

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 30 January 2020

Question 1

Councillor William Wilding, Penyard Ward

To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills

Of the 285 councils to declare a climate emergency, only 35 seem to have published 'Action Plans'. Could you tell me when Herefordshire intend to publish a plan, and if the General Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on the Climate Emergency can see whatever plan has so far been prepared?

Response

The Council intends to publish its new Carbon Management Plan in April this year. This document will set out the Council's plan to reduce its own carbon emissions over the next 5 years and will set out an interim target on our journey to carbon neutrality by 2030/31.

The Council is also leading the development of a new countywide strategy and action plan which is being developed in partnership by a new carbon reduction steering group. We are currently planning a stakeholder engagement event in March to invite partners to further support the development of this strategy which it is anticipated would be published later this year.

I would also welcome the support of the new climate emergency task and finish group which I understand is currently supporting the development of these plans.

Question 2

Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty Ward

To: leader of the council

The Marches LEP Board minutes for 26th November 2019 state that the Leader announced that he was giving an "in principle" agreement from Herefordshire Council to underwrite phase 2 of NMiTE and that he would take this offer to the Cabinet for approval on 19th December. This is now the second Cabinet meeting since the November LEP meeting and no such agenda item has yet been tabled. Following the comments made by Jesse Norman, Conservative MP for South Herefordshire in the House this week, will the Leader confirm that he has changed his mind and will not now be kowtowing to the LEP in that he will now not be asking this Council to further underwrite the LEP's funding to NMiTE by a further £5m?

Response

The Council is involved in high level discussions with Government, NMiTE and the Marches LEP and, with the support of our local MP, I am hopeful that the arrangements for releasing the funding of Phase 2 to NMiTE can be agreed in the very near future. I will update Members on this as soon as I am able.

Supplementary Question

All are in favour of NMiTE, the new university or college as I understand we are now to call them. To persuade the LEP that the council is fully behind the project the council has lent £300k on favourable terms, bought them the old National College for the Blind campus to share with the arts college at a cost of £6m, is building student accommodation in Station Approach which the council have underwritten and have underwritten the first LEP grant to the tune of £850k. I think

what the people of Herefordshire want to know is whether you are minded to increase further the council's risk on what the treasury calls a 'novel and contentious project' in further offering the LEP council guarantees to underwrite the next £5.7m of funding, an action that Jesse Norman seems to think is unnecessary.

Response

Negotiations are continuing. They are of a commercial and confidential nature. We had discussions this afternoon, are moving towards a conclusion and hopefully quite soon we will be able to announce something concrete on this.