

Supplement to the agenda for

Cabinet

Thursday 25 June 2020

2.30 pm

Online meeting

| | Pages |
|--|---------------|
| 4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC | 3 - 6 |
| 5. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS | 7 - 10 |

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 June 2020

Question 1

Mr R Palgrave, How Caple

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The County All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs, supported by the County Councils Network (CCN), is investigating the decline of rural bus services and will make recommendations to government. They are inviting evidence from Councils. Their inquiry's terms of reference also seeks views on the immediate and long-term impact of Coronavirus on bus services. The deadline for responding is 31 July.

Re-vitalising bus services is a key part of the Local Transport Policy and will make a valuable contribution to addressing the climate emergency. Figures from CCN show that funding for rural bus services in the UK has almost halved since 2010.

It would be unfortunate if this opportunity to lobby central government for more financial support were missed. Is Herefordshire Council preparing a submission to this inquiry and if not will it now allocate resources to do so?

Response

Thank you for your question Mr Palgrave. Thank you for drawing attention to this important opportunity to provide evidence to the County Council's Network with a view to seeking a better deal for rural bus support from government. I can confirm that we will be making a submission and will provide our views on the issues raised which comprise:

- Funding for rural bus services
- Innovation
- The key issues we would like the National Bus Strategy to address, and
- Concerns regarding Covid 19 and longer term implications for rural bus services

We will be making a submission for the reasons outlined, collating the substantial evidence already held prior to the inclusion of Covid-19s after effects – and also on what so far limited and disjointed evidence we have on the further impacts since lockdown and re-emergence from lockdown. Public transport – particularly buses, particularly an ambition for electric buses – is a central theme to the transport policy of the new administration. Lobbying government to help them understand the huge advantages, social and economic, that public transport has in a semi-rural authority like ours is critical. We have already seen the effects of the partial disruption of our rather limited bus service on commuters and communities in the Golden Valley, it is essential we commit resource and focus on making sure good bus services are available within the County.

Question 2

Anonymous, Hereford

To: cabinet member, finance and corporate services

I am an experienced event manager with a limited company who has been declined furlough due to being on annual payroll not monthly. I am unable to claim the Herefordshire Small Business

Discretionary Grant Fund as I do not have a rateable value or licenced business premises as I work on site with clients, therefore I do not meet your criteria. All my future event work has been cancelled and I am currently living off savings. Is there any help available to support my business please?

Response

The small business and retail, hospitality and leisure grant schemes that council is operating on behalf of Government are aimed at businesses that operate out of properties that have a rateable value. The council has paid out over £55m in grants to more than 4,700 businesses. The council has also launched a discretionary grant scheme to support businesses such as yours that do not have their own business rates assessment. This is funded from Government, and Herefordshire has been allocated £3.2m in funding for this.

The scheme is aimed at small or micro businesses, charities and social enterprises with a turnover of not more than £10.2m and fewer than 50 staff that are in shared premises or other flexible working spaces.

As this is a discretionary scheme businesses need to apply via the council's website, the closing date for applications is midday on the 29th of June. I would encourage you to apply for the discretionary scheme.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/discretionarygrant>

Question 3

Ms M Setterfield, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

From September many parents (and staff) could consider making their daily journeys to school by bicycle or on foot. More parents are likely to be working from home and others will be still furloughed, self-isolating or seeking employment and therefore more available to accompany children.

What progress has been made on the 20 action points of the 2017 Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy given that the council is accepting funding for Pop-up active travel in Herefordshire?

As bus use and car-sharing are currently considered less safe we risk huge extra congestion if we cannot make roads and cycleways safe for our children and families to use ready for this September.

Response

Thank you Ms Setterfield for your question. We support the ambitions of the 2017 Sustainable Modes of Travel and there is no better time than to respond to the realities of our current environment than now.

The first tranche of emergency active travel measure funding announced will enable local authorities to implement immediate temporary (pop-up) measures to respond to the relaxation of lockdown measures and the re-opening of shops by making provisions for social distancing on the highway and providing facilities to improve walking and cycling access to city & town centres, schools and businesses. Herefordshire Council have been allocated a sum of £40,000 for these

initial measures and a set of proposals have been developed and are being consulted on in readiness for introduction from early July. These include measures in Hereford and the market towns and comprise 20mph zones, footway widening, cycle lanes, one way streets and some street closures. It is anticipated that the next funding will support the introduction of further measures, including more permanent provisions to improve walking and cycling. In readiness for this Herefordshire Council has commenced a process to bring together walking and cycling measures developed across various programmes, including SMOTS, and this will form the basis of further measures subject to funding.

The funding we have received from government is not significant, based as it is on a local authority's public transport usage but it does allow us to plan, prepare and promote an increase in safe routes to schools for cyclists and pedestrians. The transport team will be happy to discuss this with you and others who have an interest in this in more detail – and we are always receptive to new and better approaches to our school run congestion issues. Covid-19 aside, it should be the ambition of this Council to make sure cycling and walking is the primary mode of transport to school and colleges wherever possible. And we need to put more effort into making more possible.

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 June 2020

Question 1

Councillor Roger Phillips, Arrow Ward

To: cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets,

With Hereford, Leominster and Ross Household waste sites open can the cabinet member give us an update on her proposed timetable for the opening of all the other Herefordshire sites ?

Response

Thank you for your question Cllr Phillips. As you will be aware, the household recycling centres had to be restricted to only three locations to ensure that the costs were kept within scope, due to increased staffing expenditure to manage the social distancing and control measures required of them.

The waste team and I have been having weekly meetings to discuss when the likely open of the remaining sites will be. We had to wait to see how Ross on Wye went first with a booking system. I am pleased to say it has been a huge success and I would like to personally thank the residents of Ross on Wye and surrounding areas for their ability to make this system work.

I am delighted to inform that, as a result of the waste team's incredible hard work finalising plans which have taken some weeks, that we have now been able to confirm that the remaining sites will be open. We are tentatively looking at this starting week commencing 6th July. I say tentatively because we need to ensure that measures are in place to ensure the safety of staff and users. I hope to have a confirmed date within the next few days and I will, of course, keep residents and staff up to date through our communications. The sites will be operated by a booking system to manage the amount of users coming to the site. This system will be used until the initial rush of visitors decreases to a manageable level.

I would genuinely like to thank all of the residents who use these satellite sites for their patience and understanding whilst these plans have been worked up.

Question 2

Councillor Barry Durkin, Old Ward

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

This question relates to the cabinet decision on the reintroduction of car park parking charges. The timing for resumption of charges, following the easing of opening of non-essential shops under COVID 19 regulations, is disappointing and not helpful to shopkeepers. The charges, being so promptly reintroduced, do not help or support shopkeepers and has the potential to be further damaging to their livelihood, especially the independent traders, and also potentially detrimental to the economy of Herefordshire. It must be recognised that businesses will potentially be struggling to maintain their viability after not trading for so many months during the pandemic; in addition to the increase in the trend of on-line purchasing. This help and support for shopkeepers has been recognised by Bromyard Town Council with their decision to maintain no charges in their controlled car parks.

Why is it that the temporary suspension of parking charges could not have been extended to assist shopkeepers with further time to recover?"

Response

Thank you Cllr Durkin for your question. I am sorry but I do not recall being lobbied directly by you prior to your public question. However, after listening to the concerns expressed by parish and town councils, by ward members and particularly those from businesses and Hereford BID, earlier this week I decided to reintroduce free parking for four weeks, on street and in council car parks from Saturday 27 June until Friday 24 July 2020. This will help give retailers and the hospitality trade a much-needed boost at this critical time. I will be looking at what incentives could be introduced in future to attract more people to visit, and to stay longer, in our historic towns and city and I am due to consider this and take a further decision regarding this before the end of this period of free parking.

Like every other council across the country we have parking charges for several good reasons. Charges help us to encourage people to travel in a different way, by walking or cycling for example. For those that want to or must drive, varying those charges allows us to encourage shoppers and other visitors to park outside the urban centres by charging them less for staying longer, whilst those that want to park right in the centres are expected to pay more. Charges keep spaces turning over especially in the City and town centres.

Ideally, I would love people to really think about travelling a different way in town, especially when you consider for example that over 50% of the residents of Hereford travel less than two miles to shop or commute to work. We have all been encouraged by the boost in walking and cycling lockdown brought and we intend to support those ambitions in any way we can whilst recognising some folks must travel in by car.

We have made a commitment to support local business, encourage people to visit our historic city and market towns, and buy locally. We cannot afford to provide free parking forever as we use this income to pay for the costs of transport services including public transport and school buses – austerity and Central Government cuts have left us with 30% less money per year to carry out our responsibilities. So, in the longer term we will be looking at other ways to encourage people to safely visit our wonderful city and historic market towns. There is an opportunity to look to do things in a different way while supporting local business.

Question 3

Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard and Bringsty Ward

To: cabinet member, Infrastructure and transport

We've recently been consulted on ambitious plans to spend the Active Travel Emergency Fund (Covid-19) allocation. Given the initial allocation of £40,000, which I suggest will scarcely cover the consultancy and management charges of BBLP, will the Cabinet member now issue a statement to assure fellow councillors and residents that no funding from his other departmental budgets or council reserves will be diverted to satisfy this costly exercise and that no more planned schemes will be cut from the 2020-21 Annual Plan to cover up his departments inability to balance its budget in the current year? To lose one scheme may be regarded as misfortune, to lose two looks like carelessness, but now three! I refer to Haywood Lane; Spine Road, Ross and Brierley Way – I suggest even Lady Bracknell had no comprehension of such a calamity.

Response

Thank you Cllr Shaw for your question and the much welcome levity. I seem to remember one of Lady Bracknell most famous lines was, "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality" to which the reply came back, On the contrary, Aunt Augusta..I've now realised for the first time in my life the importance of being Earnest". If Cllr Shaw and I were invited to audition to play these parts in a local am-dram production I am sure Cllr Shaw would be a natural shoe in for the role of Ernest – although a bearded Lady Bracknell would be distracting.

In relation to the crux of his question – we are required by legislation to carry out these changes and although, at present none has been identified, any need or desire to contribute to these measures from our transport budgets will be a matter for this administration and the public record.

The delaying of the three schemes you refer to is to ensure there is sufficient funding for the high priority scheme at Symonds Yat. The original budget allocated for the Symonds Yat project was based on a preliminary understanding and design of the scheme. Detailed investigations and design has enabled a more accurate works costs to be estimated and a shortfall has been identified. This work is considered high priority and the road here has been closed for a long period of time. The repair and reopening of the road must be progressed.

This variation of the annual plan is not linked to the delivery of emergency active travel measures that are proposed to facilitate social distancing in public spaces and provide viable alternatives to public transport and avoid excessive use of cars as lockdown restrictions are eased. The allocation of funding of £40,000 will enable a range of measures to be implemented following consultation with stakeholders in Hereford and the market towns and will not be spent solely on consultants' fees as you suggest.

Question 4

Councillor Jeremy Milln, Central Ward

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The past decade has seen a steep decline in the ecological health of our cherished rivers due largely, according to monitoring data, to diffuse phosphate nutrification from intensive stock rearing in the upper catchments. Soil degradation due to poor arable practices in areas prone to flooding is also contributory. 125 intensive poultry units have been approved by Powys since 2015 with another 27 awaiting determination and more in the planning pipeline. Four were approved by officer delegated powers only last week.

Now that we have all read the reports of the 'sickly River Wye' in the local and national press over the past couple of weeks, will Herefordshire Council leaders urge the UK government, through our MPs, to pull together and address this crisis as a matter of the utmost urgency? (It cannot be solved by Herefordshire Council alone!)

Response

Thank you for your question Cllr Milln and we share the same concerns. As you are aware we have been pressing the Environmental Agency, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, Powys Council and other bodies to work with us to agree a satisfactory new and more robust Nutrient Management Plan. The Leader of the Council and I have a meeting scheduled with Leader of Powys Council to discuss all the identified issues relating to the pollution of the Wye

and Lugg. I will also arrange a meeting with our MPs to impress upon them our concerns. I have also asked officers to examine our own ability as an authority to influence good water quality, through our planning process and our capital programmes where we are able to influence land use practices. I am happy for members and representatives of the Wye and Usk Foundation and other interested parties to meet with me to discuss in more detail.