

County Councillor Report – 3rd December 2023

Prepared by Cllr Linda Cohen

Buses 84/85 (and all other services)

Cllr and Cabinet member Philip Robinson is due to meet with South Gloucestershire Council later this week to discuss the future of the bus route. The campaign team (Barbara Lawrence and Janet Young) have separately written to South Glos councillors and have also put in an FOI request for bus numbers to WECA and South Glos. I have written and spoken to Philip Robinson GCC who has given an undertaking of support. I have also spoken to John O’Neill the Councillor for Charfield (SGC) who with Cllr Chris Wilmore (SGC) has promised to support our cause at cabinet meetings. We are now trying to mobilise the residents of South Glos who will be affected by any decision, to take action as their voices (as voters) are likely to carry more weight than those north of the border.

I would continue to reiterate the absolute importance of everyone trying to use the buses whenever possible, the passenger figures will continue to be a key part of the criteria used to assess our merit to receive support.

I would want to put on record my thanks for the outstanding and tireless work of both Barbara and Janet.

Road Safety / Highways

Kingswood

Residents have received notification of the proposed parking restrictions on the Wotton Road opposite Tubbs Turf. I have received letters of protest.

A TRO is under consideration to reduce the speed and for the yellow lines along the stretch.

Separately we are also considering a school safety zone which would include ‘wig wag’ lit school signs, a speed reduction and additional warning signage

We are trying to prevent parking in front of dropped kerbs and are also pushing for a school crossing patrol.

Symn Lane – Wotton under Edge

I have received further letters of concern regarding the speed of traffic and the dangers presented to children crossing the road at the top of Symn Lane. The view down New Road is obscured and children should cross further down Haw Street past Westfields. However, we do need to educate

drivers and pedestrians to take greater care and a school crossing patrol might reduce the dangers, which I will investigate.

There has been a call for speed bumps, but these have been ruled out historically.

For reference the mean/average speed of traffic on Haw Street is 21mph, New Road (in the 30mph zone) 29mph.

Swanley Junction

This is a priority for the next quarter.

The speed limits for the approach from Newport are being reviewed.

Separately the Highways Safety Officer will be out to do a review and I have asked that as part of that work we look at all police records for incidents at the junction.

We will be forming a campaign team and I would ask residents to send me any anecdotal evidence/ photographs linda.cohen@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Stinchcombe

I attended and supported the Community Speedwatch awareness event as part of Road Safety Week. The theme was 'stopping distances'. A sobering exercise about the difference between how many people you would hit if you were travelling at 30mph rather than 20mph and even more chilling 40mph rather than 30mph. There's a reason for the slogan 'Kill your speed, not a child.'

Thanks to Kath Hudson for her sterling work.

Hillesley

I am continuing to support the parish council with trying to secure speed reduction measures in Hillesley. Separately we are looking at half width village gateways to help with the process. Highways to report back on costs.

Hedgehogs

Signs in production. Update in next report. The action group has crowdfunded and will contribute to the cost.

Old Town / Parklands / Coombe

I am wrapping these three issues up together to allow them to be tackled at joint meetings to save Highways' time and to move things along quickly.

There are concerns that Parklands is being used as an overflow car park during church events and that this could preclude the fire service having access if there were an emergency.

The congested parking and traffic flow in Old Town often means that cars become stuck and then the whole of Wotton comes to a standstill.

The speed of traffic descending from Coombe continues to be a great concern to residents and although it is included in the Speedwatch bid the backlog in dealing with applications means that we need to take more urgent action.

All the residents who have reported concerns will be invited to a 'walk and talk' discussion with Highways in the next fortnight followed by a round table sum up at The Civic Centre to agree a plan of action once we have direction from Highways about what is possible. If you would like to be involved email the clerk at Wotton Town Council – clerk@wotton-under-edge.com

Please continue to promote and share these messages



Highways Repairs / maintenance

- **Road Green**

Resurfacing work now due to start on December 8th

Worth Noting

Gloucestershire County Council's road improvement plans have been boosted with an additional £87.9m funding from the government.

This will be added to the extra £100m we are investing. The council has been trialling innovative methods to improve road conditions during the 'summer of resurfacing'.

The spray injection patching machine has speeded up pothole repairs plus Find and Fix teams can repair smaller potholes ahead of schedule before they got worse. The £87.9m is a welcome boost to this winter's road resurfacing programme.

The council will receive £2.8m this financial year, £2.8m next year and additional funds totalling £87.9 over ten years.

The council has also launched [Fix My Street](#) - a new, easier and more efficient way for residents, businesses and organisations in Gloucestershire to report and get updates on everything from potholes to problem paths.

Through an interactive online map, a broad range of issues can be reported simply and easily. This might be the condition of the roads, broken traffic lights, issues with streetlights, flooding issues or drainage through to road markings and grass verges.

Residents can use it to:

- Report issues,
- See where issues have been reported already,
- Sign-up to receive updates on work when it's completed or inspected,
- View the total number of repairs made by the county council.

Fix My Street is available on the [county council's website](#) and you can save the page to your home screen on any device. Or alternatively, download the app from Apple's App Store or Google Play.

Gloucestershire County Council is responsible for almost 6,000km of roads and each one is routinely inspected. However, issues can develop quickly and residents can help by reporting problems online.

Once reported, a safety inspector will make an assessment of the work needed and whether a repair needs to be completed. Works are prioritised based on the urgency of the situation, for example, a problem on a busy road may be resolved within 24 hours. The council aim to repair all significant potholes (more than 4cm deep and 30cm wide) within 28 days.

Playgrounds

I am supporting fundraising efforts for new play equipment in Stinchcombe and for the Synwell Playing Field and Symn Lane with grants from the GCC Build Back Better fund. This will allow the action groups to use the money as match funding to attract additional help.

Activity booking for this winter's Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) opens on Monday 4 December

Families who are eligible for income-related free school meals can register now for the winter HAF which is funded by the Department for Education. Now in its third year, HAF continues to go from strength to strength, thanks to strong and successful partnerships with local partners who help make it all possible. They are:

- Gloucester – The Venture White City Ltd
- Cheltenham – Cheltenham Borough Council
- Tewkesbury – Young Gloucestershire
- Stroud – Stroud District Council
- Cotswolds – Cotswold District Council
- Forest of Dean – Forest Voluntary Action Forum

The majority of activities in the winter programme will run across four days from 2 January to 5 January 2024. There are some activities before Christmas. Families are encouraged to check their

local district HAF webpages to see activities that may be available at other times over the winter holidays.

There are lots of great options to choose from including festive parties, drama and science workshops, sports and games, art and crafts, as well as the ever-popular ticketed attractions. More information about the programme is available at: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/haf.

If they haven't done so already, families are encouraged to:

- [Register for the Children's Activities Booking System \(CABS\) now](#) to make sure they can view the activities which will be available in their district, and select their choices when booking opens on Monday 4 December.
- [Follow their district lead on social media](#) to see what is happening in their area.

Families who require additional support to choose, book or attend HAF activities, can receive support from six HAF Community Connectors, one for each district of Gloucestershire. [Find out more about Community Connectors](#).

Families eligible for pupil premium (income-related) free school meals can also apply for Holiday Free School Meal vouchers, which the council is providing for 1 week. Parents will receive £15 per eligible child from reception to year 11.

Applications will close at midday on 12 December. Vouchers will be distributed from Monday 18 December. Families will be able to find out more at www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/holiday-school-meal-vouchers/

Parents who have registered previously are automatically included and do not need to reapply.

Families whose circumstances may have changed, can find out about eligibility for free school meals on our website, and should contact childrensfund@gloucestershire.gov.uk to inform the team of any changes.

- Anyone who needs additional support over the winter can apply to the [Household Support Fund](#) which supports households in the most need with food, energy and water bills and other essential items.
- The council's [Support Hub](#) also includes links to helpful information and advice including tools to help save money, and look after health and wellbeing.

Just another drop? Director's report on alcohol published

The Director of Public Health, Siobhan Farmer, has published her annual report which highlights society's complex relationship with alcohol and the impact it has on us.

The report, titled 'Just Another Drop? The Ripple Effect of Alcohol', acknowledges that alcohol is embedded in the fabric of our society and that for many of us it is a fundamental part of socialising, relaxing or celebrating life events.

However, around 1 in 5 people (21%) are consuming alcohol at levels which put them at an increased risk of harm. As well as being linked to wide range of physical and mental health issues, alcohol can also impact relationships, work, cause financial strain, and increase your risk of being a victim or perpetrator of crime.

The report uses evidence and cases studies to show how this threshold for harm is often much lower than we realise. It also looks at the wider negative effects alcohol can have on families, communities, local services, and the wider environment and economy.

Siobhan Farmer, Director of Public Health at Gloucestershire County Council, said: "Focussing on alcohol can lead to criticisms of telling people what to do and policing people's fun. But it would be remiss of me, with responsibility for the health and wellbeing of the people in Gloucestershire, to ignore alcohol when it is one of the biggest contributors to the health and wellbeing of the local population.

"This report is also challenging because I have personal experience of the impact of alcohol. In a video clip, I share Jane's story, which I felt was an important example of how alcohol can affect all of us in many ways."

[Watch the video clip here.](#)

The report urges us to consider how we can work together to support people to understand their own drinking behaviour and how agencies, such as councils, housing, the NHS, and the police, can prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm.

The report makes recommendations that the Public Health and Communities team at the county council has committed to, as well recommendations for other agencies in the county, to help reduce alcohol-related harm in Gloucestershire.

The final recommendation is for individuals to be more mindful of their own drinking – and the report includes practical tips on how to do this.

If you're curious about the amount of alcohol you drink, [take the quiz](https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/check-your-drinking) to see how much you could cut down – you might surprise yourself! <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/check-your-drinking>

Help and support

If you would like more support to cut down on alcohol, the Healthy Lifestyles Service can help. Call 0800 122 3788 for free to start your journey or find out more online at

<https://hlsglos.org/programmes/drink-less>

Change Grow Live is Gloucestershire's alcohol recovery service, supporting those with more complex addiction issues to change their relationship with alcohol and move on with their lives. They provide virtual and in person peer support and group sessions to help with unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. Find out about support on offer online at <https://www.changegrowlive.org/advice-info/alcohol-drugs/alcohol-advice-stopping-drinking-reducing>

[Click here](#) to view the report.

Don't let Christmas cost the earth with plastic-free campaign

A campaign has been launched to encourage Gloucestershire residents to reduce the amount of plastic they use over the festive period.

Gloucestershire Recycles, which represents the county council and district councils, is aiming to show people that they can help the environment as well as save money with the 'plastic-free festivities' campaign.

It will focus on plastic reduction, as using less plastic is even better for the environment than recycling. Using less plastic means a reduction in energy use, water consumption and carbon emissions, as they all feature in the production process for plastics. The quality of plastics also reduces each time they are recycled so they can't be endlessly recycled, whereas alternatives like metal and glass can be recycled indefinitely.

Residents will be provided with information, ideas and top tips for reducing plastic over the festive period through three main themes of decorations, food and gifts.

Decorations:

- The average family spends £185 on decorations each year – to save money, try re-using decorations, swap with friends/family or buy second hand
- Recycled baubles – you can find many baubles made from 100 per cent recycled glass that look just as good, if not better, than standard baubles
- Wooden Christmas tree decorations – wood is a sustainable material and often recyclable, so consider making or buying wooden rather than plastic decorations for your tree
- Paper chains – a fun, easy and eco-friendly way to decorate the table and you can recycle the paper when finished

Food:

- Use aluminium foil instead of clingfilm – it can be recycled at kerbside, or use beeswax wraps
- Bake your own Christmas cookies or treats instead of buying them, as they often come wrapped in plastic
- Swap fresh for frozen items at the supermarket if they come with less packaging
- Swap plastic bottles, tubs and vacuum packs for cans or jars when you are shopping
- Plan meals carefully to avoid overbuying food, as much of it goes to waste

Gifts:

- Over half of UK adults say they have received gifts they don't want at Christmas; try to buy thoughtfully so they will be well received and last a long time
- Give people edible homemade gifts, like festive chocolate bark, biscuits or gingerbread men
- Give an experience – you could buy tickets to shows, concerts or events
- Use string instead of plastic tape when wrapping your presents

Christmas advice and support

The festive period can be a joyful but also a very lonely, worrying and on occasions dangerous time for residents. The cost of living crisis is not over and many families and those living on their own will need support.

Please ensure that you make residents aware of local and national services which are able to offer help. Please share with me details of any extra activities that are running in your parish.

The Keepers

Open on December 23rd for the café and carols

25th December – Christmas lunch for those who are by themselves or are carers and for those for whom they are caring

The community freezer and dry food store will be open when they are usually open www.thekeepers.org.uk

Helplines

Food – www.trusselltrust.org – find your nearest foodbank

Samaritans: 116 123 – calls are free

NHS – 111

Dentist – Also call 111 for an emergency NHS dentist near you

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0808 2000 247

If you have any ideas that you'd like to discuss or community / personal issues that need my help please get in touch. Email linda.cohen@gloucestershire.gov.uk 07791110906

My remit includes: Education, Highways, Children and Families Services, Health and Social Care, The Environment, Apprenticeships, Employment and Business, Fire and Rescue, Police, Trading Standards and Waste Disposal (not collection).