**Milwich Borough Council Ward Member Report to Parish Councils**

**for members, meetings and wider distribution. March 2022**

Greetings to everyone in these rather dark times. This is my latest snapshot of goings on at the council that may be of parish interest. There will be a great deal I have left out this month. Do get in touch at any time.

**Ukraine support and Serco proposals for an immigrant centre:** the borough is well prepared to receive and welcome Ukrainian refugees. The Shirehall and Gatehouse in Stafford are both lit up every night in the Ukrainian national colours of blue and yellow. We have accommodated our share of Syrian and Afghan families within the borough and delighted to have done so. At the same time, I have had large numbers of local people contacting me about the Serco (government) proposal to house 500 single male immigrants from across the channel via traffickers - at the Beacon University site. The Borough Council has had no prior notification and the Leader has written to the Secretary of State to express our displeasure. Serco say they are proposing to organize a community meeting, but I have no date and cannot contact their communications company – pretty unimpressive communications. Would anyone receiving information from Serco let me know please.

**Parish skip service:** should have restarted or be restarting soon. Please ask users not to tip commercial waste as it is a significant added cost to the service. Risk assessments are being produced which we would ask Parishes to assist in completing (eg) manual handling, traffic management etc.

**Domestic rates:** the borough increase this year is just 1.9%, well below most other authorities. You must add the county council and fire service rises to the figure that you are eventually landed with.

**Queen’s Jubilee Plans:** the Mayor is to host a tea party for anyone born in 1926, the year of the Queen’s birth. There will be similar tea parties across the country**. If you know of anyone who will be 96 and would like to join in will you let the Mayor’s office know, or tell me and I’ll pass it on. June 2nd!**

We are asking all parishes and community organisations running events for the Jubilee, to let us know so that your event can be publicised on a special website for the celebration weekend.

**Stafford in the World:** will be held in Victoria Park on June 2nd. Please alert local businesses, charities and community groups to the opportunity to join in the day. Contact is: Ella Smith esmith@staffordbc.gov.uk

**Regeneration of Stafford Market Square**: the reason so many events will be taking place in Victoria Park is that the Market Square is to be re-laid and restored, under our Future High Streets Fund award, to make it fit to take large scale events. The work begins after the Ironman event on June 12th.

**Learning in Stafford:** there are very exciting initiatives taking place in Stafford, now dubbed the Learning Town. Staffordshire Universityis formally opening their £6m new Health Innovation Centre at Blackheath Lane. It includes a state-of-the-art centre for training, medical research and cutting edge technologies. Newcastle and Stafford FE College has received a further £21m investment for their exciting skills and innovation centre, with a focus on STEM subjects and construction and engineering, offering higher degrees validated by Keele University. Wolverhampton University has a firm presence in the town now and heading up the ‘Learning Town’ Initiative to promote learning in all its forms, from cradle to grave. Look out for publicity on this.

**Welcome Back Fund Business Support**

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| This is the last chance for tourism and hospitality businesses to apply for a post covid grant under the scheme. It ends in a week. Email economy@staffordbc.gov.uk We have handed out over £50m to tourism and leisure businesses in the borough through the covid crisis. The council has also received a grant of £120k to promote tourism activities; and for new benches in Victoria Park, bunting and lights to cheer the town centres of Stafford, Stone and Eccleshall. And look out for the Beautiful Borough campaign to get people into town and to the borough.**Cannock Chase AONB Annual Conference: ‘Changing Perceptions and Behaviours’.** This conference attracted 140 participants. It was excellent, very thought provoking. The presentations are available now on the Cannock Chase AONB website and well worth the time – some great photographs too. The theme was access in a protected landscape. Presentations focused on initiatives underway or planned: by means of sense of place; messaging and communication strategies; behavioural change campaigns; education and the use of the arts and culture: connecting people to nature.  We heard how England’s most popular protected landscape, the Lake District National Park - is responding to challenging visitor pressures. **AONB Sustainable Development Fund**: Since 2006 the Fund has helped to bring environmental, social and economic benefits across the Chase through supporting projects to safeguard and enhance the Chase’s nationally important landscape and natural beauty. These projects have benefitted the Chase’s beautiful landscape, its special wildlife, rich culture, heritage, and community, and with continued community involvement in the scheme will go on to do so for years to come. If you have any ideas for community projects that support our core purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Cannock Chase, please do get in touch with the AONB Team. We are particularly interested in hearing from artists, sculptors, performers, photographers, and writers looking to develop inclusive arts projects linking people with our special landscape. Contact is: richard.harris1@staffordshire.gov.uk |

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