



July 2026  
Birch Ward and Parishes update  
Cllr Toni Fagan

Dear Councillors,

Firstly, I would like to share the introduction from Paul Satoor, the new chief executive of Herefordshire Council:

***Dear colleague,***

***I am writing to introduce myself as the new Chief Executive of Herefordshire Council.***

***Over the past few weeks, I have been undertaking a comprehensive handover and spending time meeting councillors, officers, partners and communities across the county. It has reinforced my initial impression that Herefordshire is a place with strong communities, ambitious organisations and a real pride in place.***

***I am joining the council at an important time, with significant opportunities ahead for the county. My focus is on building on the progress already made, supporting the council's improvement journey and ensuring we continue to deliver for residents, communities and businesses.***

***My approach is grounded in a simple set of values: trust, honesty and loyalty. I believe in openness, strong relationships and listening carefully to different perspectives. I am keen to understand what matters most to the organisations and individuals who help shape Herefordshire's future.***

***One of the things that has already struck me is the genuine value placed on partnership working across the county – it is real and makes a positive impact. I want to build on that foundation. Whether we are supporting economic growth, developing skills, improving infrastructure, strengthening communities or protecting our environment, success depends on organisations working together around shared ambitions. I believe Herefordshire's greatest strength lies not in any one institution, but in the collective commitment of businesses, public services, education providers, community organisations and local leaders who care deeply about the future of the county.***

***I see the council's role not only as a service provider, but as a partner, convenor and place leader. I am committed to building strong relationships, encouraging collaboration and ensuring we make the most of the opportunities available to Herefordshire.***

***I look forward to getting to know you and your organisation in the months ahead and to working together to support the continued success of Herefordshire.***

***Thank you for your ongoing engagement with the council.***

Secondly, we have finally received an update about the library and Shire Hall. The previous administration had proposed the library move to Maylords and had discounted work on the Shire Hall due to costs. This was overturned by the administration that took control of the council in 2023, which was determined to bring the Shire Hall back into use despite warnings of the costs. The following is a synopsis of the lengthy update councillors received yesterday.

**Following a comprehensive review, Herefordshire Council remains committed to restoring Shire Hall and HMAG to secure their long-term future. However, detailed investigations have revealed additional costs and structural challenges, making the original proposals unaffordable. Revised schemes are being developed to retain core ambitions while ensuring financial sustainability and value for money.**

**At Shire Hall, structural surveys showed that the original plan, including a library in the Assembly Room, would exceed the £8.5 million budget. Further assessments in late 2025 and early 2026 explored cost-saving options. Subject to approvals, the library is now proposed for Court Room Two and surrounding areas, offering a more cost-effective solution.**

**Alongside a new library layout, supported by £2.6 million from the UK Government's Stronger Towns Fund, the council proposes to invest £8.5 million in essential structural works. This will stabilise the Grade II\* listed building, deliver a modern, accessible library and learning centre, and support future development phases. These may include restoring the Assembly Room for public events, subject to additional funding.**

**For HMAG, a review found the original design, including a new upper floor and roof terraces, would cost up to £14.5 million above the £20.5 million budget. The revised proposal focuses on restoration and enhancement without these elements.**

**Funding of £20.8 million has been identified, including £8.4 million from the council, £5 million each from the Stronger Towns Fund and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and other contributions. Further funding will be sought to meet the estimated total cost of £24.4 million.**

**The revised HMAG scheme includes restoration of the Grade II\* listed building, structural repairs, and improved access, environmental performance, and visitor experience, while preserving its historic character. Plans include refurbished galleries, a new learning room, and restoration of the Woolhope Room, creating a more engaging museum showcasing artefacts such as the Herefordshire Hoard and supporting learning, community participation, and cultural growth. Opportunities for phased enhancements and partnerships with national institutions will continue to be explored.**

**Planning and design work for both projects is ongoing, with construction currently expected to begin in summer 2027. Further details on costs and timelines will be published as soon as possible. Work will also continue with partners, funders, and investors to secure additional support.**

**Meanwhile, cultural services remain active. The Museum-on-the-Move programme has visited over 30 locations and engaged more than 15,000 people. The Old House continues as a fully accredited museum. A temporary library operates from Hereford Town Hall, offering full services, alongside an improved Belmont library. The History Store hosts tours, workshops, talks, and community events.**

**The council recognises that stakeholders may be disappointed by delays and reduced scope. However, these decisions reflect updated evidence and current economic conditions. The council remains committed to its role as custodian of Shire Hall and HMAG and to bringing both buildings back into use for future generations.**

[Hereford Shirehall library regeneration project under review | Hereford Times](#)

This issue will be discussed by the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee [next week](#).

Please remind residents about the [Report a problem - Herefordshire Council](#) for any issues that arise as they all need to be logged and this is the most efficient way to get action.

[Home - Talk Community Directory](#) which has whole host of What's On and service information to support residents.

Finally, a reminder about the ward councillor small grant pot for any local initiatives that could do with a small amount of funds, please do let me know.

Wishing you all a good summer,

Kindest regards

Toni