

Agenda item no. 6 - Questions from members of the council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor PC Jinman, Golden Valley South	In putting together the budget what specific consideration has been given to local, national and international concerns regarding climate change? Many councils have now passed motions declaring a 'climate emergency' and setting targets aiming for them to be carbon neutral by 2030. This requires budgetary measures now given that the budget is for the year ahead.	Cabinet member, infrastructure
<p>Response:</p> <p>I would refer to the responses given to public questions 5 and 6.</p> <p>We have given substantial consideration to climate change through the development of the budget, which includes significant resources to build on our strong performance to reduce countywide emissions to assist in tackling international concerns regarding climate change.</p> <p>The proposed capital programme in 2019/20 includes over £3.2m investment in energy efficiency, invest to save and renewable energy projects. These will continue our investment in solar and photovoltaic energy, improvements to public buildings energy efficiency, warm home grants available to low income households looking to install central heating for the first time, further investment in LED lighting, and a more fuel efficient council vehicle fleet.</p> <p>In addition to our own capital investment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the council is able to use this resource to draw down significant external funding. This includes access to up to 50% capital grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, energy efficiency grants for businesses, and significant funding from the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) to support residents with home energy projects. This will not only increase the total available funding for these projects, but will also offer the council better payback periods and improved value for money. • Our proposed budget includes planned revenue expenditure of almost £1m for energy efficiency, active travel and affordable warmth activity. This revenue investment includes utilising £150k of grant funding from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to undertake a detailed project development study for the Hereford Heat Network. 			
<p>Supplementary question:</p>			

The sense of urgency concerning the response of the council to climate change was felt to have been lost when the cabinet member for infrastructure had suggested that it was a matter for the incoming Council after the May 2019 elections. The Council needed to show more of a sense of urgency following recent national reports and discussions needed to take place to inform budget-setting and measures to implement in future.

Response from cabinet member to supplementary question:

The cabinet member explained that the situation needed to be taken seriously. It had not come about as a recent emergency but had been known about for some time. The council had a carbon reduction target of 40% and had achieved 36%. To treat it as an emergency required the full involvement of the Council but due to the proximity of the elections it was suggested that an emergency meeting could take place early in the new Council. This would help formulate the policies of the Council if a new direction was to be taken.

MQ 2	Councillor RI Matthews, Credenhill	<p>A list of the Skylon Park Investors shows that thirty eight companies have located there and that thirty four of these were previously based elsewhere in the county. This means only four new companies have moved to the site from elsewhere in the country.</p> <p>Considering all businesses relocating to Government-Approved Enterprise Zones are granted very generous concessions and benefits.</p> <p>Is the cabinet member confident that the budget proposed to Council makes sufficient provision to encourage businesses to move to Herefordshire from elsewhere in the country?</p>	Cabinet member, economy and communications
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Response:
 I am confident that our budget proposals are making the best use of the resources available to the council to encourage economic growth within the county whether by supporting our own highly valued businesses and entrepreneurs to develop and expand or attracting new businesses to the county.

When looking to relocate or expand a business will look at a set of criteria unique to them and their circumstances, the decision can be based on access to markets, availability of skilled workforce, work / life balance or a number of other factors and isn't just about monetary incentives. Herefordshire Council can make the county attractive to businesses by making available appropriate land and premises to accommodate businesses seeking to relocate, either locally or from elsewhere in the country, improving infrastructure (such as transport networks and Broadband), and supporting the development of quality housing, education, culture and leisure facilities for those who work in the county.

The capital programme includes contributions of over £28m towards the provision of new employment land or specialist business premises across the county. I see the new facilities at the forthcoming Ross Enterprise Park, Shell Store and Cyber Centre developments adding significantly to the existing Enterprise Zone offer in attracting inward investment.

The council has been working on bringing a superfast and ultrafast broadband network across the county making the area attractive to businesses in terms of national and global communications. To date 87% of premises in the Herefordshire can access over 30Mbps from a starting point of less than 1%. This will set to increase with the contract with Gigaclear deployment to fibre direct to the premises with fastest connections found in the country. The council also runs a bespoke broadband deployment programme for businesses with EU funding and training programmes on making the most of technologies and connectivity. Total public investment of some £36m over the broadband programme period is within the capital programme.

Attracting businesses is also about attracting people and families. The council has supported the improvement of Halo leisure facilities, invested directly in libraries, heritage and archives, and the capital programme reflects support for the Courtyard's plans for development. Development of the Old Market has added to the appeal of Hereford and our continued support for the development of higher education in the county will attract associated employment.

I firmly believe that supporting our existing and growing businesses is as important as attracting new inward investment and the number of expanding Herefordshire businesses locating at the Hereford Enterprise Zone is a success that should be recognised.

Supplementary question:

There was acknowledgement of the infrastructure introduced at Rotherwas but there was concern about the lack of jobs given the scale of the investment of £25 million. In terms of proposed developments in the county and the projected population growth it was asked whether there would be a requirement for 10,000- 12,000 extra well paid jobs for residents and reassurance was sought that the generation of new jobs would be a priority.

Response from cabinet member to supplementary question:

The cabinet member explained that currently there was low unemployment in Herefordshire, under 1,000 people. Better paid jobs were required in the county. The capital budget relating to the enterprise zone was focused on preparing the ground and providing infrastructure to encourage business investment which was an approach which was felt to be working. Over 500,000² feet of work space built or in construction and the £28 million private sector investment had allowed for job creation. External companies were encouraged to invest and promotion through the department for international trade, the midlands engine and Herefordshire investment partnership was being utilised. Work on new facilities at the shell store and cyber centre would shortly be commenced and attendance at a global investment conference would seek to encourage investment. Potential investors visited Hereford regularly to assess the opportunities. Assurance was provided that there was full awareness of the need for growth and better jobs but the role of the council was to create the conditions for investment.

MQ 3	Councillor ACR Chappell, Hinton and Hunderton	<p>The local authority is obliged to set an annual budget, which takes little account for future planning by parish councils or community groups.</p> <p>Will the Leader write to the Government, to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to allow rural Unitary local authorities, like Herefordshire, to set an element of its budget that will assist parish councils and community groups over a three/five year period to draw down further funding for projects of benefit to rural communities?</p>	Leader
<p>Response:</p> <p>We continue to work closely with our local government colleagues and the county's MPs, to lobby for a fair funding allocation for the county. Parish Councils of course have the freedom to set their own precept and are not subject to the same limitations that we as the principle authority are in terms of the level of precept they may set without holding a referendum. This enables parish councils to support activity to meet local needs, whether through direct commissioning of services for their area, collective purchasing by working with neighbouring or like-minded parish councils, or by supporting community activity and groups in their own areas.</p>			