Defford & Besford Parish Council

Chair's report for the Defford and Besford Annual Parish Meeting

This year your Parish Council has continued work to improve the amenities of the village.

Councillors: We are once again looking for new councillors to join the Parish Council, without the dedication of those local parishioners who volunteer to serve their community we will not be able to continue to make a difference for you all. If you're able to join and give back some of your time to support our Parish, then please contact the clerk.

Neighbourhood Watch and Smart Water: Following successful rollout last year, local homeowners can continue to sign up to SmartWater (using the remaining stock we have available). Parish Council Notice Boards show details of how to obtain a SmartWater kit.

These schemes act as a strong deterrent criminal, make us all safer in our communities and enable the police to return stolen items to their rightful owners should thefts occur.

Millenium Green: Although there have been no significant enhancements to the Millennium Green this year, we have continued to complete routine maintenance work including ensuring the green is safe for all to use. If parishioners, particularly younger residents have any suggestions for additional improvements we'd love to hear from you.

Lengthsman: The Parish Lengthsman, who alongside other routine work, has worked hard and diligently to ensure, as a priority, drains are clears, surface water directed off the highway, footways clear of debris and signage is clean and not obstructed The work is never ending especially with the changes in the climate, and we do our best to keep on top of priority work within the budget available. We'd also like to remind residents that if you have hedges or vegetation boarding footpaths or road signs it is your responsibility to keep them appropriately pruned.

Footpaths / Public Rights of Way: If you walk the footpaths and see a problem, please report it on the county council's website and let us know via the parish website as our footpath warden may be able to deal with it.

https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/council-services/travel-and-highways/report-road-or-path-issue/report-problem-public-right-way

Planning: We have continued to review planning applications trying to balance increasing housing stocks which will benefit the villages and those which we feel may cause issues. We are expecting more houses to be built within the village as is happening in every settlement in the country. We wish to encourage a range of properties to be built to support existing services and provide a thriving community for the future, but every application is carefully considered before any comments made.

One way the local community can have a stronger say in planning decisions is through the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan. We have allocated funds to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for our Parish but cannot not do this without the support and involvement of the community. We need a group of volunteers to work with us on its creation, if you can support then please send your details to the clerk. Without volunteer support from residents we are unable to progress.

Road safety: This year we have focussed on improving road safety around the village including the installation of new electronic speed signs in both directions on the A4104 through the village. We publish the speed data from these on our Parish website and continue to make representation with highways on the appropriateness of the current speed limits through the village.

I would like to finish my year as chair by saying a big thank you to the other councillors who are so supportive and work hard to improve our communities. Also, to the support provided to us by our District and County Councillors. Finally on behalf of the whole Parish Council I'd like to thank Debra Lamont and Gareth Marshall, who have recently stood down, for their many years of service and support.

BESFORD & DEFFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING May 2026

Wychavon District Council Report

The story of the last municipal year and the coming year for Besford & Defford residents from Wychavon's viewpoint.

During the year Wychavon has continued and will continue to serve Eckington through running an efficient council as expected by residents. Unfortunately, the Reform lead County Council has tried to undermine this by increasing their share of your council tax by 9%. Whist the Conservative county councillors opposed this massive increase It was disappointing that the Labour county councillors and the Liberal Democrat county councillors did not oppose the increase.

PLANNING

The planning service is terribly busy with many applications coming in across the district. The applications for the Eckington Ward were as follows

	Besford	Birlingham	Defford	Eckington	Strensham	Total
Planning Applications	10	14	11	27	12	**74**
Approved	8	11	7	21	7	**54**
Refused	0	1		1	0	**2**
Withdrawn	0	1		3	0	**4**
Pending decision	2	1	4	2	5	**14**

The review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan which started before Covid has now been completed and adopted by the Council. This means the Council has a five year land supply. Whether this continues depends on changes to housing allocations the Government may announce over next few months. The Infrastructure Development Plan within the SWDPR will ensure that based on current housing numbers will be sufficient to the support services that residents will need.

Two planning issues stand out as being exciting challenges.

- The process and plans to develop the fire damaged Raven site in Droitwich.
- The demolition and redevelopment of central Evesham following Wychavon's purchase of the Riverside Centre.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

During the year Wychavon supported the creation of a South Worcestershire unitary authority to run the services currently operated by both the county council and Wychavon council. This approach had support of our residents.

Whether this happens is in the hands of the government and will be announced in June or July coming. The Government will decide if the South Worcestershire unitary authority goes ahead or a single unitary for the whole of Worcestershire.

On the basis change is coming this is the timetable.

	Wychavon Councillors	Worcestershire County Councillors	Unitary authority
Election 6th May 2027	None	None	Yes
	Wychavon May 2027 elections postponed, existing Councillors continue in office until 31st March 2028		Councillors elected become the shadow authority with powers to prepare the Unitary Authority to be ready to come into existence on 1st April 2028
31st March 2028	Wychavon district Council abolished.	Worcestershire County Council abolished	
1st April 2028			Vesting Day Unitary Authority comes into existence on 1st April 2028

There will be parish council elections on 6th May 2027

WYCHAVON FINANCES

Wychavon budget remains healthy and can cope whether or not reorganisation happens and the budget has focus on updating the We are Wychavon Plan to improve lives across the district through three priorities: People, aim Place and Environment. To this end...

- Wychavon's council tax was frozen this year and will be frozen next year.
- A new fund for residents and businesses has £5 million available and in June there will be proposals on how this is to be spent.
- The Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund has stopped but Wychavon have set aside £500,000 for small grants to support community groups, enhance biodiversity and improve the energy efficiency of local buildings.

Future Delivery of Waste and Street Cleansing Services

Our current contractors FCC had chosen not to renew the current contract. Options have been reviewed for service delivery after 31st March 2028, when the contract ends, and it has been decided that bringing the service in-house was the best way forward. This approach gives the greatest flexibility for any future unitary council to make changes. The new service will cover waste collection, street cleansing and food waste collection.

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Defford cum Besford Annual Parish meeting

Adrian Hardman

Councillor for the Bredon Division

20/05/2026

It is a genuine privilege and honour to represent the Bredon division. I'm proud of this area, proud of the strength of our communities, and proud of the way residents care deeply about where they live. That pride is exactly why I believe it's important to speak honestly with you tonight.

From April, residents across Worcestershire have seen their council tax rise by 8.98%. That is a substantial increase, and I fully recognise the pressure this places on households at a time when many people are already struggling with the cost of living. This is a stark contrast to Wychavon District who froze the tax this year.

What concerns me most is that this increase is being asked of residents without Worcestershire County Council having a current corporate plan in place. A corporate plan should set out a clear vision for the Council: what our priorities are, how decisions are made, what outcomes we are aiming for, and how success is measured. Without that, it becomes much harder for residents to see what they are being asked to pay more for, and how these decisions fit into a long-term strategy.

The main driver behind the council tax increase is pressure on demand-led services—particularly Adults' Social Care, Children's Services, SEND provision, and transport. These are vital services, supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our county.

At present, around 76.5% of the Council's budget is spent on services supporting roughly 2.5% of the population. Those residents deserve care, protection and dignity—but the scale of this spend shows how critical it is that we get planning, prevention and early intervention right.

My concern is that we do not currently have a clear, published strategy for how demand in these services will be managed or reduced over time. Without that, we risk repeating the same cycle year after year: rising demand, rising costs, emergency savings, and higher council tax. Residents deserve better than short-term firefighting. Added to this tale of woe, Reform are engaged in an internal power struggle and have decided to change leader and Cabinet at the Council in May. This has triggered a degree of instability in my case as I was going to be Cabinet member for Finance in a new coalition of various parties. This not taking place now.

I was Chair of the Hereford and Worcester Local government Pension fund, and chair of the Investment committee, and we have made progress over the past 3 years and now have £4.8 billion under management. Following our triannual valuation we have been able to reduce again the employer's contribution rate to 14%. We have as a fund an aim to reduce it to the same level as employees. This reduction of some £2.4 M

made up 24% of Reforms saving this financial year! I was pleased to see the Lords resist mandating by Government in the Pensions Bill. It is not their money but our schemes members, underwritten by our Council Taxpayers. Alas I am not longer Chair, but after more years than I wish to recall on this committee I leave at the top.

Moving on to matters closer to home; many of you will be aware of the ongoing pressure in the context of significant planned housing growth—figures of around new homes is the government target set for Wychavon. Housing growth of that scale brings real consequences for the County Council: pressure on school places, increasing health demand, rising home-to-school transport costs, and strain on infrastructure. Families feel these pressures long before solutions are delivered. The new local plan sadly includes 1000 new homes in Bredons Hardwick, which will add to more traffic through Eckington. The Tewkesbury Garden Town did not make the governments list but appears to be continuing even though Junction 9 is 20% over capacity, and no solution to the A46 is in sight. On top of these cross-border numbers, we will be seeing a large new town by Junction 7, and this will lead to more traffic, which could well be wanting to travel south. This why I continue to search for a solution to the Eckington bridge question, and am pleased we have the funding to consider solutions.

As is normal, after such a wet winter we are seeing some potholes, but I keep pressing on road resurfacing, and last month we surface dressed in the area to keep up standards. The most pressing issue is dealing with the back log in solving drainage collapses in the area. I also have had a social care issue in the village, which has been resolved. The changes in Education appear to be on track, and I was pleased to be able to get the school fundraising committee a grant for their plans. I am pleased that we have been able to cut right back to the hedge line on the A road stretch down to the Bowbrook, and thank the Parish Council for its efforts to improve road safety. We have also launched Demand Response Buses, which I hope is solving some of the issues raised last year.

The Government seems to be determined to create a series of unitary councils on the grounds of efficiency and cost saving, with an elected mayor over a sub region. I have enormous respect for the staff working in challenging services, and I recognise the scale of the issues councils face nationally but this change is influencing Worcestershire as I see talent is moving either out of public service or to calmer Council waters.

I am proud to represent Bredon Hill, I will continue to raise and try to solve the issues you raise with me on your behalf. Thanks for the trust you place in me to represent this wonderful area.

Adrian.