Welcome to the Spring edition of the Parish Newsletter.

As you can see from the content, the district council is working closely with the parishes on a wide range of topics, and I would like to thank all those who have given their valuable time in support. There has never been a better time for parish councils to make a real difference by using some of the powers being passed to them through the Localism Act. By working in tandem with parishes, we can ensure that our residents get the best and most appropriate outcomes and support from us all.

A major pillar of the council’s Strategic Review, which sets out how we will move forward over the next few years, relies heavily upon partnership working, and amongst our closest partners and allies are the parish councils. We are always appreciative of the work you do and mindful that you are close to our residents, their views, issues and problems.

First parish and town council conference

We’d like to give a big “thank you” to all of you who attended our first town and parish council conference at Abberley Village Hall on 27 February. Around 30 hardy souls turned up to participate in debates around a number of key issues but focussing mainly on the Localism Act and in particular neighbourhood planning, community right to challenge and assets of community value. Copies of all the presentations have been placed on the Localism and Communities pages of our website where you will also find a range of resources relating to the Localism Act and contact points for each of the main issues.

David Rolls, who leads the Research and Intelligence section at the council, made a short presentation on the benefits of the council’s new InstantAtlas resource – more information on this is below.

One thing that many local councils have asked us to do is to be very clear about the services that MHDC provides and to help with this we have added a list of our services to the website. This can be found at http://www.malvernhills.gov.uk/cms/community/localism-and-communities.aspx

How can we improve working relations?

We were also very keen to talk about how we could improve working relationships and following short breakout sessions, here is some of the feedback that we had:

• Feedback is helpful if you know who to contact – names not on website – privileged access for parish clerks?
• Please send posters through post, costly and poorer quality if printed locally
• Great to have a meeting in the north of the county
• Breakdown of cost of services e.g. litter picking in town/parish council areas
• Direct telephone numbers
• How many in David Clarke’s team?
• How do we influence MHDC decisions?
• Presence of planners at key times
• More meetings during the day

Do you agree? Is there anything else we should be doing to make our working relationships even better? Please let John Williams know your views: john.williams@malvernhills.gov.uk. Finally, we are looking to hold these conferences regularly and will be looking to set up another date in late summer. We will consult with CALC and let you know the date in due course.
New local information resource for parishes and communities

Making sense of local information can be a really important benefit to local councillors. When information is presented in an easy to use visual format it can help communities and their representatives to better understand and meet local needs.

InstantAtlas, which is a map based information system, can now be accessed via the Research & Intelligence pages on the MHDC website. The system displays various data, including the most recent Census 2011, in an easy to understand and interactive format. The information can be looked at in various levels of detail, including by ward and parish. It covers a number of themes such as economy, health, community safety and transport. To access the information go to InstantAtlas.

The November 2012 Worcestershire Viewpoint Survey results, on both a district and a ward level, will be available by 10 May.

Rural Services Project

The Malvern Hills Partnership (MHP), chaired by the district council, commissioned Community First to carry out a six month pilot project focussing on seven rural parishes within the wards of Longdon and Martley to build on previous research about access to services.

It’s widely recognised that people living in rural areas are at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving services. Health care, transport, education, shopping and leisure may all be at a distance, making it hard to meet the needs of some people.

A large number of people took part in the survey which revealed that local organisations and community groups play an important role in meeting their needs. Community First initially set out to look at ‘gaps’ in service, but soon realised that the biggest gap was ‘information’.

A number of initiatives have resulted from the project which is still on-going. Work is focussing on the Longdon area to encourage parish councils to develop their web presence. Other support has included small parish grants to buy a photocopier for a village newsletter, funding for notice boards and web pages. A computer and printer have been installed in Pendock post office to provide any resident with quick and easy access to information and advice about public services and local events – an innovation that has been well received.

For more information about the project, please contact Karen Humphries at Community First on 01684 312745.
Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood planning is a key part of the Localism Act. It enables communities to draw up a neighbourhood plan for their area and is intended to give communities more of a say in the development of their local area.

Neighbourhood plans give communities an opportunity to:

• choose where new homes, shops and offices should be built
• have a say on issues like design
• grant planning permission for the new development that communities want to see go ahead through neighbourhood development orders and community right to build orders.

In areas where a town or parish council exists, these are the only bodies that can prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. Within the Malvern Hills district, neighbourhood planning can therefore only be undertaken by town and parish councils.

During the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan or Order the district council will provide on-going advice and support to parish and town councils and make necessary decisions at relevant stages.

Guidance on developing your Neighbourhood Development Plan

MHDC held a workshop on 21st March for those town and parish councils intending to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan and have prepared a guide to developing a Plan. The guide is available on our website http://www.malvernhills.gov.uk/cms/planning/planning-policy/the-planning-policy-framework/neighbourhood-planning.aspx

Town and parish councils are encouraged to seek early advice from the district council’s planning policy team, who can help you to meet the legal and conformity requirements of developing your plan. For further information contact David Clarke on 01684 862370.

Applications to designate Neighbourhood Areas

One of the first steps in developing a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Order is that the town or parish council has to apply to the council to be designated as a neighbourhood area.

Kempsey Parish Council has recently applied to designate the parish as a neighbourhood area and, in accordance with the relevant regulations, the council has been consulting on the application over a 6 week period. The application can be viewed on our website. Any comments on the Kempsey neighbourhood area application should be sent to MHDC by 5pm on Friday 10th May 2013. Comments can be sent electronically via email to DevelopmentPlans@malvernhills.gov.uk or posted to the following address: Development Plans and Conservation, Malvern Hills District Council, Council House, Avenue Road, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 3AF.

In the forthcoming weeks the council will also be consulting on applications to designate neighbourhood areas covering the parishes of Clifton-upon-Teme and Leigh & Bransford.
People power has money-saving potential

The first round of a new collective energy scheme launched by Malvern Hills District Council, as part of a national energy switch, has had good results with almost 400 households registering their interest in the Malvern Hills Fair Energy Scheme.

Over 86,000 people across the UK signed up to April’s Big Community Switch via their local council’s energy saving initiative.

Nationally, 71% of those who took part in the massive community switching programme in April found the scheme could help them save on their energy bills – with an average saving of £111.

Residents who took part in the Malvern Hills Fair Energy Scheme will now have received a personal offer which they can choose to accept by the 8th of May. Participants are reminded to read the terms and conditions, before they switch and save.

Residents can register online now for the next round of the scheme. If you are interested in the scheme you must register by midnight on the 3rd of June and it will help to have a gas and electric bill handy to estimate your consumption. On the 4th of June a new “reverse energy auction” will take place, with the company with the best energy offer winning.

Even if you don’t live in the Malvern Hills district you can still register for the council’s scheme, just enter Malvern Hills as your local authority. Visit the council’s website at www.malvernhills.gov.uk for more details.

New funding to support Neighbourhood Planning

The Government have recently announced a £9.5 million, two-year support programme for communities developing a neighbourhood plan. Under the programme, parish and town councils will be able to apply for grant payments, up to £7,000 per neighbourhood area, to contribute to costs incurred in preparing a neighbourhood plan or order.

The programme will also offer opportunities for those interested in, and involved in, neighbourhood planning to share learning, including through planning camp events, workshops and online forums.

The programme will be delivered by Locality, in partnership with the Royal Town Planning Institute / Planning Aid England.

The grant strand of the programme has a funding allocation of £3.69 million to be distributed over two years in two rounds of funding:

- The first round opened on 1 May 2013 with 2.28 million available. Funds will be distributed from May 2013 onwards and can be used to pay for activity taking place before 31 March 2014
- The second round of funding will open around February 2014 with £1.41 million available. Funds will be distributed from April 2014 onwards. The funded activity will need to be completed by December 2014 for round two.

Guidance notes for grant applications are available on the Locality website at http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/. The guidance notes indicate that the grants can contribute to a wide range of costs, for example, start-up costs, training sessions, community engagement costs, contribution to required studies, expert advice and incidentals such as printing costs.
New recycling service underway

The council’s new recycling service got underway on bank holiday Monday 6th May. Every household in the district has received letters outlining the changes, which revolve around the introduction of wheeled bins. In addition, the Head of Community Services wrote to every parish and town council with details of the new service.

There has been a very good response to the availability of a ‘collection alert’, which offers customers a chance to subscribe for both email and text reminders. Over 2,000 residents have already registered, which is extremely positive. Please take every opportunity to encourage your constituents to subscribe to this service which is free and will be expanded to cover other service changes including bad weather disruption. Subscribing is easy either via our website or by telephoning Worcestershire Hub on 01684 862151.

We have also taken the opportunity to remind residents about the ‘Assisted Collection’ service and over 500 people have recently registered. This is a popular solution for residents who are not physically able to place their recycling and refuse at the boundary edge of their property. Please promote this service to your local community – more details are available on our website or you can telephone the Worcestershire Hub on 01684 862151.

Zig Zag Coaching

In April, MHDC commissioned Zig Zag Coaching to deliver the council’s unique sports programme Sport2Inspire. The council will continue to monitor and evaluate the organisation throughout the duration of the programme to ensure that a high quality service continues to be provided for the district’s children and young people.

The sports programme targets children and young people aged 5-16 years and delivers coaching in a very wide variety of sports activities during the school day, before school, after school and over the holidays too.

For further information about how to access the sports programme please contact Zig Zag at info@zigzagcoaching.co.uk or call 07510 990969. To sign up to their mailing list please visit www.zigzagcoaching.co.uk.
You could save money on your energy bills by joining the Big Community Switch NOW.

50 councils are taking part and the more people that register, the better the deal for everyone.

Register your interest now, with no obligation to accept your personalised offer.

Take this opportunity to see what you might save.

Sign up online at www.malvernhills.gov.uk, visit your nearest customer service centre or call the Worcestershire Hub on 01684 862151.