

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 27 November

Question 1

Ms V Stinchcombe, Dulas

To: cabinet member, children and families

In light of the climate emergency declared by Herefordshire council (and thank you for declaring that) I'd like to ask how schools and young people are being prepared and supported, both in terms of clear and honest information and an emphasis on the skills they will need as things get progressively worse. We can't allow them to face this crisis uninformed and unprepared.

Response

Thank you for your question linked to our declaration of a climate emergency and your concerns about how young people and schools are being supported to get accurate and helpful information on this complex and significant challenge we all face.

As you are aware, schools do follow a relatively set curriculum which we have limited influence over. Academies have more flexibility over the content than do maintained schools but all have some control over how it is taught. In addition, over recent years the council has reduced its activities within schools for a number of reasons – with financial constraints being a major lever but also a move towards a school led system. However, Herefordshire Council currently has a number of excellent projects in which schools participate. These include our Active Travel programme, including “Bikeability”, which aims at moving people (including young people at schools) away from fossil fuel forms of transport to more environmentally friendly and healthier options, such as walking and cycling. In addition, there is also an opportunity for schools to engage with renewable energy projects through the Marches Renewable Energy programme, which would enable schools to consider how to reduce their climate impact through the use of renewables. Furthermore, we are currently revising our carbon management plan (due to achieving our 2020/21 target two years early) and also to keep in line with our new ambition of being carbon neutral by 2030/31. As part of our work to reduce council emissions, we will also look at ways in which we can show leadership across the county and this will include aspects such as considering young persons engagement within our aim to include Herefordshire resident, businesses and schools in community engagement for a countywide carbon emissions reduction strategy too.

Finally, we have a corporate aim to ensure our young people have easy access to clear, honest and accurate information. This is a significant issue and one which the council is taking very seriously indeed. It will take time for plans, actions and changes to see evidential impact but it is a challenge which we intend to address courageously so we can look forward to future where climate breakdown is not on their list of worries.

Question 2

Mr D Hall, Leominster

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Being in your role for over six months now, you will note in the last number of weeks and months, the increasing continued breakdowns and incidents/RTCs across the county, not least on the 'new bridge' in Hereford, particularly at peak times, which effectively brings Hereford to a complete standstill, increasing pollution and congestion.

Therefore, how long can this administration continue to prolong a by-pass, when you will categorically realise that without one, Herefordshire cannot prosper socially, economically and environmentally and will encounter continued underfunded investment and jobs being diverted elsewhere whilst Herefordshire will be doomed to the 'dark ages'.

Response

We are committed to supporting the economy of the county and protecting the environment. All decisions we take must be compatible with the climate emergency, carbon reduction and emerging policy. We believe that there are other options that could deliver transport and growth objectives in Herefordshire and these should be considered. This is why I have taken the decision to review the bypass scheme which was developed as part of the Hereford Transport Package.

I feel you are making an assumption that the only way we can combat congestion is by building more roads, I don't agree that building roads is the only way to do that. I do believe a second bridge crossing is a strategic necessity but as important is getting a high percentage of people who live in the City to travel a different way – by foot, by safe cycling, by electric bus. I am also examining the potential of removing traffic lights to improve traffic flow through the city. This all requires investment and planning to enable people to have the opportunity to choose to travel a different way. Motorways and bypasses are as congested at many times as Greyfriars bridge.

I recognise the importance of keeping traffic moving and the Council and our delivery partner Balfour Beatty Living Places works very closely with the emergency services to respond to incidents as quickly as possible. I am also in discussion with Highways England (which is responsible for the A49 through Hereford) to explore what more they can do to ensure that they clear incidents quickly and ensure traffic flows smoothly which may include recovery service.