



I am delighted to wish you 'all the best' for the Festive Season and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

This is the first in a series of electronic Newsletters, which hopefully provides some topical updates on what has been happening locally across the Eccleshall area, from Cranberry in the North, through to Adbaston in the West and Norton Bridge in the East of the area, taking in lots of places in-between.

If after you've read this you have learned at least one thing that you did not know, then **please pass this on** to your friends locally - thank you.

If however, you have been forwarded this from one of your friends, please drop me a line by email (by clicking this link : jeremyp@jeremypert.co.uk) and I will send you future Newsletters directly. Thanks.



Review of 2015

2015 has been a really busy year locally of planning applications, strategic planning and securing investment in jobs and apprenticeships, amongst other things.

The position in the Borough is that unemployment is low (- September 2015 it stood at 674 people out of a total population of @ 130,000 people). In fact the issue is more one of a risk of not having sufficient skilled employees to match vacancies against.

The other regular story on people's lips is the level of traffic disruption in Stafford - but this should only be temporary – and is a direct result of the inward investment coming into the Borough. Schemes at Norton Bridge - with £80m being invested in rail capacity – or in Stafford town centre- where there is an investment of £70m in a new multi storey car park and flagship Marks & Spencer store – support the local economy being vibrant and dynamic.

This inward investment, under a Conservative administration, helps protect jobs and the overall prosperity of the area, so it is a small price to pay for ensuring the success of the local area.

Elsewhere, the Police and Crime Commissioner has devolved the local scrutiny of policing decisions to a new panel of locally appointed people, which has met in the last couple of days for the first time. It is this panel that can ensure that local priorities are met and reflected into future policing and I was pleased to be involved in the active recruitment of this panel.



Projects in the Local Area

Nat West Bank Branch – Closure March 2015

One of the key issues to affect the local area has been the loss of the National Westminster Bank in Eccleshall in March 2015, despite a heavy weight campaign to keep the branch open. There was :-



- a petition of over 750 signatures
- meetings with the Chief Executive of National Westminster Bank locally and also between Sir William Cash and the Chief Executive of RBS, National Westminster's parent company
- the Borough debated at a Council meeting the closure and resolved to write to :-
 - Eric Pickles – the then Minister for Local Government and Communities
 - Vince Cable - the then Business Secretary
 - George Osborne - the Chancellor of the Exchequer

Whilst the project supported by community members including Kevin Reynolds, Borough Councillors including Frank Chapman and Peter Jones and the local Member of Parliament, Sir William Cash, was unsuccessful, we did at least get the agreement for 'a mobile bank' to visit Eccleshall on a weekly basis on a Wednesday from 10:00 - 11:00hrs.

Between forty and fifty people now visit the bank on a weekly basis.

I have pushed for more frequent visits, but without a significantly greater number of bank users attending weekly, this is somewhat unlikely given that the mobile unit comes from Nottingham and there is only one of them covering from Lincoln across to Eccleshall, so there are many, many communities without any representation.



Martin King, proprietor of The Old Smithy, Christine Heelis, Clerk to Eccleshall Parish Council and Clive Robert, Nat West Bank Manager, Stafford

Not the greatest of answers but at least it was an improvement on the original plans of 'the Bankers' in Scotland



Solar Power Planning Application – High Offley and Tunstall

On the other side of the spectrum – such is the variety of the work I get involved in - was the application to build a Solar Farm on 31 acres of prime agricultural land at High Offley and Tunstall.

I am not against solar power per se - there are plenty of sympathetic schemes, one in Slindon comes to mind - this one would have taken over a large and beautiful valley surrounded by historic houses and beautiful rolling

countryside and would have dramatically affected the amenity and visual impact of the land of which we are merely custodians.



I called in this planning application so that it could be determined by the Planning Committee of the Borough Council.

This happened ten days before Christmas and the Committee, after a site visit, nearly unanimously agreed, despite the planners recommending that the application be approved.

Days like that don't happen very often, when the committee just see the problem created in such a clear and unambiguous way and it was nice to have been involved in representing the views of local people.

140 odd objections were received to that scheme - a similar number to those objections received on the planning application to build a new access at the Raleigh Hall Industrial Estate.

Unfortunately despite a convincing story and lots of activity from local residents, the committee were not sufficiently convinced and voted seven to five to approve the scheme against local resident's wishes.



I still need to do something about the sheer level of HGVs thundering through Eccleshall both from north - south as well as east - west and that issue is not lost on me, despite not being able to come up with a sensible answer so far.

Plenty of other planning applications have been secured both at committee and through working with the community at large, including planning permission for a dwelling for the Mill at Offley Mill, replacement windows for a barn in Bowers and the refusal amongst various applications of various obscure planning proposals.



Other Work in the Local Area

Much of the work that goes on is often unseen or of benefit to a small number of local residents, this includes things like :-

- Securing the replacement of posts and chains for outside of the Highfields in Croxton – after twelve years of requesting as much
- Getting streets swept and clear of leaves and debris
- Working on the refurbishment of the Eccleshall toilet area
- Fighting to secure additional children’s and teenagers’ facilities in Eccleshall
- Working with the community in Norton Bridge to look at a new play area
- Securing beneficial legacy investment from Network Rail in the Chebsey and Norton Bridge areas

Sometimes this work can take months or years to come to fruition and can seem inordinately frustrating to local residents – and frankly I often share that view but I am keen to secure as much of the investment in services that there is available, for the local area



Wider Work

Otherwise, I have been working in the Borough on various initiatives, including on ensuring that we have the right balance of strategic housing across the Borough and in getting the new Women’s Refuge open, planned for early 2016.

Over the last few months, I have been to more housing openings or ceremonies to cut ‘the first sod’ than I care to remember – there’s too many to mention :-



I was delighted by the number of people who supported the recent fund raiser for Staffordshire Women’s Aid – where we raised a total of £1,115 – just for eating curry !

Now there’s an interesting thought for a New Year’s Resolution.



Finally, best wishes for 2016 and Happy New Year.

JEREMY PERT
STAFFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL - Ward Member for Eccleshall
 Bank Farm, Croxton, Staffordshire ST21 6PE
www.jeremypert.co.uk
 Telephone : 01630 620274
 Mobile : 07740 924659