http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/things-to-see-do-and-visit/wyre-forest-event-information/summer-activities-2018.aspx>

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Leader of the Council