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## A message from the Leader

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Dear All,

As we move in to our second year of administration, since the May 2023 elections, much of my time in office has been focussed on setting out our strategic priorities for the county.



I would like to thank everyone who has provided their views on the budget, the Local Plan, the Local Transport Plan or the Council Plan. Your contributions have been a key source of evidence guiding our ambitions for the county. The Council Plan was agreed at annual Council today, it brings together our four year strategic vision for our county.

In June, to underpin this, we will bring forward our delivery plan. This will outline our immediate priorities for delivering growth, environmental protection and our ambitions for delivering housing, jobs and attracting investment to Herefordshire.

The Marches Forward Partnership is gaining momentum too. Herefordshire, Shropshire, Powys and Monmouthshire are directing attention in areas such as healthcare, education, skill development, jobs, service provision and transport infrastructure (including road, rail, bus travel and cycling). With the Council Plan now agreed it makes us well placed to advocate Herefordshire priorities front and centre of the newly emerging geographic economic areas.

The more direct relationship we now have with central government, following the winding up of the Local Enterprise Partnership, recognises the council as a

principal investment partner. This is freeing up huge scope to prioritise local people, places, growth and transformation for the county.

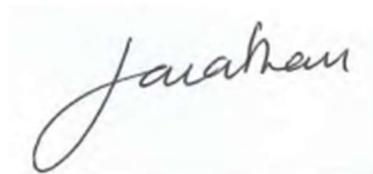
We are placing equally high priority on ensuring our rivers can be restored and brought back to good health. Our new phosphate strategy is bringing forward initiatives that aim to help us to reduce phosphate levels in our soils and waterways. These initiatives provide for truly sustainable development in the county alongside our growth plans.

Looking ahead, we will be maintaining our focus on children's services. Tina Russell joins us in July bringing her extensive experience in both front line and leadership roles across a broad range of children's services. Tina has been instrumental in taking Worcestershire from an Ofsted rating of Inadequate to Good. I am confident that Tina's strong track record of leading improvement will enable us to achieve our ambition of delivering the best possible social care services to our children and families in Herefordshire."

As always, you can contact me by emailing

[Jonathan.Lester@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Lester@herefordshire.gov.uk)

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan', is displayed on a light blue rectangular background.

Jonathan Lester  
Leader of the Council

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Leaders Newsletter

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The Herefordshire Council Plan 2024 - 2028

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Our council plan was agreed on 24 May, it sets out how we will work to increase prosperity, protect the environment and provide the services that people need.

Our vision is:

***Delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do.***

This falls in to four interconnected themes:

- **People** feeling healthy, safe and supported in their communities;
- **Place** - our local environment being protected and enhanced, supporting the right housing in the right place; helping to fund council phosphate mitigation measures to improve the health of our rivers;
- **Growth** - attracting inward investment, creating more jobs, enabling housing development and providing the right infrastructure to keep Herefordshire moving forward.
- **Transformation** - a council embracing best practice, delivering innovation through technology and demonstrating best value for money in the services we provide.

To deliver these outcomes we will focus on working with our residents, the voluntary, community and public sectors along with businesses; all of us have a vital role to play in Herefordshire's success.

We build of course on a strong foundation. Herefordshire is already a wonderful county and a great place to live. Better life expectancy, a thriving business base, entrepreneurialism and a growing educational sector are all factors underpinning the positive change we aspire to achieve for the county.

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## Turning the Council Plan in to delivery...

In the next few weeks Cabinet will agree our immediate priorities to delivering the Council plan. Our delivery plan will set out our objectives with clear actions and milestones for the next 12 months. The delivery plan will be reviewed annually to monitor progress, and to allow for flexibility and opportunity for redesign to be built into the process.



## And what does this look like on the ground...



I recently met with members of Stoke Lacy Parish Council to discuss the delivery of highway projects arising from section 106 monies from a housing development in the village. The extent of the scheme was discussed and agreed to include village gateway features, speed reduction device, narrowing of the carriageway to reduce speed and buff coloured

carriageway roundels.

Many of you will be involved in similar discussions elsewhere in the county and involved in the brilliant work that our parishes are engaged with. This is a central and underpinning theme of the Council Plan - partnership working with private, public and community sectors coming together to achieve positive outcomes which are shared by all.

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## Visit to the Royal National College for the Blind

On a related theme, I met with Lucy Proctor, the Principal of the Royal National College for the Blind. It was a chance to see this world class educational facility which provides specialist education for 90+ per year students from across the country and the world. They also offer specialist training and support to businesses, universities and other education providers working with visually impaired people.



My visit was a chance to explore how we may be able to build on the success of their fully accessible teaching area which enables students to gain practical experience as part of their vocational qualifications. The project was funded by RNC, a number of grant making trusts and S106 receipts allocated to young people and special educational needs.

Following this visit we offered advice on how future S.106 monies may be able to assist in their continued work as a world leading specialist education provider

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## Marches Forward Partnership - listening to what you have to say...



You will recall from my December newsletter the setting up of the Marches Forward Partnership. Since its launch in 2023, the partnership has been looking at ways to unlock new investment into the English and Welsh border region that is home to 750,000 people.

On 14 May partnership members met to begin shaping a Marches Manifesto. The event at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, brought the four founding councils - Herefordshire, Monmouthshire County, Powys County and Shropshire, together with representatives from government, business, farming and food producers, land managers, transport experts and environmentalists.

Attendees were asked for their input on the partnership's four key themes:

- **Nature, Energy & Climate Adaptation** – Looking at opportunities based around the natural environment, and current and future challenges to the climate, energy and nature.
- **Transport & Digital Connectivity** - Improving infrastructure and connectivity across the Marches to give better access to jobs, education and opportunities.
- **Health, Housing & Skills** - Focusing on the sustainability and well-being of communities, skills development in response to employers needs and accelerated housing delivery.
- **Food, Development & Visitor Economy**- Encouraging economic growth of our economy, developing and promoting the region's unique offer.

Following on from these discussions, the Partnership is preparing to present proposals to both English and Welsh Governments in a few months' time. The draft "Marches Manifesto" will be used to shape discussions with both Government departments in Cardiff and Westminster helping to drive forward effective cross border working.

I believe there are significant economic benefits by us joining forces to work across parties, across counties and across borders for funding and investment from the UK and Welsh governments. We are well positioned, with the adoption of our Council Plan, to advocate clearly and coherently on behalf of Herefordshire.

The Partnership has huge potential to unlock the remarkable benefits of living and working in such a beautiful, rural region. It gives greater economies of scale and strength to our voice in explaining what services, infrastructure and investments we need locally and in the region as a whole.

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## More details on the multi-million £ Local Transport Fund

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Following the dissolution of the HS2 scheme, £36billion has been reallocated to support local transport across the country.

There are different funding streams that will manage different outcomes for local transport (e.g. road maintenance, Midlands Rail Hub). One of the funding streams is the Local Transport Fund (LTF). The Department for Transport (DfT) are expecting that the Local Transport Fund will align with the emerging Local Transport Plan (LTP).



While details are still being finalised we do know the allotted monies for Herefordshire will be devolved and managed by Herefordshire Council with local MPs being consultees.

Herefordshire has been allocated £101,851,000.

The vast majority of the money will be capital. There will be a small allowable percentage of the total that can be spent on revenue, aimed at supporting the capital spend. DfT have indicated that the guidance is due 'in a few weeks'. We believe this will contain the allocations for years 1 and 2, but it will not tell us about the rest of the spending profile beyond years 3 to 7.

The money for the first two years should become available from Spring 2025.

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## Looking ahead to a new public realm contract



On Thursday, 25 April, the Cabinet took the decision to bring the council's Public Realm Services contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) to an end in 2026. This is because the current contract does not allow the council to deliver its longer term requirements and aspirations.

A new contract will commence on 1 June 2026. This gives a two year period for a redesign, procurement and planned mobilisation of the new service. This work is underway and we will share further details of this as we progress.

We are committed to continuing to work closely with BBLP for the duration of our contract to ensure high quality services for local residents, and a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

The decision can be found on the [council's website](#)

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## Continuing investment in our road networks.

Herefordshire Council has confirmed that it will be investing a total of £38.388m in improving the highway network in 2024/25, which is an increase of nearly £12m when compared with the previous year.



This increased funding will allow the council to target investment at those roads in the county that need it most, through resurfacing and surface dressing schemes.

To identify which roads will be included, the council uses data gathered from surveys, statutory inspections and reports of defects from members of the public. This data is then used to determine the condition of the road and what intervention would be optimal to prevent further deterioration and achieve best value for money.

In previous years the council has allocated the funding it receives for roads exclusively to our Public Realm Contractor (Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP)) however this year will also see the introduction of our new Herefordshire Highways Framework, which allows the Council to use alternative contractors where appropriate to deliver additional work. BBLP will still remain responsible for the delivery of public realm services and road maintenance work as agreed in the Annual Plan.

We use asset management prioritisation to determine which roads receive maintenance or treatment based on their condition. This process is important to ensure that limited resources are allocated to the roads which require the most attention.

All our road information is available on our [roadworks map](#).

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## Have you been on the new public art trail in Hereford.

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Eight fantastic contemporary sculptures have been unveiled in Hereford, completing the new public art trail across our city centre.

The sculptures have been created by talented artists from Hereford College of Arts (HCA) and established artists linked to Hereford. These are part of a project jointly commissioned by HCA and Meadow Arts to celebrate 170 years of creative education in the city.

The eight locally produced sculptures join the eight wall murals recently commissioned by Studio Response and produced by leading street artists working nationally and internationally.

The sculpture project draws inspiration from English laws of the 17th and 18th centuries that required shops to display visual trade representations crafted by local artisans, by repurposing disused signage brackets.

A map of the [public art trail](#) guides visitors on a tour of the city taking in the best locations alongside enjoying the artworks on display. The two mile tour takes about one hour to complete at a moderate pace. Along the way more information can be unlocked by scanning the QR codes located next to each artwork. To find out more about the sculptures and the artists follow this link to our [website](#)

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## New £750,000 for the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery

Herefordshire Council will receive £750,000 from Arts Council England, thanks to its Government-funded Capital Investment Programme. This is in addition to the £18.4m received from the stronger towns, lottery and council capital funds.



The funding is going towards supporting the major refurbishment and extension of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery, located on Broad Street, to create a state-of-the-art museum and art gallery for Herefordshire.

The redevelopment of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery is a flagship project for the Herefordshire Council and Stronger Hereford. Once complete, the redeveloped museum and art gallery will significantly enhance the county's cultural offer, support community engagement and attract new visitors to the area.

The project will extend and transform the Grade II-listed museum building on Broad Street. The new museum and art gallery will include new galleries and display spaces, temporary exhibition spaces, the restoration of the historic Woolhope Club Room and new commercial areas. All areas of the museum will be fully accessible with lifts and full flat access throughout.

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## Improvement works in Leominster

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Visitors to Leominster will soon notice preparations being made for improvement works to streets and pavements in the historic town centre.

The improvements will see the High Street, Iron Cross, Victoria Street and Corn Street enhanced with attractive surfacing, improved paving, wider pavements and raised tables at the major junctions making it safer and more accessible for pedestrians. The paving in Corn Square will be refurbished and the road and parking area will be resurfaced.

The first stage of work is to remove two trees from Corn Square to make way for new trees and seating. The Robinia will be moved to Sydonia Park (if possible), however the Cherry tree has been found to be near the end of its natural life due to constrained growth so will be removed. The replacement planting will include other suitable trees together with other native plants for seasonal interest and habitat.

The improvements are part of the Leominster High Street Heritage Action Zone funded work – a multi-million pound regeneration initiative supported by Historic England, delivered through Herefordshire Council and Leominster Town Council. This major investment has already transformed buildings with improvements to structure and facades to reflect the original detail restoring local historic character and heritage features.

More details can be found on the [council website](#).

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## Visit to Riverside Primary School

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On Tuesday, 30 April, I was invited to meet with Headteacher, Emma Shearer, and her team to see some of the great work being undertaken at Riverside Primary School. I met with their pastoral team who offer to support families and children. They have 3 family support workers, learning mentors, and speech therapists. The building and the grounds offer a really high quality learning environment. T



There is a big focus on reading and literature, including Shakespeare. This is in turn opening up amazing opportunities for the pupils. The children of year 6 recently performed Macbeth at the courtyard. The vast grounds of the school offer a range of supported outdoor learning including the forest schools area, an orchard to learn about local apple varieties and a large field with playgrounds.

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## Visit to Hinton Community Centre

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In April, I met with Trustees at Hinton Community Centre and discussed the great work they do in their local community. The centre has fantastic facilities which supports cultural, recreational and community activity. I know that they will go from strength to strength.

Whilst I was there I met with the '3Degreez Allstarz' who have formed a community interest company (CIC). They are a Hereford based cheerleading and Dance community club. They are a not for profit company, running a range of cheerleading, tumbling & dance classes.

As well as providing great opportunities for all ages Allstars helps to build confidence, self-esteem, leadership, teamwork skills, and strong friendships for life. They also provide adult fitness classes, running parent and tots sessions, recreational cheerleading classes, 1-2-1 tumbling sessions, and competition cheer and dance teams. The Allstars ethos is to celebrate differences and to change lives through positive coaching, fitness, friendship and dance

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## Investing in skills and education locally

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At the start of May, myself, Graham Biggs, and Philip Price met with the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE) CEO James Newby and Board Trustees. We discussed future opportunities for joint



working. Educational opportunity and skills are central to our council plans to grow the economy and bring jobs and investment to Herefordshire. NMITE courses continue to grow in popularity, encouraging people of all ages to develop their skills in the county.

Our plans to develop more student accommodation in Hereford will be well placed to support this. We agreed to meet regularly to develop relations and momentum with our work.

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## Hereford Sixth Form - celebrating their success



I was recently invited to meet Catherine Brearey, Principal of Hereford Sixth Form. It was a great opportunity to visit the college which has recently, in 2023, celebrated 50 years of excellence. I am very proud to say I attended Hereford Sixth form to do my A-levels. Herefordshire is very fortunate that we have this excellent educational centre on our doorstep. It continues to go from strength to strength in providing a full and comprehensive curriculum for young people, not just in Herefordshire but across the region.

**The Council's latest upcoming key decisions are available on our [Forward Plan](#)**

**Visit the [newsroom](#) for all the latest council news and information**

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