

Whaley Bridge Annual Town Meeting

Friday, 27th April 2018

High Peak Borough Councillor's Observations 2017/2018

By Borough Councillor John A T Pritchard

High Peak Borough Council (HPBC) Service:

The composition of the Council's 43 Councillors is 23 Conservative, 17 Labour, two Liberal Democrat and myself. I am a member of the 'Liberal Democrat and Independent Alliance Group'; its Leader is Cllr Lomax and I am the Deputy Leader. I am a Member of Audit & Regulatory Committee (and Constitution Sub-Committee) and am the HPBC Representative on Whaley Bridge Sports Association Management Committee.

The Council has increased its Council Tax for FY (Financial Year) 2018/19 by 2.9% (ie setting Band D payments at £186.36) to support a budget for providing essential services of £10.4m. The Council spends 11% of the Council Tax which it collects; 89% is passed to the 'precepting' authorities: the County Council, the Police and Fire Authorities, and Town and Parish Councils.

Our expenditure is used to provide services including planning, affordable housing, waste and recycling, street cleaning, leisure centres, parks maintenance, support for local businesses, crime prevention activities, benefits services and elections.

Promises: I promised, when re-elected in 2015, that I wished to continue to:

- seek the provision of a second bridge
- campaign for more affordable housing
- seek appropriate funding and uses for the Class II* Trans-shipment Building in the Canal Basin
- promote the use of our two railway stations and local bus services as 'car-free' entry portals
- work on a local Neighbourhood Plan if the public demonstrate that they want it and will work towards it.

Planning: There is an up to date and compliant High Peak Local Plan, adopted on 14th April 2016. Its 'planning horizon' is the year 2031. Its policies now attract full weight in decision making.

Last year there were 697 planning applications, and 107 requests for 'pre-application' advice (for which householders are not charged). Government targets are that (unless there is an agreement in writing with the developer) 'major' applications should be determined within 13 weeks, and 'minor' applications within eight weeks. The Council's performance was 100% for major and 94% for minor determinations.

The validation of planning applications, which had been an 'externalised' service, has been brought back 'in house'.

Planning Application HPK/2014/0119 (also known locally as the 'Gladman' application) was received on 19th March 2014 and validated on 9th April 2014. It sought outline planning permission for 'up to 107 dwellings, site access, highway works, landscaping, public open space and associated works'.

Outline Planning permission was approved on 7th May 2015 permission for up to 107 dwellings including landscaping and public open space. The application for the approval of the reserved matters is awaited. Condition No. 1 (of 31 Conditions) reads: 'Approval of the details of layout, scale, appearance, access and landscaping (hereinafter called 'the reserved matters') shall be obtained from the Local Planning Authority in writing before any development is commenced.

Planning Application HPK/2017/0371 for a house adjacent to 31 New Horwich Road is awaiting determination.

Planning Application HPK/2016/0516 for an 'indicative' layout of 77 properties on land to the south of Manor Road was recently refused Outline Planning Permission.

Second Bridge: Oh dear!

Homelessness:

As a local housing authority HPBC is responsible for responding to the duties placed upon it by homelessness legislation, which has recently been reviewed and revised. The Council has estimated that that there are 1,053 empty homes (as well as 304 vacant non-domestic properties) across High Peak. Empty properties can also attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

The Council's Empty Property Strategy provides for the Council to:

- work with, and support, owners and landlords to help them return building to positive use
- raise awareness of the issues caused by leaving properties empty
- minimise the number of properties that become empty for long periods
- provide sustainable development by reducing the need to build new properties
- Improve housing conditions and prevent the deterioration of existing buildings.

Council Tax and business rates are often still payable on unoccupied premises.

The **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** now requires the Council to provide everyone who is 'homeless or at risk of homelessness' with access to 'meaningful help', irrespective of their priority need status, including:

- a duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a personalised housing plan
- a prevention duty to help all applicants threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- a relief duty to help all applicants that become homeless to secure accommodation for at least six months.

Affordable Housing:

New affordable housing units have been, or are being provided, in developments at Bridgemont, Thomas Fields in Buxton and elsewhere:

Bridgemont:

In March conditional planning permission (with 34 conditions) was granted to the Peaks and Plains Housing Trust of Macclesfield for a 100%-development of 13 affordable homes (five two bed houses and eight one bed apartments) at Bridgemont. Section 106 contributions are to be sought for some £32,000: Play Space (£960), Parks and Gardens (£7,423), Outdoor Sports (£6,362.20), Allotments (£1,000.35) and Education (£17,176.17).

More affordable homes at Thomas Fields scheme:

A £10million partnership scheme between the Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, Housing & Care 21 and Homes England, is now nearing completion at Thomas Fields in Buxton. This 'Extra Care' scheme for people aged over 55 comprises 53 two-bedroomed Extra Care apartments, a Residential Care Unit with 20 en suite rooms and fully-accessible communal facilities including a restaurant, hair salon, wellbeing suite, activity room and landscaped gardens with seating areas.

27 flats will be available at affordable rents and 26 apartments will be for shared ownership and outright sale. On-site support and care services will be provided according to the needs of the residents, and can include personal care and help with domestic tasks such as shopping, cleaning and ironing.

Councillors' Initiative Fund Scheme:

The Children's Play Area at Bridgemont adjacent to the children's nursery has been improved. The scheme will continue in 2018/2019 (£750 per Councillor):

https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/media/212/Councillors-Initiative-Fund---guidance-notes/pdf/HPBC_CIF_Guidance_Notes_2017-18.pdf

Buxton Crescent Hotel and Thermal Spa Project:

The £50M redevelopment of The Crescent (a Grade 1 Listed Building) and the Natural Baths and Pump Room (a Grade 2 Listed Building) continues. It will deliver:

- a 79-bedroom, 5-star hotel incorporating the Natural Baths
- a new visitor interpretation centre
- a state-of-the-art thermal, natural mineral water spa
- six specialist shops.
- an interactive visitor centre, tearoom and heritage experience in the Pump Room - open to the public free of charge - as well as enabling public access and interpretation of the Assembly Rooms.

Rats: I have recently met the Council's Rat Officer on-site at one of the areas where rats are seen in gardens. He explained that rats are becoming abundant *everywhere*. It is reported that in Milton Keynes rats as large as dogs are freely running around during daylight hours (see: <https://uk.yahoo.com/news/plague-rats-size-small-dogs-chewing-car-cables-take-english-town-114228427.html>) and that in London rats are up to four feet long (including tail) (see: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/12190991/giant-monster-rat-found-in-hackney-downs-london-childrens-playground.html>). High Peak Borough Council does not charge for their treatment and extermination, but some local authorities do.

Navigating the HPBC Website: A useful tool for navigating the HPBC website is available at: <https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/article/1037/Site-map>; another useful tool is the Interactive Planning Map: <https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/hp/council-services/planning-and-buildings/interactive-planning-map>, and yet another is My High Peak: <https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/My-Account> where registered Account Holders (currently there are 8,500) may:

- view personalised council tax information, such as balances, payment dates, banding information, and payments made so far in the year
- find out when benefit payments are due, when previous payments have been made to you, whom benefit is paid to and how to make changes
- view council tax and benefit letters and bills online
- pre-populate many of the Council's online forms with your name, address and e-mail details
- track certain requests that have been submitted to the Council.

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