

**Leader's announcements to Council  
22 September 2021**

This is the first face-to-face meeting of full Council since February 2020. Members have been provided with guidance on the special arrangements that have been made and the part that we can play, to keep all those attending the meeting as safe as possible.

The infection rates in Wyre Forest have fallen back somewhat since the sharp increase a couple of weeks ago. Today's figures show an infection rate of 239 per 100,000 of population compared to the Worcestershire average of 234 and the English average of 256. Locally, Redditch has the highest infection rate of 361 at present. The fact that people are still being hospitalised and, sadly, dying shows why we all have a part to play in keeping infection rates down.

Vaccination rates in Wyre Forest remain in line with or ahead of the Worcestershire average, with 88% of the adult population in Wyre Forest having received their first vaccination and 83% having received their second vaccination (Worcestershire: 87% and 82%). Working with the primary care sector and public health, we have supported and promoted two "drop in" vaccination sessions in Kidderminster, which have delivered over 400 vaccinations: the take up has been higher in Wyre Forest than in similar events elsewhere.

Progress continues with the preparatory steps that are essential prior to works "on the ground" for the Future High Streets Fund projects. The full planning application for the former magistrates' court was submitted in August and there was a successful public exhibition of the plans on the 9<sup>th</sup> September despite the weather. Another exhibition will be held soon so that those who were unable to attend can have a chance to see the plans. The Planning Committee is expected to consider the application before the end of the year.

I regret to report that the Government has still not informed anyone of its decisions on applications for the Community Renewal Fund. Colleagues will recall that bids had to be submitted by 18 June and decisions were due to be announced by the end of July. Seven weeks later, we are still waiting and there has been no indication that the deadline for successful applicants to spend the money will be extended beyond the 31<sup>st</sup> March.

Perhaps the changes in Ministerial portfolios will have caused additional delay. The new Secretary of State, Michael Gove, has been in office for almost a week. The name of his department has changed to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and some commentators have criticised the omission of reference to local government. No information has yet been forthcoming on when he expects to meet council leaders on a webinar, something that his predecessor did regularly over the last 18 months. Before Council meets in December, we will see whether the Government values local government in its announcements as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review on the 27<sup>th</sup> October.

## **Agenda Item No. 8**

The local plan for Wyre Forest will be the subject of meetings during October before we move to consultation on the main modifications. This will include consideration by the Local Plans Review Panel and Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to a Cabinet decision on the 13<sup>th</sup> October formally to approve the commencement of a consultation period of six weeks, from the 14<sup>th</sup> October to 26<sup>th</sup> November. I hope members have found useful the Q and A briefing note provided by officers and the briefing with the Council's planning barrister – if you did not attend, it is possible to view a recording of the briefing. I urge members to study the report carefully and there is a massive amount of material in the appendices, running to hundreds of pages. The consultation will be only about the main modifications: consultation on site allocations that featured in the plan approved by Council for submission to the Secretary of State in 2020 has already been undertaken and concluded. In closing, I would like to thank in particular staff in the forward planning, development management and legal teams for all their hard work in getting the plan to this stage of the process, an important step closer towards its adoption by Council in spring 2022.