

HERE AND NOW in HUNGERFORD

No. 28 in a series of regular briefings from the Council

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A THICK RED LINE

I suppose that I should now expect long delays in any plan or proposal that has to travel through the corridors of power in WBC. After all it took them over six years to produce their Strategic plan that was to indicate their plans for the period 2010 to 2026. We still await publication of their outline proposals for housing development in Hungerford. When this is announced, there will be a further period of consultation before any actual decision is taken.

On a more mundane level, it took 4 years to reach agreement to have the Brown Tourist signs placed in our area. It now seems that the same speed of inaction is affecting the construction of the promised pedestrian crossing in Bridge Street. After a shaky start to the procedure requiring BT to move some cables, it was the generous offer by District Cllr James Podger to give up a portion of his garden, that seemed to clear the hurdles preventing work. We then learned that this offer, whilst accepted, required legal work but that should have been completed and the crossing installed by Spring.

I know that it was easy to have missed summer but it has been over 3 months since that deadline was missed.

However, in the world of “you couldn’t make it up” that WBC live in, we are told that reference to the Land Registry shows that there is a dispute over the actual ownership of the footpath. It appears that the thickness of the Land Registry’s pencil is at the heart of the dispute. We can only hope that someone has offered them a sharpener.

NEW FACE ON OUR TEAM

Rob Chicken will be known to many in our town, and his presence on the Council will add much to our ability to deal with the issues of today and tomorrow. His background in business will be especially useful in working to attract more companies to our town.



HUNGERFORD 2050

If you have read my piece in the latest edition of Chain Mail, you will have seen that I was advocating that we should be planning for 2035, in the light of my observations on the timescale used by WBC, perhaps we should be looking at 2050 in our forecasts.

I predict that one of the major issues then, as now, is that of parking. With a number of property owners in the station area now planning development there, it will not be long before the temporary Car Park on the Oakes site, will not be available. The need to find alternative sites for the vehicles is now urgent and your Council will be addressing this once again

in the coming months. I reiterate my own (personal) suggestion that the land north of Charnham Park is eminently suitable for such a facility but please let me have your suggestions that we could consider.



A MAGNET FOR TRADE

Hungerford is not alone in struggling to increase the ‘footfall’ or even to maintain the success of the past. Many visitors, who ‘find’ us, declare how pleasant the town is and enjoy the ambience that exudes. However it is difficult to promote this invisible virtue. Undoubtedly the antiques trade does attract a host of likeminded punters but a town cannot live on one aspect alone.

We have a number of independent shops offering goods that are not available in the major chains. But there are gaps in the market place which if filled might turn the tide; I am sure you have a personal list of what is missing. Please let me have your ideas that could be addressed in the Chamber of Commerce.

Furthermore if more of those who are already here, were to consider different opening hours, including Sunday trading this might be another positive factor.

“THE HEART OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS”

It is not just a coincidence that your Council is promoting our town as such, but a deliberate attempt to refocus the attention of potential visitors to the beautiful area in which it sits. Whilst Hungerford itself has many attributes, the fact that other great attractions exist in the NWD within easy driving distance, make our town a natural base. If you are unfamiliar with some of these, which include the World Heritage site of Avebury, please pick up a leaflet from the Council office and broadcast the message to friends and family

Your Council is also now working with other towns along the A4 from Hungerford through to Bath to create a Tourist Route.

No, we are not looking to build a new road but to build on the history and attractions along and beside the A4 as it exists today. Having recently returned from north Devon and discovered that the A39 there is now described as The Atlantic Highway, it would seem that there is a lot of mileage in developing the concept of a “Regency Coach Road” that would siphon off some of the M4 traffic to the benefit of an extended community. With so many prospective partners involved, it is unlikely to happen overnight but under the coordination of the Visit Wiltshire team, we hope to launch the route in 2017.

Watch this space.

- Cllr Martin Crane, OBE, Town Mayor of Hungerford