

## **COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 25 June 2020**

### **Question 1**

**Councillor Roger Phillips, Arrow Ward**

**To: cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets,**

With Hereford, Leominster and Ross Household waste sites open can the cabinet member give us an update on her proposed timetable for the opening of all the other Herefordshire sites ?

### **Response**

Thank you for your question Cllr Phillips. As you will be aware, the household recycling centres had to be restricted to only three locations to ensure that the costs were kept within scope, due to increased staffing expenditure to manage the social distancing and control measures required of them.

The waste team and I have been having weekly meetings to discuss when the likely open of the remaining sites will be. We had to wait to see how Ross on Wye went first with a booking system. I am pleased to say it has been a huge success and I would like to personally thank the residents of Ross on Wye and surrounding areas for their ability to make this system work.

I am delighted to inform that, as a result of the waste team's incredible hard work finalising plans which have taken some weeks, that we have now been able to confirm that the remaining sites will be open. We are tentatively looking at this starting week commencing 6<sup>th</sup> July. I say tentatively because we need to ensure that measures are in place to ensure the safety of staff and users. I hope to have a confirmed date within the next few days and I will, of course, keep residents and staff up to date through our communications. The sites will be operated by a booking system to manage the amount of users coming to the site. This system will be used until the initial rush of visitors decreases to a manageable level.

I would genuinely like to thank all of the residents who use these satellite sites for their patience and understanding whilst these plans have been worked up.

### **Question 2**

**Councillor Barry Durkin, Old Ward**

**To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

This question relates to the cabinet decision on the reintroduction of car parking charges. The timing for resumption of charges, following the easing of opening of non-essential shops under COVID 19 regulations, is disappointing and not helpful to shopkeepers. The charges, being so promptly reintroduced, do not help or support shopkeepers and has the potential to be further damaging to their livelihood, especially the independent traders, and also potentially detrimental to the economy of Herefordshire. It must be recognised that businesses will potentially be struggling to maintain their viability after not trading for so many months during the pandemic; in addition to the increase in the trend of on-line purchasing. This help and support for shopkeepers has been recognised by Bromyard Town Council with their decision to maintain no charges in their controlled car parks.

Why is it that the temporary suspension of parking charges could not have been extended to assist shopkeepers with further time to recover?"

## **Response**

Thank you Cllr Durkin for your question. I am sorry but I do not recall being lobbied directly by you prior to your public question. However, after listening to the concerns expressed by parish and town councils, by ward members and particularly those from businesses and Hereford BID, earlier this week I decided to reintroduce free parking for four weeks, on street and in council car parks from Saturday 27 June until Friday 24 July 2020. This will help give retailers and the hospitality trade a much-needed boost at this critical time. I will be looking at what incentives could be introduced in future to attract more people to visit, and to stay longer, in our historic towns and city and I am due to consider this and take a further decision regarding this before the end of this period of free parking.

Like every other council across the country we have parking charges for several good reasons. Charges help us to encourage people to travel in a different way, by walking or cycling for example. For those that want to or must drive, varying those charges allows us to encourage shoppers and other visitors to park outside the urban centres by charging them less for staying longer, whilst those that want to park right in the centres are expected to pay more. Charges keep spaces turning over especially in the City and town centres.

Ideally, I would love people to really think about travelling a different way in town, especially when you consider for example that over 50% of the residents of Hereford travel less than two miles to shop or commute to work. We have all been encouraged by the boost in walking and cycling lockdown brought and we intend to support those ambitions in any way we can whilst recognising some folks must travel in by car.

We have made a commitment to support local business, encourage people to visit our historic city and market towns, and buy locally. We cannot afford to provide free parking forever as we use this income to pay for the costs of transport services including public transport and school buses – austerity and Central Government cuts have left us with 30% less money per year to carry out our responsibilities. So, in the longer term we will be looking at other ways to encourage people to safely visit our wonderful city and historic market towns. There is an opportunity to look to do things in a different way while supporting local business.

## **Question 3**

### **Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard and Bringsty Ward**

#### **To: cabinet member, Infrastructure and transport**

We've recently been consulted on ambitious plans to spend the Active Travel Emergency Fund (Covid-19) allocation. Given the initial allocation of £40,000, which I suggest will scarcely cover the consultancy and management charges of BBLP, will the Cabinet member now issue a statement to assure fellow councillors and residents that no funding from his other departmental budgets or council reserves will be diverted to satisfy this costly exercise and that no more planned schemes will be cut from the 2020-21 Annual Plan to cover up his departments inability to balance its budget in the current year? To lose one scheme may be regarded as misfortune, to lose two looks like carelessness, but now three! I refer to Haywood Lane; Spine Road, Ross and Brierley Way – I suggest even Lady Bracknell had no comprehension of such a calamity.

## **Response**

Thank you Cllr Shaw for your question and the much welcome levity. I seem to remember one of Lady Bracknell most famous lines was, "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality" to which the reply came back, On the contrary, Aunt Augusta..I've now realised for the first time in my life the importance of being Earnest". If Cllr Shaw and I were invited to audition to play these parts in a local am-dram production I am sure Cllr Shaw would be a natural shoe in for the role of Ernest – although a bearded Lady Bracknell would be distracting.

In relation to the crux of his question – we are required by legislation to carry out these changes and although, at present none has been identified, any need or desire to contribute to these measures from our transport budgets will be a matter for this administration and the public record.

The delaying of the three schemes you refer to is to ensure there is sufficient funding for the high priority scheme at Symonds Yat. The original budget allocated for the Symonds Yat project was based on a preliminary understanding and design of the scheme. Detailed investigations and design has enabled a more accurate works costs to be estimated and a shortfall has been identified. This work is considered high priority and the road here has been closed for a long period of time. The repair and reopening of the road must be progressed.

This variation of the annual plan is not linked to the delivery of emergency active travel measures that are proposed to facilitate social distancing in public spaces and provide viable alternatives to public transport and avoid excessive use of cars as lockdown restrictions are eased. The allocation of funding of £40,000 will enable a range of measures to be implemented following consultation with stakeholders in Hereford and the market towns and will not be spent solely on consultants' fees as you suggest.

## **Question 4**

**Councillor Jeremy Milln, Central Ward**

**To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

The past decade has seen a steep decline in the ecological health of our cherished rivers due largely, according to monitoring data, to diffuse phosphate nutrification from intensive stock rearing in the upper catchments. Soil degradation due to poor arable practices in areas prone to flooding is also contributory. 125 intensive poultry units have been approved by Powys since 2015 with another 27 awaiting determination and more in the planning pipeline. Four were approved by officer delegated powers only last week.

Now that we have all read the reports of the 'sickly River Wye' in the local and national press over the past couple of weeks, will Herefordshire Council leaders urge the UK government, through our MPs, to pull together and address this crisis as a matter of the utmost urgency? (It cannot be solved by Herefordshire Council alone!)

## **Response**

Thank you for your question Cllr Milln and we share the same concerns. As you are aware we have been pressing the Environmental Agency, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, Powys Council and other bodies to work with us to agree a satisfactory new and more robust Nutrient Management Plan. The Leader of the Council and I have a meeting scheduled with Leader of Powys Council to discuss all the identified issues relating to the pollution of the Wye

and Lugg. I will also arrange a meeting with our MPs to impress upon them our concerns. I have also asked officers to examine our own ability as an authority to influence good water quality, through our planning process and our capital programmes where we are able to influence land use practices. I am happy for members and representatives of the Wye and Usk Foundation and other interested parties to meet with me to discuss in more detail.