

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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mrs Morawiecka, Hereford	<p>“The Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy, including capital budgets is prioritising spending £40.3million in a new road south of Hereford. This road has no outline business case and there is no appraisal of transport options that shows borrowing over £30million:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is the quickest and lowest cost way to deliver on the purported benefits of this road; • offers best value for money for taxpayers; • that the road scheme will generate sufficient revenue to repay the borrowing, as required by Capital Project investment rules. <p>Will the committee review and consider how Herefordshire Council allocates capital investment to support the Local Transport Plan priorities and other Council Plans, and that the allocation of scarce money to capital transport projects complies with Treasury Green Book guidance on option appraisal and can show best value for money for local taxpayers?”</p>	Cllr Price and Cllr Stoddart
<p>Response:</p> <p><i>The council is committed to bringing forward the first phase of the Western Bypass. The additional borrowing to fund the proposed £30m addition to the capital programme for 25/26 has a revenue budget impact aligned to the term of borrowing and this is included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Whilst the £30m addition to the capital programme is proposed to be funded from borrowing, grants will be sought to reduce the amount of borrowing required.</i></p> <p><i>Once completed, this new bypass connection for the A49, from the south to the north of the city, will deliver the Western Growth Corridor, creating over 10,000 new homes and over 300 acres of employment land. This will result in future recurrent income for the council which is expected to be greater than the cost of borrowing.</i></p> <p><i>A Business Case will be developed as part of the ongoing development of the scheme to refine the cost of the scheme and demonstrate a cost benefit ratio before progressing to a decision to formally allocate this funding towards the scheme’s construction.</i></p>			
<p>Supplementary question:</p>			

Councillors appear to be confusing 2 separate road schemes – the Southern Link Road (A49 to A465) and the Western “Bypass” (A465 to A49). The latter road scheme will cost well over £300million not £30million. The claimed benefits of the whole Western “Bypass” that apparently goes through a massive housing estate of 10,000 new homes, cannot be attributed to the standalone Southern Link Road.

At Cabinet on 13th January, Cllr Swinglehurst said she was unable to confirm the specific number of houses to be developed to the West of Hereford. Yet her cabinet colleagues claim otherwise, still seeking to allocate 37% of Herefordshire’s new housing growth to a floodplain, upstream of the city. At the same Cabinet meeting Cllr Price stated that the Western “Bypass” was at Full Business Case Stage so would he advise where this can be found?

Supplementary response:

When referring to business cases for major highways infrastructure there are three stages. Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) which is the concept stage when early feasibility work is done. Outline Business Case (OBC) where detailed appraisals are done of options. And finally, Full Business Case (FBC) which is when a scheme is moving to a detailed design stage and delivery plans are developed. The Western Bypass was previously an approved DfT project at SOBC stage. The South Wye Transport Package which included the first phase of the bypass (Southern Link Road) was at FBC stage. The Council has employed AECOM to undertake work to update the previous business cases for the Western Bypass but also to provide a standalone FBC for the Southern Link Road. This work has been commissioned and will provide the detail needed to inform any decision to take the SLR to tender and into a delivery phase; but will also lay the groundwork for taking phase 2 of the bypass to OBC stage.

PQ 2	Mr Hardy, Hereford	<p><i>Active Travel England (ATE) is an executive agency of the Dept for Transport and supports Councils to develop sustainable transport networks and secure funding to deliver them and is a statutory planning consultee. ATE meets monthly with Herefordshire Council staff and yet Herefordshire Council makes no record of the meetings and advice given by these experienced and highly qualified staff. This appears to be contrary to this committee’s March 2023 recommendations, particularly to “Publish in full all background materials”. Will this committee recommend that records of ATE meetings and the advice and recommendations given by ATE be formally recorded and will they invite ATE to present to this Scrutiny Committee and other Council meetings, about how they support the Council to deliver on the Priorities for the Transport Network in the LTP report?</i></p>	Cllr Price
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Response:

Thank you for your question regarding the governance around the delivery of Active Travel Fund schemes. Hopefully the following bullet points will you assurance our engagement the ATE is adding value and sufficiently recorded.

- We are delivering a number of schemes which have active travel measures in them. These are being delivered mostly with Levelling Up Fund monies but also include elements of ATF in the funding mix.
- All of our highways capital schemes are carefully developed in line with current walking and cycling guidance such as LTN120 and the standards that govern highway design.
- Each scheme has a project board and a project manager, as well as officers and consultants that are involved in the design and planning the delivery of the works. Notes are recorded for every project board meetings and decisions are recorded.
- We also have an overall programme board which reviews progress on each scheme. Notes are also recorded.
- We also hold regular informal meetings with both DfT and with Active Travel England to give them assurance that the schemes we are delivering are meeting the ATF and LUF objectives that were set out in the original bid and agreement with DfT. The ATE team have been very supportive of the schemes Herefordshire are developing. Feedback from ATE is shared with the LUF project board and with individual project managers. This has all been low-key and informal and there hasn't been a need or requirement to keep formalised notes of these meetings.
- As schemes are developed they are reviewed with the Cabinet member for Transport. Furthermore, Cabinet have reviewed and agreed the full programme of works.

Supplementary question:

'The response to my question is identical to the response given to Mr Milln's supplementary at Scrutiny Management [Board] at the 16th December, but does not answer either. Mr Milln had listed the ATM schemes and their funding and asked for detail about them to enable independent scrutiny about their design against LTN-120. I asked for council to keep a record of its meetings with ATE and for an invitation to ATE to present to committee. Fortunately, ATE keeps notes of these meetings. On 22 July 2024, ATE encouraged a transport summit for active travel which the council postponed - it was supposed to have been on November 2024. This is an opportunity to respond appropriately to both mine and Mr Milln's questions. Can we therefore have a date for the summit and an assurance it will deliver consultative stakeholder engagement on the design detail of the ATM schemes before they are implemented? In particular, I would point out the plan for the SLR does not include walking and cycling provision, despite the response to my question stating that 'All of our highways capital schemes are carefully developed in line with current walking and cycling guidance such as LTN120.'

Supplementary response:

LTN 1/20 requires authorities to give due consideration to the guidance when making highway improvements but does not stipulate that authorities must include cycling infrastructure alongside new roads. The first phase of the Hereford Western By-Pass has always been considered as part of a package of schemes rather than a road in isolation, and initially formed part of the South Wye Transport Package. To this end it was felt that directing limited funding towards new cycling infrastructure and improvements along Holme Lacy Road provided better value and benefits for Active Travel in this area rather than infrastructure alongside a new road. Any proposal to include cycling infrastructure alongside the new road would have no cycling infrastructure for it to connect into at either end, be a considerable distance from cycling demand and would be alongside fast moving traffic. It is therefore felt that Holme Lacy Road better aligns with the core design principles of LTN 1/20 that routes should be coherent, Direct, Safe, Comfortable and Attractive and therefore the new road is in line with the guidance.

With regards to the reference to an Active Travel Summit, I believe this is in reference to a Rural Transport Summit originally arranged with Midlands Connect and was proposed to take place in Herefordshire in June 2024. Officers understand it was cancelled by Midlands Connect due to the proximity of the national election at that time, was then rescheduled for November but then further postponed as felt not appropriate given that plans for active travel schemes including the Transport Hub, Holme Lacy Road, Quiet Streets and Aylestone Hill had progressed to design and delivery stages and had been approved by Active Travel England.

PQ 3	Mr Milln, Hereford	<p><i>The last road Herefordshire Council built was the City Link Road (aka Station Approach), the only component of the HCCTP to have been completed as its overrunning costs consumed nearly all the £40.9m budget intended to have funded the Transport Hub and improvements to Commercial Road and Blueschool Street which will now have to be funded largely by LUF.</i></p> <p><i>The Council's 2015 Business Case claimed a BCR of 1.51 for the HCCTP based on an optimistically-biased value of £63.2m of transport and public realm benefits: improved amenity, noise, emissions/air quality, walking & cycling, bus use, road safety and journey times.</i></p> <p><i>As these benefits have not materialised what lessons would the Council draw, in terms of value for money, modal transport shift, budget-deliverability, well-being and climate crisis compatibility when considering other large capital road schemes in the Local Transport Plan?</i></p>	Cllr Price
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Response:

An evaluation report on the City Link Road was published in November 2020 – this can be viewed on the HC website here: [HCCTP Interim Traffic Flow evaluation report](#). The report demonstrates evidence of what objectives were achieved. The Council also responded to the lessons learned from the overspends on the scheme following a detailed audit report, adopting revised project management and governance processes which now are used on all infrastructure projects. This has been an area of scrutiny review in the past.

Supplementary question:

The CLR Evaluation Report cited in the response to my question only maps motor traffic counts from 2018 data soon after it opened, on a pathway to future congestion. It doesn't/couldn't measure improvements to active or public transport patterns, road safety, air quality, well-being or severance then or now. Any such benefits remain illusory until or unless the public realm elements of the HCCTP, such as reducing the dual carriageway on Blueschool Street to a single carriageway with separate bus/bike lane and turning Commercial Road into a 'boulevard' as promised, are delivered, and to best practice design standard.

How then will the Council apply the CLR lesson that such benefits do not accrue from building motor-only roads and will it now add bus infrastructure and LTN1/20-compliant ATMs alongside its proposed SLR & bypass since these schemes became stand-alone and lost their 'transport package' elements?

Supplementary response:

The CLR has reduced traffic on Blueschool Street as seen in the traffic survey study results. The construction of a Western Bypass will further reduce traffic through the City centre taking A49 through traffic away and reducing the severance that having a high-volume A road through the centre of a city creates. The proposal for the Southern Link Road was always seen as a package of measures within the broader South Wye Transport Plan, rather than the road being considered in isolation. To this end it was felt that funding was better directed to improved active travel measures on other routes, for which traffic would reduce as a result of the SLR, that provided more tangible benefits to users than to direct funding towards infrastructure alongside the new route which would have no connectivity to other active travel infrastructure at either end in order to continue the journey and would be less convenient to a majority of users traveling by non-car modes to Rotherwas. The Council is already building some of the active travel schemes that formed part of the South Wye Transport Package through the Levelling Up Fund and Active Travel England funding to improve cycling and pedestrian access to the city centre. In 2025 we will see construction start on the Holme Lacy, Transport Hub, Aylestone Hill, Quiet Lanes and Great Western Way Improvement schemes all aimed at improving active travel provision. These schemes will complement our work to develop a bypass and see a better future for Hereford.