

Councillors' questions at Cabinet – 7 June 2018

Question 1

Councillor RI Matthews, Herefordshire Independents

To: cabinet member, infrastructure

The cabinet member for Infrastructure has repeatedly stated that a very costly Western Relief Road, together with an extra 16,500 new homes is what is required to provide a sound and prosperous economic future for this county.

Can he now please inform me who, of any relevance locally, support his views apart from those with a vested interest like the church commissioners. After all, local businesses see no merit in travelling thirty miles north along a highly dangerous A class road when they can access the motorway within ten minutes in the opposite direction.

Response

I am more than happy to remind Councillor Matthews again of those 'of any relevance' who support the by-pass – who are primarily the Herefordshire electorate.

I appreciate that as ward member for Credenhill, one of the wards directly affected by the new road, Councillor Matthews will rightly be seeking to represent the views of those residents whose own homes may be affected. However in addition to representing the views of constituents in a particular ward, all councillors have a responsibility to serve the citizens of Herefordshire as a whole and to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of not just their ward constituents but of those who live and work throughout the county.

In addition to the electorate, and those responding to the many consultations undertaken over many years who support a by-pass as an essential element of our plans for economic growth in Herefordshire, we have received considerable support including from both the county's MP's, the enterprise zone board, the Chamber of Commerce, the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Midlands Connect, the Herefordshire Business Board, the NMiTE university, and many local business whose operations are constrained by our current roads network.

The by-pass, the new homes that it will enable, together with many other activities which we are supporting will indeed assist in supporting the growth of Herefordshire, but our plans are not focussed solely on growth for its own sake. Economic prosperity is inextricably linked to overall health and wellbeing. Good quality jobs, good quality housing, effective transport systems supported by options that encourage cycling and walking and which reduce the impacts of air pollution in densely populated areas all contribute to ensuring the wellbeing of our residents – the most relevant local interests that I know of.

Supplementary Question

I disagree on a couple of points. I do not think that the public enthusiasm would be such if you had given them a democratic choice on which route to take. Secondly one of the county's MPs told me last week that he was still very much in favour of an eastern route. It is the view of a lot of people that large companies are not moving to Hereford because they have little or no confidence in the proposed infrastructure programme. Please explain your

views on this? The terrain where the western bypass is proposed to be constructed is extremely testing and trying. There was an overspend on a flat piece of road on the fringes of the city so I think it can be taken as read that the cost of the western bypass will be nearer £300 million than what has been proposed. Do you agree that if your proposals are to work satisfactory then you will need to provide 10 or 12,000 highly paid secure jobs for which you are building these houses for our bright and intelligent young people to remain locally?

Response

You have given a lot of opinions but not a question. Please tell me what companies have inferred to you that they will not move to Hereford because I would like to know who they are. If you are referring to the city link road, there was no overspend on that project. At this moment in time we have no reason to suppose there will be an overspend of well over £100 million as you are suggesting. All the consultations we have had going back to the core strategy and the recent HTP consultations and route options consultation, the local public and the residents of this county have clearly said that they want us to deal with this problem and they are the relevant people. It is my view that the county MPs are supportive of the western route as I can only go by what I know and they do not tell me that they are supporting an eastern route.