

Report from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst

With Best wishes for the Season

As I sat down to write my final Leaders report of the year, with Christmas approaching, I paused to think about what this season means to me. For those who celebrate Christmas – this is a time of year to be with our families and friends – to enjoy the warmth of our homes and, as the old song goes: “Faithful friends who are dear to us will be near to us once more...”.

But for many others, I know that December can be a very difficult time. It can mean the household budget being stretched further than at any other time. It can also be a lonely time, and a difficult experience. For those who have lost loved ones, Christmas can be a tough time of year.

That’s why it is so heartening that many people see the festive season as an opportunity to help others. As the King said last year, our churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and gurdwaras, unite in feeding the hungry, “providing love and support”. The foodbanks across our district will be busy in these next few months, and they rely so much on donations of items which can make a huge difference to some people’s lives. You can find out about local foodbanks, and other services which help with the cost of living at: threeivers.gov.uk/services/community-and-living/cost-living-support

And then there is the wonderful Warm in Winter project led by local charity Small Acts of Kindness, with support from Three Rivers District Council, which will be providing older people in need with bags that contain practical items such as a fleece blanket, thermal hat and gloves, hot drinks, soup and porridge as well as an information pack providing help, support and opportunities to join local activities.

Small Acts of Kindness source, pack and distribute an amazing 12,000 Warm in Winter gift bags across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire at this time of year, and those will help to warm those people struggling to heat their homes.

Countless other organisations across the district and the country are there helping people this December – and throughout the year. It is these stories of human kindness that underline, for me, the true meaning of Christmas. Sharing love to our fellow humankind, helping those who need help. I say thank you to all those people who give up their time to help others, not just at Christmas, but all through the year. Thank you – and whatever your faith, and however you celebrate at this time of year, I wish you happy holidays and a peaceful and happy New Year.

It has been a busy time since the Council Meeting, the items below are just some of the things I have undertaken for the whole Council

- Continued to work with Oxhey Jets, Council Offers and Herts County Council to get the best lease deal for them from HCC and I attended the Oxhey Jets Remembrance Football match and confirmed with John Elliott the council award of almost £1m for the club.
- Welcomed and spoke with new staff at the quarterly new staff induction event.
- Toured Warner Bros, Studios Leavesden discussed and saw their on-going expansion plans.
- Visited Woodoaks Farm, Maple Cross and the Black Barn. Raised concerns with Herts County Council on the latter's plans to restrict access
- Met, discussed and agreed a new way forward on the former Red Cross building Barton Way with Croxley Green Parish Council. The Parish Council has now agreed my suggested proposals in principle and a Press Release has been issued and expect to be attending a Public Meeting to outline these in details once initial drawings are finished.
- Attended the Aquadrome Steering Group, (Ricky) discussing the improvements.
- Meet with Chair of Sarratt Parish Council confirming the grant of £200,000 towards upgrading their sports pavilion.
- Attended the celebration of life event for former Cllr Roger Seabourne.
- Attended the Strategic Planning meeting for South West Herts Councils Hemel.
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- Attended, spoke with government minister at the Herts Investment & Development Board re the government's planning policies and devolution. The minister confirmed that the new NPPF would be published before the end of the year and most likely before Christmas (there had been 11,000 public response).
- Appeared on Sky News opposing the Data Centre plans in Abbots Langley and attended part of the Public Inquiry.
- Hosted a quarterly meeting with Parish Chairs & Clerks discussing issues of mutual concern. A further meeting this month is booked in to discuss with The Chief Inspector Policing issues.
- Attended the Local Government Association Annual Conference, met ministers and discussed planning reform. The Deputy Leader also attended.
- As a Member of the Herts Growth Board comprising all 11 Herts Councils, discussed future investment requirements and the need for more and better public transport at its most recent meeting.

Devolution and Re-organisation

At the time of writing on 1st December the White paper is due out this week.

It will be followed by I am told by an English Devolution Bill within 12 months.

The clear strong preference from the government is a Mayoral Combined Model although it has been said no re-organisation is pre – required there is clearly a strong indication that this will be a likely push. Some changes to PCC's and maybe Fire and Rescue responsibilities are also likely.

Hertfordshire County Council and its leader have said:

“We have been open with our residents and businesses that we as a county council are open to exploring options for devolution deal. After expressing our interest to government, we are now awaiting the contents of their Devolution White Paper so that we can understand if such a deal would be of benefit to the residents and businesses of the county.

“No communication has taken place on specific proposals and any suggestion that we wish to see the elections postponed or delayed as we secure a devolution deal are not accurate.”

At this stage, any discussion around Local Government Reform is mere speculation. I look forward to frank discussions with Leaders and our MPs on the content of the White Paper once it is published. “.

So let's see!!

Report from the Lead Member for Resources, Councillor Jonathon Solomons

Report to follow.

Report from the Lead Member for General Public Services, Councillor Sarah Nelmes

Parking

The current pipeline of programmed parking schemes within the district are all now being worked through and in the New Year I will be working with officers and colleagues on the programme for the next few years. High on the list will be a look at the larger carparks across the district to look at some of the anomalies and see if changes are needed. The really serious increase in the station car park charges in Croxley and Chorleywood has made this more pressing. All proposals for other schemes will be 'scored' for prioritisation, having regard to the capacity of the team and their other duties

Ricky West – The TRO the scheme which had multiple consultations and adjustments as a result (and went through Committee more than once) has been sealed and the scheme has now commenced. It will be very closely monitored

Primrose Hill – provisional plans drawn up and shared with the ward councillors

Chorleywood – This scheme was all ready to go but the station car park issue has caused some local problems so we will be seeking an urgent meeting with the relevant councillors and stakeholders to see if some last minute 'tweaks' might be able to help

Harefield Rd – the final report is being prepared

High Elms – the consultation results are being reviewed and a meeting being arranged with HCC re a crossing

Skidmore Way – the consultation has closed and the report being prepared

Gosforth Lane – as the issues there are complex discussions will be held with the housing association our waste team, and local councillors

Bedmond Lane – looking at junction protection

Slip by old World of Water – looking at possible solutions to a newly emerged dangerous parking issue

Some residents have asked about the possibility of having a 'Residents Card' type scheme which would enable differential parking charges for residents and non-residents. The legality and possible cost/benefit of such a scheme will be researched

Waste

After 7pm on 28 November I got a phone call from Times Radio asking if I would speak at 7.20 the next morning about the Government's proposed changes to Waste Collection and was told I'd be sent an embargoed press release as a briefing. When

only a year ago the previous Government's Waste Collection reforms were finalised I was surprised, especially as only the day before I had been at a District Council Network reception with many Local Govt colleagues and even though many of the exhibitors there were about recycling (including our fantastic Three Rivers stand about our innovative approaches to increasing recycling and reducing waste – thank you to the officers who put together a fantastic and engaging exhibition and engaged with so many other authorities, MPs and Ministers – many thanks to the Officers who did such a great job on this). I have expressed my initial thoughts, but the devil will be in the detail and I hope that some of the more disquieting ideas will be looked at again. The next few days should provide more detail.

Our waste teams are functioning well at the moment although the weather has given some challenges, and we will be putting extra resource in place to collect the extra waste over Christmas.

We currently tendering for 4 more vehicles, 3 next year and a further one the year after and a vehicle to deal with the new Commercial Food Waste collection service.

We are working with housing providers and managing agents on some of the issues with collection at some flatted blocks and there are some improvements, but we will continue the work further on this. We will look to add food waste collection at Shannon House once there is further improvement on the proper separation of recycling and residual there.

Grounds Maintenance

Seasonal Activities continue including hedge cutting, clearance of leaves, clearance of garage areas and alleyways and the annual renovation of the bowling greens.

We have now taken delivery of our own mechanical composter which will mix different green wastes types which will result in us having compost for use on council owned land and so reduce some of our costs.

Our leaf clearance programme is on a 6-8 week cycle. If we receive ad hoc requests outside the planned programme we will try to if at all possible but the timetable is tight and the team are already stretched.

Animal Inspection & Licensing

Licensing visits with City of London and our new officer are on-going and where compliance issues have been noted, City of London and officers are providing advice to license holders.

PSPO consultation (re dogs) to extend and amend the exiting PSOP live on Have your Say Platform

Paper being drafted for GPPS Committee on Animal Welfare FPNs – covers new powers conveyed by The Animals (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2023 and the accompanying Statutory Guidance which officers must consider when using these powers and seeks authority from Members to consider and as appropriate make use of fixed penalty notices

Public Health Funerals

Officers are working on a new policy on this which should come to Policy & Resources in March

Report from the Lead Member for Housing and Public Health, Councillor Steve Drury

Health

With regard to public health, Herts CC are looking to fund across the districts and boroughs to the tune of £3.6 million over the next 3 years, this will be based on new funding criteria laid down by HCC and will mean a lot of work by staff to meet the new rules.

Healthy Hubs

Firstly, we have learnt that the hubs will be funded for the next 2 years, which is good news as, much higher footfall in ¼ 3, with 136 residents calling in and 108 healthy hub interactions, almost half of these were in S/Oxhey and the most common reasons were in relation to benefits and mental health. Because of these issues, Herts Mind Network are now going to provide regular monthly attendances at all three hubs. I have visited both A/Langley and S/Oxhey hubs and will be visiting Mill End next.

On 16th November I spent the morning at Vicarage Rd, home of WFC where TRDC in conjunction with the football clubs trust, hosted a men's health seminar, there were over 50 attendees, we had a talk on prostate cancer which is a problem for more and more men, and where to get more information, also mental health and physical activity, I also made a video on behalf of TRDC promoting this event, but, I won't be in line for an Oscar!

HCC have also confirmed that Districts will be receiving a further £55K for the Household Support Fund, this is for us to distribute to various organisations across the district, and an overview of the amounts will be shared in the Members Information Bulletin over the coming months.

Housing

I've had notification that there is an enforcement action against a resident on a noise issue in the north of the district and I'm also aware of an empty property where there is an issue with possible rodent/ fox infestation, which is a difficult issue to deal with as the owner is no longer around and relatives do not appear to want to deal with the Council.

Both officers and myself have had to cancel briefings in November for differing reasons but, we will be meeting on Thursday 5th Dec, any updates arising from that meeting will be given verbally by myself at full Council.

As of 2nd of December there are currently 66 households in temporary accommodation, 10 of which are in nightly let accommodation, 1 of those is in Rickmansworth, the others are elsewhere, the details of where they are located, I am happy to discuss outside of this meeting.

Officers will, and, are trying to move these people back into our area as soon as properties become available, as long as it is safe to do so.

There are 1410 live applications on the Housing Needs Register

We have 116 assigned homeless applications, (who are owed a prevention or relief duty by the Council)

20 in the assessment stage, and 39 households that are owed a full housing duty by the Council.

Report from the Lead Member for Infrastructure and Economic Development, Councillor Louise Price

I would like to thank Officers for their help in preparing this report.

Infrastructure

Electric Vehicle Charging Project

The Charging Point Operator for our EV chargers in council car parks has been appointed and installations are likely to start in January 2025. We have launched an EV progress webpage with information about the project and a tracker for when each installation is likely to occur, this can be viewed here: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/ev>

Officers intend to submit a report to the General Public Services, Community Safety and Infrastructure (GPSCSI) Committee in the New Year seeking adoption of an EV Strategy.

LCWIP

A report with the proposed amended routes was presented to the GPSCSI Committee in October 2024 and amendments were agreed. Officers have investigated Green Street in Chorleywood and will be considering this for inclusion in the final plan. A revised LCWIP will be presented to committee for adoption in early 2025.

Beryl Bikes (bike hire scheme)

The Beryl bike hire scheme extension in Croxley Green has been completed. The scheme saw 475 journeys in October with most of these between Croxley and the main Watford scheme. Officers are working to deploy the final bay at Croxley Library.

Economic Development

Shop Survey

A shop survey is undertaken once a year in order to assess the function, condition and vitality of retail centres and shopping parades in the district. The shop survey assesses the use classes of units in the district's retail centres and shopping parades, including any vacant units.

The majority of units (48.3%) across the main retail centres were in retail use E(a) at the time of the September survey.

The proportion of vacant units in the main retail centres has decreased since October 2023, from 7.8% to 6.3%. The vacancy rate in the main retail centres is significantly lower than the UK average of 13.9% (as of 2023). Additionally, only 2.8% of the units within the District's Neighbourhood Centres were vacant.

Economic Study

Three Rivers District Council, collectively with all other districts in South West Hertfordshire have recently commissioned and completed an Economic Study.

The study is an evidence-based document that makes high level assumptions regarding future employment floorspace needs across South West Hertfordshire. It will help to inform the development of Local Plan policies in South West Hertfordshire by reviewing current market trends and considering the potential need for office, industrial, storage and distribution floorspace over a timeframe to 2041. The study also takes into account the longer timeframe of the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan by making projections to 2050.

The report will therefore inform TRDC's policy position on employment floorspace in the emerging Local Plan. Its conclusions will be used as evidence in the development of policies and potential employment land allocations. A report will be brought to the Local Plan Sub-Committee in the new year setting out the implications for policy development.

Visit Herts Destination Management Plan

Visit Herts has recently produced the Hertfordshire 5-year Destination Management Plan which identifies priorities and actions to grow and benefit the local visitor economy. This plan sets out the current opportunities and challenges for Hertfordshire and sets out a shared vision for the destination over the next five years.

Hertfordshire welcomes over 25 million visitors to the county each year. The visitor economy contributes £2.2 billion to the local economy annually and supports almost 39,000 jobs, which is 6% of all employment in the county. The Harry Potter Studio Tour welcomes up to 6,000 visitors a day, approximately 2 million a year. The Destination Management Plan seeks to set out a plan for how such visitors can be encouraged to stay longer and spend more time in the county.

Report from the Lead Member for Community Safety and Partnerships, Councillor Andrew Scarth

Community Partnerships & Health

Some actions from the partnerships side of work.

16 bids were received by Watford and Three Rivers Trust for the Connecting Three Rivers Fund. The fund holds £4,603 to award to local projects that would achieve the following priorities:

- Promote local employment and volunteering opportunities
- Develop and coordinate the community and voluntary sector
- Tackling and preventing anti-social behaviour and youth crime
- Tackling hate crime and improving community cohesion for minority
- community groups

The Local Strategic Partnership and Community Safety Board meeting on 12th December will agree the successful applicants proposed by the Advisory Group.

A successful men's health event was held at Watford FC Stadium on 16th November, organised by TRDC in partnership with WFC community sports and Education Trust. Over 50 attendees participated, receiving presentations on prostate cancer, mental health and physical activity. The better health bus was also present offering everyone a health check.

32 people attended the Volunteers Fair held at Croxley Business Park on 20th November. The event also provided local charities an opportunity to network with each other. Next year, Watford and Three Rivers Trust will promote increased engagement from charities at existing community events.

Data is being collected from all services to compile the Equality Duty Information Report for Three Rivers District Council which will be published in January.

World Aids Day falls on 1st December. A worksheet has been circulated to all staff and councillors, and partner organisations to mark the day, to show support, spread awareness of medication to prevent and treat HIV, highlight the resilience of people living with HIV and to remember those who have died from Aids related illnesses.

Community Safety

- Implemented the Community Safety Partnership Action Plan for 2024 in line with strategic priorities - action plan on track on all areas and actions
- Reviewed and implemented the Anti-social Behaviour Policy (ASB).
- Introduced a new on-line platform for ASB - customer focusing, self-help tools and referral pathways

- Piloting an ASB App for reporting ASB
- Produced Three Rivers Prevent Delivery Plan
- Cuckooing Task and Finish Group/awareness campaign in South Oxhey via the use of the Advertising van with partner agencies
- Produced a new Safeguarding Adults and Children Policy
- Hopefully TRDC will be successful in the purchasing of 8 new CCTV cameras
- Implemented a CCTV Policy
- Annual Community Safety Report
- New Community Safety Clinics to include the ASB Service run at the Healthy Hubs
- Community Safety Conference planning for conference in February 2025
- The Anti-social behaviour satisfaction survey now includes a QR to give residents a choice of ways to respond to the service
- Subgroup implemented to support Shannon House, with a wealth of support offered (with police and managing agents)
- White Ribbon Accredited
- 16 days of activism (Domestic Abuse) including charity walk
- ASB Week - 3 locations
- 12 days of Christmas, social media posts leading up to Christmas on personal safety around the holiday period in place
- Various communications on keeping safe through the winter months and home safety
- Opals Event - Abbots Langley
- Working with police on the identified hotspot areas
- introduced Personal Safety Campaign
- Funded MIND
- Funded No More Service
- Co-ordinate and manage a wealth of meetings with partner organisations

Report from the Lead Member for Leisure, Councillor Chris Lloyd

Panto:

- *Jack and the Beanstalk* sales: 11,308. (As of 27/11) . Currently on track to meet target.
- Panto VIP night is on Friday 13 December @ 6:30pm. Formal invites have been circulated to councillors.
- Panto rehearsals started on Monday 25 November with the first performance Friday 6 December.
- The 2025 panto title will be *Beauty and the Beast*

Membership

- The membership scheme has 61 members. Activity continues to promote the membership scheme.

Electrical Intake Replacement

- Part remedial works completed in August. One quote was received for the electrical intake room but was overbudget so not taken forward. Works will be retendered through December-January.

Shows and Events:

- Watersmeet Annual Review 2023-24 was presented at the 16 October Climate Change, Leisure and Housing committee.
- 2025 is Watersmeet's 50th Anniversary with celebration activity planned throughout the year. Activity prior to 31 March to be included in the January Members Information Bulletin and then full activity for the rest of the year to be presented at 12 March Climate Change, Leisure & Housing committee.
- The Christmas Market on Saturday 16 November was a successful event and well attended with 30 stall holders and approximately 400 members of the public.

Leisure Assets

Open Spaces - Management Plans

Next financial year the management plans for Croxley Common Moor and the Withey Beds will be reviewed and updated for the period 2025-30.

Stone's Orchard and The Green Management Plan – officers have met with CGPC Clerk – the parish are supportive of the proposal and suggested they have CIL funds that could be used if required. Engagement period will be undertaken with the draft management plan then completed in early Spring with the aim of the final management plan to take to committee in July 25.

Draft Play Space Strategy 2025-2030

The public consultation for the Draft play Strategy will be carried out in 2 parts.

Officers will be visiting local primary schools across the whole district in January 2025 to consult with children in Years 1-6.

Adult (parent, carer etc.) consultation will be achieved via the Have Your Say platform and widely promoted on social media and the leisure newsletter and Council newsletter.

Leisure Management Contract

The solar panel works were completed at the end of October. No complaints were received due to the disabled parking bays being closed.

Works are ongoing at William Penn Leisure Centre with the spin studio, dance and fitness studios and gym being refurbished and new equipment. Spin, dance and fitness studios have been completed, with the gym due to be completed by mid-December

2 Benches at The Horses' Field – the benches have been installed

Friends of Groups

Meetings have been taking place with Friends Groups. Going forward officers will aim to have face to face meetings twice / year.

Leisure Development

Baldwins Lane pavilion – Work on the Artwork should start next month, date is weather dependant.

Cultural Strategy

- The Cultural Asset Mapping work is near completion and the data gathered is currently being mapped on GIS. These maps will enable us to view a snapshot of culture across the district, with areas of high and low activity.
- The Public Consultation was on Have your Say from 8th – 22nd November. We have had an excellent response, with 620 submissions to date. This has been widely advertised to the public via various channels, and to cultural organisations/ providers.
- A report on the research will be prepared in December, along with recommendations about next steps for creating the strategy.

Artistsmeet

- Valeria Aguiar is exhibiting from 3rd October – 31st December, with artworks inspired by her dual British-Brazilian heritage. There was no formal Opening Reception, but Valeria attended the Watersmeet Christmas Market on 16th November.

Sports Development

- We were successful in securing £3,000 from the Parkinson's UK sport and physical activity grant to run a class in partnership with Bounce Back Fitness. The class will be a mix of strength, balance and coordination work and Table Tennis aimed at people living with Parkinson's and will commence in January/February 2025.
- Play Rangers will end sessions for the year on Friday 29 November before starting their winter break. In-School sessions will continue until the end of term.

Christmas Trail

- The Christmas Trail this year is called 'Santa Needs You!'. This is a 45-minute walk aimed at children and families however anyone is welcome. There will be QR codes to scan throughout the trail with Christmasy surprises behind each point. This will be hosted at Leavesden Country Park and will run from the afternoon of Monday 2nd December until 2 January 2025. It will be promoted via the Council's communications platforms including social media channels and website.
- It was well supported last year.

Natural Infrastructure and Projects

Aquadrome Programme

Pedestrian Bridge

- Essential tree works in preparation for the bridge - complete.
- Removal of the telegraph pole - complete.
- FRAP has been submitted and acknowledged– EA can take 10 weeks to agree
- Anticipate a start on site in the new year – contingency was built into the programme, so still on track.
- Contractors have been told all work to be complete, with the play area ready to be opened by the Easter holidays.

Bridge Closure Comms:

- Storyboard for the bridge and play area on either side of the bridgeworks to explain the project - complete.
- Continued work with Comms and Beaver Bridges to share the “journey of the bridge”
- Programme being developed with Leisure officers to bring Beaver Bridges into a couple of schools to talk about the bridge.

Recovery and Resilience funding NHN (National Lottery)

The NHN project has been successfully completed and received full approval by the National Lottery in October 2024.

The NHN project achieved its aims by providing a baseline understanding of the sites natural and social heritage, challenges and opportunities. We have successfully:

- Gained an understanding of the site’s hydrology and how to sensitively manage this
- Completed ecological surveys on the habitats and species present
- Developed a site identity and a Strategic Communication and Engagement Plan

- Completed a series of Engagement Activities
- Seconded 2 posts for the above projects

A full Evaluation report was submitted as part of the final claim.

This report has been circulated to Members and will be on available on the website.

Our Lottery mentor signed off the project with:

‘Congratulations on a successfully completed project and well done to all those involved!’

NLHF main application- WWW bid

The new Expression of Interest (EOI) was submitted on 21 November 2024 reflecting the preliminary findings from the hydrological survey and our baseline work as a result of the NHN project. If successful, the development phase bid will be submitted in February 2025. The total bid was for £4,846,109.

Visitor Experience

- Storyboards 1 in place – complete.
- Storyboard 2, regarding the flood plain in now in situ at the point where the paths are closed. An additional two boards will be in place over the coming month.
- Storyboard 3 – welcoming visitors to site and giving a project overview is currently in production.
- A project specific web page has been launched so that members of the community can find out more about the planned works for the Aquadrome. The QR code on recent posters and the storyboard link to the website.

Fishing Swims

- Specification and tender are out to tender (return 13/12)
- 20 swims will be refurbished in agreement with the fishing club, Remaining swims will be given back to nature
- New signage is being designed to include logos, W3W, fishing swim nicknames and swimming terms.

The Bury Grounds Biodiversity Project -

- LCF (Landfill Communities fund) funded tree works commenced on Monday 18th November, focused in the garden area aiming to conserve the existing trees and shrubs. Due to quotes for the works coming in under budget, quotes are currently being sought with an increased scope.
- The FRAP has been submitted to the EA with a request for this to be prioritised. As this project outline has been EA approved through the funding process with Affinity, we do not expect any issue with this. Therefore, initial communications will commence soon to inform on the scheme. In addition, when works commence temporary on-site interpretation will provide further information.

Chorleywood House Estate – Chorleywood Chilterns Chalk Stream Project

- Chilterns Society is working with Wild Trout Trust on the design of this scheme. Measurements are being taken across the 1.1km stretch.
- It is anticipated that design options will be available for review in early 2025 before a more detailed design.

Capital Programme

In delivery:

Leavesden Country Park – Entrance Widening – The combined gate has been installed on site and is fully operational. One YMCA remain updated on the works. Awaiting additional permit approval from HCC Highways with a view for pedestrian island, kerb dropping and tarmac works to take place overnight.

In development:

Play Area Capital Programme

Eastbury and Ebury Play Areas: Plans approved for Certificate of Lawful Development as a permitted development.

Works to Ebury Play Area will take place as part of the Rickmansworth Aquadrome Bridge project, with the play area becoming the compound for the works.

Eastbury play area is due to commence work w/c 2 Dec and due to complete 13 Dec, weather permitting. Eastbury Farm School updated on all works. Cllrs have been updated on plans for proposed works.

**Report from the Lead Member for Sustainability and Climate Change,
Councillor Jon Tankard**

Report to follow.