

Councillors' questions at Cabinet – 27 July 2018

Question 1

Councillor Matthews – Credenhill Ward

To: cabinet member infrastructure

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure would have us believe the new road would greatly curtail traffic in the city centre and drastically reduce noise and air pollution, however engineers have confirmed an additional 26,000 vehicles in the system would result in all access routes being more congested.

He also states that the local economy will prosper from the road, yet local businessmen repeatedly inform us that they want an E route, and access to the nearby motorway and not to an inferior road system.

The proposed route would cause considerable environmental damage, in particular to the River Wye SAC and SSI and wildlife habitats.

Does the Cabinet Member agree that several of the main benefits he forecast are flawed, and that it is time he came up with more economically beneficial alternative and deliverable options which are readily available?

Response

No I don't. The evidence is clear that an eastern route is not an option given a number of considerations not least of which are the significantly greater environmental impacts. The evidence is equally clear the Hereford Transport Package, including the bypass and a number of complementary active travel measures, is deliverable and that the proposed preferred route is the best performing of the options. Councillor Matthews may continue to make his unsubstantiated claims (such as a recent assertion at General Scrutiny Committee that the choice of route had been made two years ago – it had not; a corridor for the bypass was included in the core strategy approved by Council) in an attempt to subvert the will of both Council and the county but I am satisfied that the case for the western bypass remains sound and in Herefordshire's best interests.

Supplementary question:

When I listened to the debate this morning I have come to the conclusion that every time our consultants and engineers are questioned on this issue they move the goal posts. They clearly told us at Breinton that these extra 26,000 vehicles would result in constant and heavy congestion on all feeder roads into the city. Since then they have started to move and shuffle.

I thank Councillor Price for his reply. Obviously we are miles apart and the main benefits you forecast are flawed and I think if an independent person looked at what I had said and reviewed it they would be more likely to agree with me than with you.

This main expenditure won't come for another few years. We are already on £150m. I spoke with some engineers the other day who had just built a couple of bridges of a similar nature up north and each bridge cost £150m. So with inflation, rising cost of materials etc do you agree that when construction of this road starts it will be nearer £300m?

Response to supplementary:

Cabinet member, infrastructure: You have thrown in a whole bunch of scenarios in there that are your views. I accept your views for what they are. The council's consultants will tell me

which route is likely to cost this amount of money and this will be the evidence that we expect to go forward. If we go forward five years and we haven't built the road then I am sure inflation could have an impact, Brexit could have an impact I don't know what the end result of it will look like but at this moment in time to choose this red route we have a comparator in the cost today of other routes. As we build the business case and our partners who wish to support us as a priority scheme they will be fully aware of road building costs because we are only a minnow in the sea of big schemes in this country and they will be absolutely aware of cost increases as they happen. I would choose to use the views of our consultants in telling me what the road is going to cost and why it is going to change. Your guess is as good as mine as to what impact inflation may have over a point of time.

I do disagree with your figures. Your bridges that you quote as £100m probably cover something significantly different from what we are trying to do. They are not like for like. The evidence we have for costs for this road are borne out by the methodology that we have to follow and Highways England and the Department for Transport are fully aware of it because it is the process they require us to follow.