

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 23 July 2020**Question 1****Mr T Pincham, Hereford****To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills**

With reference to point 9, "Capital Outturn" in the End of 2019/20 corporate budget and performance report considered by cabinet at its meeting of 25 June, noting that various development projects have been delayed due to COVID-19, is now the time to actually speed up key projects to stimulate much needed economic activity locally e.g. football ground development?

Response

Over the last few months since the outbreak began the council along with other public partners have been focussed on the response phase of the outbreak, ensuring that communities are safe, that those shielded or self-isolating had the support that they need, and that businesses received the national grant funds to sustain them during the lockdown period. During this period the majority of construction projects (private and public) paused work on site, and as did the development of new activity until the impact of Covid 19 were better understood. As the restrictions imposed by Government were lifted, the construction industry was able to restart with appropriate measures in place to operate safely. I'm pleased to say that the Council current key projects that are on site, the Shell Store, Cyber Centre and Station Approach student accommodation are all now progressing well to completion. All these projects are contributing to supporting the economy. As we move into the recovery phase, I agree that the right capital projects will have a role in supporting the economy. We will be looking at what projects are still right to take forward at this time and whether they could be accelerated to meet the priorities of our County Plan, improve the quality of life for local residents and enable the development of sustainable higher value employment opportunities for the future.

Supplementary Question

I note the Cabinet was originally due to approve the £14.375m investment for student and / or key worker accommodation, a community room and spectator provision located on Blackfriars Street at Hereford Football Club. However, the cabinet meeting of 31st March was obviously cancelled due to COVID-19 - so a decision to approve was postponed.

All three elements of this specific project have the potential to provide significant economic and social value to the city centre.

As such, may I ask when the council will now proceed with a technical design and full planning submission as originally planned for discussion by the Cabinet in March?

Response

I thank the questioner for their enthusiasm for this project. Clearly in light of the coronavirus crisis we do need to review our capital programme - that's work that's going on as we speak - and it is clearly of central importance to us as to the questioner to ensure that our capital investments deliver maximum economic and social value to the community and so that is the basis for doing this review and we will make decisions on specific projects as soon as possible.

Question 2**Mrs B John, Leominster**

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

I was delighted when the Department for Transport announced funding to help local authorities like ours implement Emergency Active Travel measures, and know that many councillors are very enthusiastic about implementing them. However, like me, I expect they were really disappointed to hear that the scheme put forward by the Council did not secure the full provisional allocation of £40,000 in phase 1. Herefordshire is one of just fifteen councils awarded around 50% or less of the provisional allocation.

In order for the Council to ensure they receive at least 100% of the indicative funding of £160,000, provisionally allocated to Herefordshire in phase 2, they will need to act on the feedback on why their first bid was only partially successful. What was the feedback from Government which the Council received on the bid for tranche 1?

Response

We were very disappointed that government did not award the full indicative allocation of £40,000 funding for the first phase of Emergency Active Travel Measures. The Council's application set out a range of measures that would facilitate active travel and support social distancing in Hereford City and the five market towns in Herefordshire but it would seem it was felt our measures were not sufficient to receive the full first tranche allocation. Other authorities that did better proposed setting aside more road space and implementing more road closures, something more difficult to do in our market towns and City where we often only have one lane of traffic in each direction, unlike bigger urban areas like London or Manchester. The initial feedback we got was short and vague and we have requested further detailed feedback on our bid to help inform the development of our bid for the second allocation later in the summer and will do all we can to achieve the full allocation of funds for Tranche 2.

Supplementary Question

I think it's a very good idea for the council to challenge the vague and cursory feedback received on the last bid. I understand that it is hard to compare Herefordshire with a large city like Manchester, however I understand Shropshire Council received its full allocation. I suggest Herefordshire Council liaises with the transport team in Shropshire Council to see what they submitted and to find out what they can learn from them for the next bid.

When will Herefordshire Council publish the more detailed feedback from central government for tranche 1 please?

Response

The minute we have that advice we'll publish it, we simply haven't had it and we've been chasing it which is very disappointing but the minute we have it we will share it and we have asked I think for about the third time now. In relation to the other points about Shropshire that's a very interesting one and I will make sure that we do liaise with Shropshire and I've also asked that we liaise with other organisations such as Sustrans and cycling organisations to make sure that we get the very, very best advice so we can get the very greatest allocation for the second tranche.

Question 3

Ms K Jamieson, Ross on Wye

To: cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets

I see from the agenda that John Kyrle is to be allocated a grant for a new science block. I am delighted to see the grant being made subject to a requirement that the build be designed and

completed with the objective of obtaining a BREEAM excellent or Passivhaus certification. £260k of the grant being allocated is specifically for this purpose.'

The wording in the report recommendation part b however is somewhat unclear as it says 'with the objective of obtaining this certification' rather than 'obtaining' and this is repeated several times in the report. Would the Council confirm that, as the management of the project is being handed over to the school, that the council will be checking that the building does indeed achieve the BREEAM or Passivhaus certification?

Response

Thank you for your question Ms Jamieson. You will have seen that Herefordshire Council recently released its new Carbon Management Plan and that we are fully committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Schools are a key area of this plan, where we aim to reduce emissions by 40% over the next five years. To this end, Cabinet were unanimous in stipulating that as a condition of the grant, the extension at John Kyrle High school must meet BREEAM excellent or Passivhaus certification.

Since Cabinets condition to include sustainability features within this build, a significant amount of work has been undertaken by officers, the school and contractor to embed this ethos and alter design with BREEAM excellent the chosen method of sustainability. The contractor has confirmed that the extension itself will meet the standards of BREEAM excellent and it is extremely likely the overall project will achieve BREEAM Excellent certification, however this can only be confirmed once a BREEAM Pre Assessment has been conducted during the pre-design stage. The wording within the report is reflective for this reason.

Please be assured that although we are awarding a grant to the school, who will project manage the extension, they will still be accountable to Herefordshire council and funds will only be released on receipt of approved invoices. Officers have been and will continue to work closely with the school, meeting regularly with them and the contractor to make sure a number of obligations are being met, such as, achieving value for money, quality standards and that sustainability is at the forefront throughout both the design and build stage.