

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mr Snow, Hereford	Does increased concern that Herefordshire’s poor performance in the tourism sector (relative to the rest of the UK) is directly related to the fact that it has more intensively farmed poultry units than any other county in the UK (please see recent thesis by Cardiff University - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2Qk48qxQ3U) mean that it is disingenuous (at best) or fraudulent (at worst) to accept over £440,000 from the Marches Investment Fund to promote tourism whilst still giving planning permission for yet more poultry units to be built in the County?	Cabinet member environment, economy and skills

Response:

Thank you for your question. I am aware of the research of Dr Alison Caffyn that you highlight in the question, and indeed I and other Council colleagues will be meeting with her shortly.

I recognise and share the widespread concern about the impact of intensive poultry units on the quality of our precious local rivers, and am working very closely with colleagues to try to address this problem, including through development of supplementary planning guidance.

The evidence presented by Dr Caffyn is indeed interesting and concerning. However, I do not think it is a reason not to invest in development of the local tourism sector.

Over the last circa 10 years there has unfortunately been limited council support for, or promotion of, the fantastic tourism opportunities in the county. This is a real shame as tourism is a sector of great importance to our local economy, with lots of potential. That’s why our County Plan 2020-24 states that supporting the development of tourism is a priority for the council.

The Marches Investment Fund grant from the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has been awarded to support the recovery of the large number of existing visitor economy businesses across the county from the severe impacts of Covid 19. The project has already had a very positive impact, for example the PR element of the work has led to significant national press coverage including Herefordshire being named by the Telegraph Media Group in their top ten best tucked-away spots in Britain (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/lists/hidden-corners-britain-escape-crowds-summer/>), Conde Nast Traveller tipped the county as one of the ten best places to visit in 2021 in the UK (<https://www.cntraveller.com/gallery/places-to-visit-uk>), and recognition by Forbes with Herefordshire included in their ‘Essential Travel Forecast Report’ as one of the regions of the UK worth considering for a staycation.

We have been working closely with visitor economy businesses in implementing this very welcome LEP-funded project. As part of this project a great deal of consultation has been done with the local tourism sector, and as far as I am aware none of them have mentioned concern about intensive poultry units affecting their business.

I personally agree with you that planning permission should not be given for additional intensive poultry units currently, while there are limit-breaking levels of pollution in our rivers. The council and the local construction sector have unfortunately and unfairly had to bear the brunt of the cost of this pollution, in the form of the moratorium on housebuilding, despite the fact that the best available data shows that most of the pollution is from agricultural sources. We do indeed need a joined-up policy for protection and development of our beautiful county – one that recognises the costs of externalities such as agricultural pollution and acknowledges the impact of these costs on other sectors. However, as a council our powers to address this are unfortunately limited – by planning law, and by the actions or otherwise of regulatory agencies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency, who have direct responsibility in this arena.