

Delivering for the Eccleshall area

Community News

The aim of this Newsletter is to bring together various pieces of topical, but local, news from across the Eccleshall, Adbaston, Chebsey and Standon and Cotes Heath areas. It is not designed to be an almanac of all the things that I have supported or been involved with or even the 'most important' pieces of work - as someone badly affected by one issue can often find that their voice is drowned out by all the other issues of the day.

In this third local Newsletter, it covers some of the work being undertaken on a variety of projects and on issues of concern and that matter most to local residents. Since the last newsletter, I seem to have spent a lot of time working with various community groups on capacity and resilience building – as well as raising some much needed funding for them – in excess of £30,000 for local groups - to help a variety of good causes to achieve some of their aims. The other significant commitment has been the drive to deliver on my promise to resist any inappropriate development locally.

Norton Bridge Archaeological Finds –

Go on Display in Stafford

During the works undertaken by Network Rail at Norton Bridge, there were several sets of archaeological finds unearthed, including remains of an old butter churn lid from the Saxon period which is now being preserved at the Potteries Museum in Hanley as well as some late 19th and early 20th Century bottles.

The collection of bottles recently went on display at the Ancient High House in Stafford, so that local residents can see them, as part of the Marson Shop gallery space.

Mr. Marson's shop occupied the Ancient High House for over fifty years and the bottles enhance a tableaux that illustrates the shop and how it might have looked back in 1910.



The bottles being handed over to Councillor Mike Smith, Cabinet Member for Sport and Leisure and Adam Hill, Head of Sport and Leisure for Stafford Borough Council

The Ancient High House is open from 10am to 4pm Tuesdays to Saturdays and admission is free.

Evidence of prehistoric activity was also uncovered in the same area of the site.

Eccleshall Toilet Area – quite some

teamwork

Frequently work to enhance an area takes many months and often goes on unnoticed, despite the number of people involved. That's certainly been the case with the Eccleshall Toilet Area.

A desire to improve the area, whilst also reduce some of the cost of maintenance, led to a site visit in October last year, which revealed much to everyone's disappointment that the poplar trees on site had tree canker and need to come down before they fell down.



The old Eccleshall Toilet Area in Spring

The Borough's tree surgeon did this work in the Spring and a new feature tree was planted not long after. The small shrubs were also removed in favour of an open area of easy to maintain grass.

The Toilet block has been painted and will look rejuvenated with planters and the tree in time can be lit, thanks to the addition of a power supply. But this work could not have been achieved without the support and vision of County Councillor Frank Chapman, the Parish Council, the Eccilians and various departments in the Borough Council all working together to achieve the same aims and objective.

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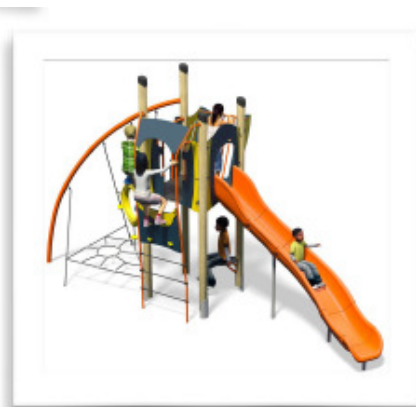
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Norton Bridge Family Area Receives a**£3,000 Boost**

Residents of Norton Bridge have wanted for a long time an area for local families to spend time together – more than just having a play area suitable for their children to use - but somewhere where everyone could use easily and freely, of any age and ability, able bodied as well as less able bodied.

The existing Borough Council play area with two pieces of equipment was just not the space that the local residents had in mind.

Instead a group came together, involving several local residents and Parish Councillors, and agreed a lease with the Borough Council to take over the space so that they could develop it into something that the community wanted and could benefit from.



Norton Bridge Family Area – some of the proposed play equipment

This plan is very much underway with people from across the community supporting monthly afternoon teas, donating money and being actively engaged in delivering what will be a £50,000 project, with people committed and investing in their community.

Network Rail – through the group that has delivered the West Coast mainline rail infrastructure project at Norton Bridge - have also been involved in putting in the groundwork, as part of their legacy project.

Along the way, the Central England Co-operative, through their Community Fund, has supported the initiative with a grant of £3,000, following an application that I submitted, such was their desire to help

Today the group, which involves young people actively involved with the planning and the delivery, has raised a little over £8,000 with grant applications being submitted for the balance of the money over the next few months – alongside the local ‘fun’ fund raising, including Silent Auctions, attendance at Farmers Markets, as well as the teas, which are shortly to morph into ‘Winter Warmers’.

For the young people involved they will be getting either a Young Leaders in Service award (- if over the age of 11) which is equivalent to the Duke of Edinburgh award or a Certificate from the Parish Council – to recognise their achievement.

However, the biggest achievement will be in seeing this redundant space used fully again.

Croxton Community Speedwatch

Residents of Croxton have come together to express their concern at the speed of traffic going through Croxton on the B5026. There have been a number of accidents and ‘near misses’ with tales of residents feeling intimidated by the volume and velocity of traffic.

Putting a weight limit on the main thoroughfare looks highly unlikely, so instead residents have opted, with support from the Community Safety Partnership involving the Police and Borough Council, to set-up a new Community Speedwatch group, aiming to get a message out to all road users to value the area they are driving through as much as local residents.



If anyone wants to volunteer to help in Croxton or wants to explore starting a scheme in another area, I can pass on your details if you want to contact me

The aim is not to victimise road users but balance their rights with the impact on the local communities they travel through.

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Eccleshall Eagles Flying High at Eagles Park

In September, Eccleshall Eagles finally after many years of hard work and development, moved into Eagles Park – their new facility along the Swynnerton Road with a range of junior pitches, Club House and changing rooms.



Eagles Park – with some of the best pitches in Staffordshire

Over the last six months I have secured grants from five funders to complete the project totalling £27,000 to get the site fully operational and looking like ‘a mini Wembley’ for the Club’s two hundred junior members to use on a weekly basis.

The grounds are being maintained in a unique agreement with the nearby HM Prison at Drake Hall, whereby as part of the pre-parole process some of the women are released on a daily license. This is being backed up with a formal Grounds Maintenance qualification to help those women involved secure employment after their release, so that everyone benefits from the agreement.

Eccleshall’s Neighbourhood Plan

The planning regime in the UK has changed over the past few years, partly in recognition of the failure to build enough houses on a consistent basis since the end of World War II.

To address this need, there is a plan to build 250,000 new homes every year between now and 2020. This in part will be facilitated by ensuring an availability of land which locally is through ‘the Stafford Borough Local Plan’, which was adopted in June 2014. All the policies are contained in that plan and derive from there.

This in turn filters into what that means for local areas through Neighbourhood Plans. This sets out what areas would be appropriate to build on over the next twenty years and what the local designs and densities should look like, so that new development does not over-run existing communities and that there is an appropriate level of infrastructure to be able to cope with development – for example sufficient school places and road capacity.

Given this requirement, the Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan team should be congratulated on being the second area in the Borough to have an approved Neighbourhood Plan in place.

This should minimise speculative ad hoc unwelcome development.

Wider Borough Council Work

Homelessness Support – Gold Standard

Stafford has a statutory duty to help prevent local people from becoming homeless – and that is the Council’s first and foremost response when people come to visit the Housing Options team in the Borough, often in a worried and distressed state.

The vast majority of people can be helped through early intervention, advice and support. And in the small number of cases where that is just not possible, the team will explore every avenue to ensure people don’t needlessly have to sleep out on the streets. This includes Rough Sleepers outreach as well as supporting some of the voluntary sector groups in this area.

The work back in July was recognised at the National Homelessness Practitioner Conference as part of their Gold Standard Award presentation.



Stafford Borough Council’s Housing and Homeless Prevention team pick up their award at the National Homelessness Practitioners Annual Conference, in Warwick

Community Groups – Small Grants

Stafford Borough has an extremely strong voluntary sector and whilst funding is extremely tight across the whole of local government, Stafford Borough is keen to support the growth and development of small voluntary sector organisations in areas like capacity building and renewal or in delivering against some of their primary objectives.

With this in mind, a new round of small grants funding has just opened up, awarding anything from £200 to £1,000 to voluntary sector organisations, as part of a £10,000 fund set aside for the voluntary sector.

Further details, including the application form, can be found at :-

www.staffsfoundation.org.uk/sbc/

Improving Homes – healthy Homes

There is an increasing awareness nationally of the link between housing and health and equally how that affects people living in an area, as not every area in Stafford Borough has the same life expectancy – in fact there is nearly a ten year difference in average life expectancy between the best performing areas and the least.

So given this link, a fund of £185,000 has just been set up by the Borough to help householders – home owners and landlords, if they qualify - to secure loans and in some cases grants to be able to improve their homes and remove some of those significant risks to people’s health in their own homes. This may be to help fight excess cold through better insulation or by removing possible trips and falls.

The objective of the targeted funding is to improve life expectancy and reduce the gap across the Borough whilst reducing some of the knock on costs of poor health, to partners like GPs and the local NHS hospitals.

Supported Accommodation

Having consistently raised the issue of funding for some of our most vulnerable in society, through the funding of supported accommodation, with local MPs, the Local Government Association and the Dept. for Communities and Local Government, the issue is beginning to be recognised, before all the Supported Accommodation disappears.

There have been a number of new proposals about how to fund long term care and support from Central Government and whilst it is still not clear how it will work in practice, at least there is some light at the end of the tunnel.

Building Houses

With the need to build more homes for people to live in, or maybe get their first steps on to the housing ladder, I have visited more housing developments across Stafford Borough than I can remember ever doing before in a twelve month period. That’s houses of all types of tenure – for home ownership, social housing as well as private rented – across all areas of the Borough. Over the next three years more than 300 new homes will be built by Stafford and Rural Homes, with a number of new innovative schemes targeted at helping people afford to buy their own homes.



Opening of affordable homes in Hixon, during Rural Housing Week

Stafford Plays It’s Part

Stafford committed back in September 2015 to offer shelter and support to five Syrian Refugee families, as part of a commitment to welcome fifty Syrians into the County and 10,000 into the UK.



War-torn Aleppo, Syria

In March the Borough was the first place in Staffordshire to see the start of these Syrian families arriving and recently it was my honour to attend ‘a welcome event’ for all of Staffordshire’s Syrian families, where we all could share in each other’s cultures and traditions as well as food.

It is not often that you know something that we do as a community is critical, but by the number of smiling children’s faces that I saw that evening, against the backdrop of some of the stories that the adults told separately of pure horror, you just knew that all the endeavours of all the partners and agencies coming together to provide a solution, has been absolutely fundamentally worthwhile.

SMART Motorway Coming for M6

Highways England has announced that following the works to improve the M6 as it comes through Birmingham into Staffordshire and the work it has already started at Junction 17 through to 19 to the North, that it will start work from early 2017 through to February 2020 to create additional motorway capacity in the Stafford area.

This will be by creating ‘all lane running’ through using the hard shoulder as a permanent traffic lane. Regular vehicle refuges will be created for vehicles that breakdown and significant lane signage will also help stranded motorists.



SMART Motorways in action in Birmingham

The ensuing road works through the period will include contraflows and regular night-time closures and knock on disruption across Junctions 13 – 15 of the M6.