

The Gazette view



Making plans for Christmas lights

WATCHING the rain lashing the windows of the *Ross Gazette* office in Broad Street, on Monday, made me very aware that the Events Committee at Ross Town Council had been very clever with their choice of date for the Christmas Fayre and Lights switch on in Ross.

Sunday, November 20th, was a chilly day but thankfully the rain held off until the lights had been turned on to illuminate the Market House and the Christmas tree.

As always, there are some people who do not think there are enough lights, and whether to have white or coloured lights is always a matter of opinion. Personally, I think the Market House is the biggest draw we have for visitors to the town, and the lighting on it is beautiful, both elegant and festive. However I do understand people calling for more lights, and especially, more coloured lights, in other parts of the town to draw more Christmas shoppers.

Surely it is possible to have both.

Ross Town Council spend a considerable sum each year replacing the lights which get damaged or vandalised, and it would cost many thousands of pounds to completely install new lights and power supplies for a festive spectacular. As the Town Council does not seem to have the will to purchase enough lights to give the town a festive makeover, perhaps it would be a good idea to think of new ways to pay for the lights for next year.

I was interested to read about the lights in Bromyard, which are paid for by contributions from local people. They fundraise all year to

Local artist campaigns for fairer treatment for retiring women

MARIANA Robinson, (62) an artist from the Wye Valley managed to get her unique proposal for bridging the gap that changes to women's pensions have caused to the Pensions All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in July this year. Her "63 is the new 60" proposal offers to meet the Government half way by allowing women born in the 1950s to retire at age 63 instead of the new timetable which was brought in by the 2011 Act.

Mariana has set up her own Facebook campaign to lobby



• Artist and campaigner Mariana Robinson

Government to look at this much fairer proposal. She is concerned that with the Autumn Statement due this week, the Government has yet to acknowledge that these women have been treated unfairly. She said that there have been too many pensions' acts changes hitting this one cohort of women at once.

She told the *Ross Gazette* that she, and her fellow campaigners, are not against womens' retirement ages being brought into line with men but it should be done more fairly for those women who it will affect.

Mariana claims that there are huge anomalies between the age women can retire although there may be just a few months difference in ages. She proposes that women born between April 6th, 1953 up to April 5th, 1960 should be allowed their full state pension at age 63. She says that the 63rd birthday is a fairer point than the government timetables. For more than 60 years, women have retired on their

60th birthday. However the first that the majority of women knew that they were being brought into line with men retiring at age 65, was within 18 months of their expected retirement at 60. Mariana said: "This dreadful lack of communication meant it was far too late for them to make alternative retirement arrangements. Some had taken redundancy or decided to retire early to look after elderly parents, expecting their pensions within a couple of years, only to find that the goalposts had been moved not once, but sometimes twice or three times. That's why these women have risen up and are fighting for justice."

If you are a 1950s born woman and wish to support Mariana's campaign you can find it on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/marianarobinson/ Their aim is for people of all political persuasions with a simple strategy of getting their state pensions before they wear out or become destitute.

More people in employment

THE amount of people claiming job seekers allowance (JSA) in Herefordshire has dropped substantially since this time in 2010. The total number of claimants in the parliamentary constituency is 690; of those who are 18 to 24, there are 160.

Employment Minister, Damian Hinds, comment-

ed: "Yet again we have a strong set of figures, with employment continuing to run at a record high and unemployment falling to a 11-year low. Growth is being fuelled by full-time professional jobs while wages are continuing to perform strongly, which underlines the resilience of the UK labour market.

Defib installed at Merton House

THE latest defibrillator to be provided by the charity, The Oddfellows, has been installed



Neighbourhood plan update

CONCERNS were raised about the Neighbourhood Plan for Ross by Councillor Phil Cutter at Ross-on-Wye Town Council's Full Council meeting on Monday, November 14th.

He said that the process was costing the Council a lot of money to employ consultants. He said: "Local involvement is vital. We need local knowledge to get these things to work. It's all very well bringing in consultants, but they don't know the area."

Cllr David Ravenscroft said: "The consultants have done a tremendous amount of work. They have pulled together the work that local volunteers have been providing. Without that I don't think we'd move forward."

Fire Authority funding gap

CONCERN is growing that funding gaps between government grants to the Fire Authority and what it needs to enable it to continue to provide its current level of service, cannot be bridged.

The Fire Authority has been acting to deal with the reductions in funding for some time and has managed to balance its budget for 2015-16, but there will be a small gap of £300,000 in 2016-17. The Authority said: "Closing this gap is very unlikely to have any impact on frontline response."

However the future is less secure for 2017-2020. They report that "All indicators suggest the period of austerity is likely to continue and there has been no suggestion that the grant reduction trend of the last four years will be any different.

"Work is currently underway with partners in other emergency services and local authorities to collaborate in the provision of back-office support functions to provide savings to meet these future gaps.

"It is too early to say with certainty how much of the gap these measures will meet."

In the past few years, fears that Ross and Whitchurch will lose fire crews have been allayed, largely due to fierce public opposition to these proposals. Suggestions to house the ambulance