

Delivering for the Eccleshall area

Community News

It's Easter – and we've managed to make it to my second local Newsletter – "Delivering for the Eccleshall Area", covering things that I have been working on that may be of interest in Eccleshall, Adbaston, Chebsey and Cotes Heath and Standon residents. I hope that you find the changes made to this Newsletter make it easier to read, but just as informative, as to a small part of the work that has been undertaken in support of the local area and people living here. Spring is firmly upon us, along with the Easter holidays with families off on holiday, please can I wish you 'all the best'.

Norton Bridge Archaeological Finds

The £250m work to create a brand new rail junction at Norton Bridge, that started in August 2013 and is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2016 has achieved many things including the creation of 11 new bridges and the movement of one million tonnes of earth.

It also found a wooden butter churn lid, which has been dated back to the Saxon period - between 715 – 890AD. Many of these finds have quite rightly been sent to The Potteries Museum in Stoke on Trent, for logging and preservation and then they will be put on display to the public.

In addition a small number of ancient bottles have been retained in Stafford and it is hoped that these will be put on display at The Ancient High House so that these important finds can remain and be seen in the local area that they were unearthed in.



Specialist track laying equipment at Norton Bridge – as part of the laying of 10Km of new track

Once the work has been completed at Norton Bridge, high speed trains will be separated from slower local services and freight, which will reduce congestion and allow the introduction of new services, without which the West Coast Mainline would have been at capacity by 2017.

Eccleshall Toilet Area

The Eccleshall Toilet area has long been a dark and dank place in the centre of the town.



Eccleshall Toilet Area in Spring

The most attractive part of the area has been the mature trees surrounding it, but they had become diseased with a tree canker and had slowly been cut back to reduce the spread.

Based on the latest tree survey three of them needed felling, which has provided the ideal opportunity to look at plans to open up the whole toilet area and create something a bit less like 'a black hole'.

In conjunction with the Parish Council, the Eccilians and County Councillor Frank Chapman, a plan was agreed with the Borough Council undertaking the work to open up of the whole area and removal of low level shrubs – and obviously the diseased trees.

This has made an immediate impact in that the area is now so much more accessible and light and this should make the whole area more attractive and convenient to use, whilst also making the centre of town a much more attractive area, within the Conservation Area.

It is proposed to put a tree into the central space to make it a feature.

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Eccleshall Road Names

With the creation of any new housing and supporting road network, these roads ultimately need naming. And that is true for the new houses being built along the Stafford Road.

The original thought was to name these after Rare Breed Sheep – although to anyone not an aficionado of the ‘Longhorn’ or the ‘Shorthorn’ that might have been far from memorable.

Instead, following liaison between both the developers of the site and the Borough Council, sense has prevailed and instead Eccleshall Parish Council, in consultation with members of the Historical Society and community, has been able to put forward their ideas for suitable road names.



An example of the traditional trades being remembered in local street naming

These have been based on traditional rural enterprise, including :-

- Wheelwright Drive
- Farrier Gardens
- Cartwright Walk
- Blacksmith Close
- Saddler Grove
- Stagecoach Way

I am pleased that the developers of the site have accepted that the local people of the area are best equipped to come up with suitable names for their area.

Road names are being discussed for other areas to be developed in Eccleshall and this includes themes of local Bishops linked to the area or local teachers linked to the school.

The convention however is to name roads only after people that have been deceased, so it is unlikely that any road will be named after any existing or recent academic.

Planning Enforcement

Sometimes planning permission is not required to modify someone’s property – whether it is a commercial property or someone’s home.

But in many cases it is.

The planning system has recently been changed in an attempt to help alleviate the country’s housing shortage, with an aim of building 250,000 new homes each year for the next five nationally. The equivalent target is building a minimum of 10,000 homes between now and 2031 in the Stafford area – or 500 new homes per year.

Supporting appropriate development that is sympathetic to the local area is a key part of the work undertaken locally.

The planning work is largely invisible until a planning application for inappropriate development is submitted which affects a lot of people. Although it is only possible to argue against development when there are clear planning reasons for the application to be turned down.

Another part of the planning work is to ensure that developments that are undertaken without the appropriate planning permission are resisted. This is because local people don’t get the opportunity to comment on the development – and nor do the statutory authorities – when the proper planning process is not followed. And equally building is not as tightly controlled to modern day standards.

So in short it is always best to ask the Planners at the Borough whether planning permission is required before starting work.

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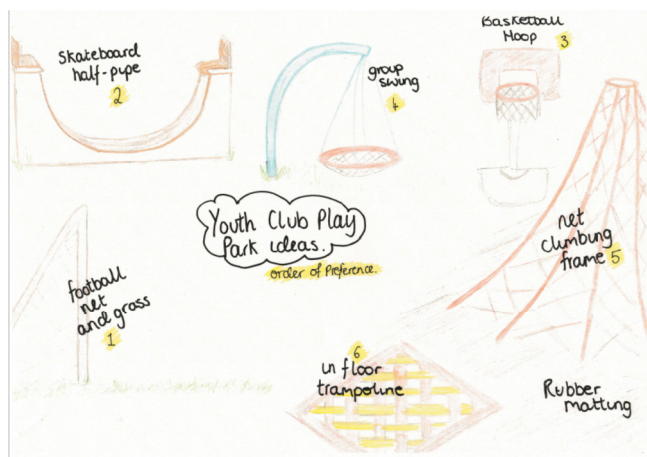
Eccleshall Play Areas

For a number of years work has been going on to secure improved play facilities for both younger children as well as teenagers in Eccleshall. Finding the most appropriate location and target age group has been extremely challenging, such that after years on this subject progress has been slow and hard won.

There is little to no public money available for new 'local play areas' because the play areas that capture and hold the interest of children today are the largest ones – like the one in Victoria Park or Wildwood Park in Stafford – and they require significant funding.

With the Stafford Road housing development will come significant new facilities for children of all ages, including toddlers and teenagers play facilities as well as a fenced multi use games area for ball sports.

Following consultations arranged at the local school and with the YoYo Youth Club, the key area that is missing from new play facilities in Eccleshall relates to wheeled sports.



Schematic from Eccleshall's YoYo members of Play Facilities sought for local area

And many meetings have been held with developers and land owners to try and overcome this deficiency, as an area for wheeled sports – like a skateboard park – requires sufficient space around it to ensure that it does not become a nuisance to near neighbours. Ideally this would mean that any skateboard park was not surrounded by houses and maybe was located on the edge of town.

These discussions to find a suitable site have run aground as they have come up against development policy and in some cases these discussions are identifying some of the flaws and inflexibilities in the current planning systems.

That said, we will continue to work to try and find a solution that works for all parties, without letting any solution involve more houses or risk being a nuisance to near neighbours.

Wider Borough Council Work

Stafford's First in Staffordshire

Stafford committed back in September 2015 to offer shelter and support to some Syrian Refugee families. The Borough has been the first area in the whole of Staffordshire to deliver on its commitment and welcome in the Syrian Refugees and their families, such that by the end of April we will have delivered on our commitment. In what has been a collaborative approach with the County Council and the local Health Service amongst others to ensure that those arriving will be properly supported whilst in the UK.

These families will have come directly from the refugee camps on the Syrian borders and have been interviewed prior to arriving in Stafford, to ensure that we can provide all of the specialist support – whether it be healthcare, education or housing – to meet their needs.



At West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership with Richard Harrington MP – Secretary of State Responsible for Refugees

I have also been looking at sensible and suitable ways of taking up the offers of many people to support the refugees in Stafford.

For anyone interested in knowing a little more about the crisis, details can be found at :

www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/syria-war-refugee-crisis

Stafford's Employment High

Unemployment in Stafford remain at a historic low of just 0.8% with a fall of 34 people in the last month, down to just 540 people out of work and claiming out of work benefits. This is a reduction of over 1,300 since March 2013.

Full data sets are available from the following location :
www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157178/report.aspx

Stafford’s Domestic Violence Refuge – Operational

A ten year journey by the people supporting Stafford’s victims of domestic violence has entered a new phase after the new Women’s Refuge opened its doors in February.

This paved the way for women and their families to be accommodated in a modern, purpose built facility that allows them to stay together as a family unit in a secure and safe environment, so that they can receive the best possible support.

Following this Newsletter’s first edition, a number of people contacted me to offer Staffordshire Women’s Aid their help and support. This in part has led to the starting of a joint working relationship between Staffordshire’s women’s Prison, where both partners can offer each other significant support and value.



I have been in dialogue with the Under Secretary of State for Women, Caroline Dinenage MP, to champion some of the work in this area. And I am pleased that the specific issue of domestic violence continues to gain a better understanding and has been raised in many different places, even by The Archers.

If you want to contact Staffordshire Women’s Aid in confidence, they run a twenty four hour help line at :-



Supported Accommodation

With some local changes to funding regimes, a number of supported living schemes, including Lichfield House and Jubilee Court locally, have been forced to close. However with some sensible actions we have ensured that the impact on people in the Borough has been limited and certainly no one has been made homeless as a result of these closures.

However, there remains an issue for future provision that similar facilities need funding centrally in a sensible and supportive way, for some of the most vulnerable in society and I recently had the opportunity to take this up with both the Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government, Greg Clark MP and the Chairman of the Local Government Association, Councillor David Hodge.

This issue will not sort itself out without significant support and certainly not for the next nine to twelve months at least. Local Stafford MP, Jeremy Lefroy is also pressing the case on behalf of Borough-wide residents.

The Coming Together of Agencies for Croxton

The County Council’s Local Community Fund has supported 676 projects in the last twelve months, including one in Croxton - to install a new defibrillator at the petrol station in Croxton on the B5026.

This has been supported through the coming together of joint funding agencies including Staffordshire County Council, West Midlands Ambulance Service, Eccleshall’s First Responders as well as the local Broughton and Croxton Jubilee Fund.



Croxton Service Station is the latest location to get a defibrillator as part of the network of units locally – all designed to save lives

This latest defibrillator has added to the strong existing network of defibrillators at Fairoak; Bishops Offley; and those in Eccleshall and more further afield in Swynnerton, Yarnfield, Chebsey and Norton Bridge.

Westminster Trip

In early November 2015, I took a group of local people to visit the Houses of Parliament in an attempt to make democracy more available to everyone and transparent.

The day was well attended and the group were able to not only meet with their local MP, Sir William Cash, but also those from Stafford, Jeremy Lefroy, and several other surrounding constituencies, including Owen Paterson and Fiona Bruce.



Debates were heard in both the House of Commons and Lords covering a wide range of issues.

If you would like to be included in future events or plans, please contact me directly.