

Appendix 2 - Questions from members of the Council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor Paul Symonds, Ross East	The proposed capital programme growth includes an item of £192k for air quality monitoring stations in Hereford and Leominster. What alternatives were considered to this proposal, for example diffusion tubes, and how do the capital and revenue impacts of alternative options compare to the proposed option?	Cabinet member housing, regulatory services and community safety
<p>Response:</p> <p>The £192k proposed for air quality monitoring sites aims to upgrade the existing air quality monitoring station on Victoria Street in Hereford and also construct a completely new monitoring station at the Bargates junction in Leominster. Both will be for continuous monitoring of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter to gauge compliance with the air quality objectives set by the government and for which nitrogen dioxide is potentially exceeded at both locations. Although diffusion tubes offer a much cheaper and basic alternative from a revenue point of view, only nitrogen dioxide can be measured in this way and the diffusion tube data can only provide monthly averages which are then used to provide annual means. The accuracy is also challengeable.</p> <p>However, the proposed monitoring stations will provide real time measurements for both nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter that will offer a much greater insight into the pollution levels at both locations and will assist officers in their understanding of traffic impacts and help us gauge the effectiveness of any measures put in place on an hour by hour basis. There is also scope and opportunity for expanding this suite of parameters, including those that will help inform the Council's climate emergency agenda</p>			
<p>Supplementary question:</p> <p>Could we be informed of the capital and revenue cost difference between the proposed electronic monitoring stations and the diffusion tube, nitrogen dioxide system?</p>			
<p>Cabinet Member response to supplementary question:</p> <p>An officer response would be provided.</p>			
MQ 2	Councillor Bob Matthews, Credenhill	At the full council meeting held on the 2nd of February 2021 when the Hereford transport strategy was debated I supported the administrations recommendations to stop the Western bypass and Southern Link Road in its present form and when speaking to the amendment proposed that officers be instructed to deliver a more cost effective environmentally	Leader

		<p>sustainable route between the A465 and A49 utilising a small section of the existing plan.</p> <p>Does the leader agree if this modest compromise had been agreed it would have saved this Council and the taxpayer £7.8 million?</p>	
<p>Response:</p> <p>Thank you Councillor Matthews. You refer to saving the Council £7.8m by agreeing to include part of the proposed SLR. I question the use of the word “saving”. The money has already been spent. There would have been no saving for the Council or the taxpayer.</p> <p>The £7.8m has been taken out of reserves and I acknowledge that therefore the total amount of the resilience reserve has been reduced, meaning that portion of the reserve cannot be used for something else. However there remains a balance of £4.2m (agenda item 9, paragraph 22, page 212) in the resilience reserve which can continue to be used for the purposes for which it is intended, and the repayment of the capital does not impact on the council’s ongoing revenue budget.</p> <p>The decision of council on the 2nd of February makes it clear that the council will be focusing on sustainable and resilient transport activities for the city and the county from now on.</p> <p>Cllr Harrington has already confirmed that future work will include consideration of improvements to the traffic connections between the A465 and the A49 beyond Belmont. He looks forward to working with you and other Councillors to identify the most practical and cost effective solutions to achieve that.</p>			
<p>Supplementary question:</p> <p>Can the Leader consider the impact of traffic and congestion on the health and wellbeing of local people in Newton Farm and address this issue as a matter of urgency?</p>			
<p>Leader response to supplementary question:</p> <p>We are concerned about the health of local residents and the pollution caused by traffic queuing on the Belmont Road and many of us were not satisfied that the construction of a southern relief road would have an impact on congestion in this area. We are looking at other measures and trust that following the budget discussion there will be sufficient money to progress our proposals.</p>			
MQ 3	Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard Bringsty	<p>In 2019/20 Herefordshire collected 98% of the council tax due and was 11th out of 57 unitary councils in terms of its collection rate.</p> <p>Key to the rationale in amending Council tax reduction scheme, Para 8 states, “It is, however, likely that the charges raised would not be settled quickly and could in fact become outstanding debt against those that are charged.”</p> <p>What evidence is there that that is the case?</p>	Cabinet member finance and corporate services

Response:

Collection rates have fallen since the pandemic and are currently behind the same point in time in 2019/20 even though many more accounts are being reduced by council tax reduction and a hardship award. Historically the collection rate of accounts in receipt of council tax reduction has always been around 83% reflecting that a number are on low level repayment plans, having this collection rate on a higher number of accounts, coupled with an increase in the council tax charge, would indicate that if the discount was not increased to 100% an additional amount of outstanding debt would accrue. At this difficult time, this administration considers it preferable to increase the 2021 discount to 100% rather than risk pushing more families into long-term debt.

Supplementary question:

The loss in revenue for this Council for the change to the council tax reduction scheme is £2million every year going forwards which will be cushioned by the use of one-off grant funding this year. Would the 151 officer not expect to see a more comprehensive business case were it one of the front line departments asked for this level of £2million of spending?

Response to supplementary question:

Section 151 officer response - There was a very detailed business case to support the assumptions of the CT base and collection rates. Happy to discuss with Chairman of the general scrutiny committee as a potential item for the committee's work programme.

MQ 4	Councillor Jonathan Lester, Three Crosses	In the February 2020 budget meeting Council approved £2m of new homes bonus be spent and capitalised on the Integrated Wetlands project. Subsequent to that meeting £2m of LEP capital funding was won. What has happened to the £2m of the new homes bonus funding, where does the Capital Programme reflect the LEP decision in November 2020 to reduce it's grant to £1m and is the current spend on forecast to defray required sums by March 31 st 2021?	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
------	---	--	---

Response:

The £2m from the New Homes Bonus agreed at the Council meeting in February 2020 was allocated to the Integrated Wetlands project in the capital programme to deliver up to 9 integrated constructed wetlands and purchase land for rewilding to improve the water quality of the River Lugg and in so doing, unblock development in the Lugg catchment. Following this project approval, the LEP then awarded £1m towards this same project.

The project has remained in the capital programme at £2m, however, funded equally by £1m from the LEP and £1m from the New Homes Bonus. The residual £1m from the NHB has been placed in a provision as land negotiations are making it increasingly apparent that £2m will not be sufficient to deliver the schemes. The team are continuing to work to meet the tight programme of delivering these wetland schemes and to also meet the LEP's funding requirements.

£500k of LEP funding is required to spend by the 31st March, but due to delayed land negotiations a significant proportion of this sum may not be defrayed until April/May time. Currently the Council is in discussion with the LEP to use freedoms and flexibilities to utilise this grant

funding for other Council projects in year, with a legal requirement to spend on the integrated wetlands project using Council funding to the same value in the following year.

Supplementary question:

- i) Can the cabinet member infrastructure and transport confirm if there is a resource issue in progressing work on the phosphate issue?
- ii) The New Homes Bonus money that has been set aside has been allocated to the capital programme but can the section 151 officer clarify if the money can be used for revenue purposes?

Response to supplementary question:

- i) The cabinet member for infrastructure and transport – It is the responsibility of the Environment Agency and Natural England to look after major water course however we have been working to find a solution to the moratorium that has been imposed. We have identified nine farms/pieces of land that we can purchase and we are at the stage of discussing with the landowners. Two private planning applications have recently been submitted one of which is in the planning system.
- ii) Section 151 officer – The New Homes Bonus can be used for revenue or capital purposes which will be determined later in the meeting.

MQ 5	Councillor Barry Durkin, Old Gore	Is the ongoing road works at Fiddlers Green, Fownhope, fully reflected in the budget presented before Council today?	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
------	-----------------------------------	--	---

Response:

The budget for the works to Fiddlers Green, Fownhope is fully reflected in the capital budget of £4.027m for Priority Flood Repair Works added to the capital programme as agreed by Council on 4 August 2020. This sum is included in the budget presented today, the 12 February 2021, at Appendix C to item 8, the 2021/22 capital investment budget and capital strategy update.

Supplementary question:

Why was the funding for the reinstatement of the B4224 not made available as soon as possible considering the statement in the County Plan to target the repair of roads that were in greatest need of repair and what work would be undertaken to repair the verges in Woolhope?

Response to supplementary question:

Cabinet member for finance and corporate services – Money had been made available at an early stage to fund the first stage of works and the second stage required further engineering design. Money had not been forthcoming from central government to fund the repair therefore the council had made provision in the budget which was agreed earlier in the 20/21 financial year.

Cabinet member for infrastructure and transport – Plans had been made to ensure the roads around Woolhope that had been damaged would be repaired after the works on the B4224 were completed. There have been many challenges with the repair of the road and a review would be completed to evaluate the performance of the contractors.