

## **Cllr Paul McLain**

At the TBC Executive Committee Meeting held on 22 April 2026, it was agreed to undertake a Borough-wide Community Governance Review of parish arrangements. The purpose of the review is to enable the Council to consider what, if any, changes are needed to parish governance arrangements - to ensure they reflect the identity and interests of local communities and are as effective and convenient as possible.

While the last review was only undertaken some five years' ago, the impact of new residential development in many areas (built/approved/projected) has led to population changes and shifts in 'natural settlements' and concerns that existing councillor numbers may not be sufficient to ensure efficient and effective representation of parishes. In this regard, the Borough Council has already received several requests/enquiries from parish councils for changes to parish arrangements (boundary revisions and increases in councillor numbers).

In addition, given the current local government reorganisation and a likely move to one or two unitary councils across Gloucestershire, it is vital for parish arrangements to be up-to-date and sound, as parish areas will be used as the building blocks for any new warding arrangements at unitary level (as part of the subsequent electoral review that will be undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England).

The review is now underway. The Terms of Reference set out the matters that can be considered under the Review (such as boundary alterations, warding, councillor numbers), the current advisory scale used to determine councillor numbers, and the overall Review timetable. The Terms of Reference also set out the key considerations in formulating proposals - and any proposals for change should seek to ensure that future community governance arrangements will:

- be reflective of the identities and interests of the community in your area; and
- facilitate effective and convenient local government.

By way of background, as parish colleagues may have seen from the recent GALC briefing, the House of Lords **voted in favour of a major amendment to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill** that strengthens parish governance across England. While the government has opposed the amendment, its supporters continue to reinforce the importance of parish and town councils as the foundation of local democracy. The bill will now proceed to the Third Reading in the House of Lords before returning to the House of Commons for consideration of Lords' amendments.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) provides the financial plan for the Council for the period 2027/28 – 2029/30. It sets out the expected level of funding available to support the delivery

of services, the likely cost of providing those services, the growth in service budgets that will be necessary to meet additional demands and the gap that exists between the funding available and the cost of service delivery. The strategy concludes with the plans that the Council has to close that funding gap. Whilst it is anticipated that the Council will cease to exist from April 2028, this has not been formally confirmed and therefore the council must plan its medium term financial future as if it was to continue as an independent organisation. Even with confirmation that the council will be abolished, the medium term financial strategy will support the successor body in planning for the financial challenges it will face in its early years. The council could face a deficit in its base budget of £3.5m in the next 3 years. This is based upon a set of assumptions around funding that are uncertain but are the most likely given previous government announcements and consultations. The primary reductions are due to the government's changes in business rate retention, meaning a projected 2.1m redistribution of TBC business rates away from the borough, cessation of the recycling credits initiative, new resource requirements being placed on the council such as Biodiversity Net Gain and the Renters Rights Act, additional inflationary pressures including the Iran and Ukraine wars. It is worth noting that a sustained 1% increase in projected inflation would cost the council an additional £207,000 per annum for each year that inflation remains higher than forecast. The additional cost is based on an increased cost of products and services, higher pay awards, partially offset by an increased income from fees and charges.

New GOV.UK **guidance has been published to support neighbourhood planning**, including practical advice on implementation, monitoring, and working with partners through memoranda of understanding. This will be particularly useful for councils with adopted neighbourhood plans looking to move into delivery.

From 1 April 2026, most **planning appeals** decided by written representations will follow a simpler and faster process, using only the evidence submitted at application stage. This change aims to speed up decisions and reinforce the importance of providing complete information upfront. Councils should be aware that opportunities to introduce new evidence at appeal stage will be limited, making early engagement and robust responses more important than ever.

### **Cllr Jill Smith**

The New Mayor, Cllr George Porter, was invested last Tuesday with myself as Deputy Mayor. We started our duties the following night with a Full council meeting and Cllr Porter in the chair.

All the committees and Portfolio holders for the coming year were agreed.

It was agreed that the Council will fully support the Debate not Hate Campaign, which emphasises that healthy democracy depends on open, robust debate conducted with respect. It is important to foster a political culture that promotes a kinder, more respectful way of working. This extends to the wider population, where civility and reducing abuse in politics are encouraged. This comes in line with marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jo Cox's murder, and political parties are marking this occasion together. Politicians and Councillors should not be the subject of attacks or abuse due to doing the job they were elected to do.

The housing and homeless strategy 26/28 was approved, as also was the spending plan for the use of the homeless rough sleeping and domestic abuse Grant 26/27.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy was approved. This set out the expected funding to support the level of TBC services required. This takes the Council up to April 28, when the Council is thought not to exist, but this hasn't been formally confirmed. TBC will be in as good a place as possible to hand over to the new authority. There are still lots of unknown variables, so the accountants have done the best they can with the unknowns.

The TBC funding fair took place to highlight the help available for community projects on 29<sup>th</sup> April. It was well attended. Support is available for community groups, charities, and Town and Parish Councils, to be 'funding ready', carry out funding searches, look at eligibility for funding types before application, and to review applications with the applicant. The officer to contact for help is Helen Wolfson or Sarah Dittmann, community funding officers on [communityfunding@teWKesbury.gov.uk](mailto:communityfunding@teWKesbury.gov.uk)

The Planning Department is still running with several vacancies and is actively trying to recruit.

A lot of time and effort of the whole council is still going into moving towards one or two Unitary Councils.

### **Parish Chairman**

Another busy month. Aren't they all!

A meeting has taken place with Adam Gooch, Senior Planning Officer for the three Council Strategic Local Plan. Details of this meeting have already been circulated, but the key issues are summarised below:

- Responses to the previous consultation exercise continue to be evaluated.
- It is intended to consult Borough Cllrs shortly but there will not be a further round of public consultation.
- It is intended to steer the Plan through for the three Councils' approval by the end of 2026 following which it would be submitted to Independent Public Examination in 2027.
- The Call for Sites submissions are currently being sieved for suitability. All those submitted in Highnam are considered potentially suitable. That is not to say though they will all be allocated for development.
- The concept of a New Settlement west of the Highnam Roundabout coalescing with a similar sized settlement in Churcham is very much under active consideration. Discussions about this have been held with FoDDC Members and Officers. Much will hinge on the feasibility of providing rail and park and ride facilities.
- A joint meeting with FoDDC and TBC officers and members, Parish Cllrs, Co Cllrs and MP is to be arranged for early July specifically to focus on the composite new settlement concept.

A further meeting of the six parish council chairs has taken place to focus on the New Settlement issue. An invoice in the sum of £3,623 net of VAT has been received from the commissioned planning consultant. Churcham PC will initially pay this but are seeking contributions from the other five councils. *How much do we wish to contribute?*

It has been agreed that the formal name of this new grouping should be the Severn Parishes Alliance.

A draft memorandum of understanding is being circulated and will be submitted to our June meeting for consideration.

On 30 April Spring, Solar Farm promoters, held a presentation regarding their plans for a major new site at Linton Farm between the railway line and the river. A planning application is likely to follow by the end of this year.

Without prejudice discussions have been opened with the Two Mile Lane and Lassington solar farm promoters with a view to establishing community benefit funds for both schemes. We continue to wait for these planning submissions to come to TBC planning committee for determination.

Witness statements have been provided to the Environment Agency to support whatever legal action they propose to take regarding the illegal tip site at the rear of Over Farm.

The first cut of highway verges around the village have been undertaken by Greenfields., our newly commissioned contractors. A review of their performance is in hand.

A formal complaint has been made to Gloucestershire County Council's legal team regarding their lack of action in progressing our Village Green application in relation to Land Off Maidenhall. A substantive response is awaited.

Following the expiry of the previous licence last November, Tewkesbury Borough Council are currently drafting a new Management Licence for Lassington Wood and John's Wood for our consideration.