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

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mr Mead, Leominster	When the current hospital was built there was concern the number of beds was insufficient being less than the beds available in the existing hospitals. The council answer was that with better facilities patients would be treated quicker and released faster. Since then, together with reduced home care, and thus bed blocking, it has proved the concern right. The population has increased considerably and with the proposed increase of 10,000 new houses to be built together with other thousands built and to be built and now a university, an aging population, considerable Welsh usage, as they have very poor facilities in our border counties, an increase in beds and facilities is necessary with no possibility of a new build on the current hospital site. The current bus station site should be used for this and not a multi-storey car park.	Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing / Cabinet member roads and regulatory services
Response: Thank you for your question. Any consideration of increasing hospital beds and facilities in the county is a matter for Wye Valley Trust and the NHS, as NHS capital monies would be required for any new build. As with any development, in the event that the hospital brought forward proposals, the council would work with the hospital to determine how best it could achieve its objectives. In terms of support for people on discharge from hospital, the council has worked hard over the last 12 months to secure more homecare capacity which is in line with current demand. We continue to keep this under review to ensure that we are meeting people's needs as we recognise that there is increasing demand. The council has staff based in the hospital working with the wards to ensure timely discharge of people.			
PQ 2	Mr McKay, Leominster	Being informed at recent Walkers are Welcome meeting that the delay with proposed footpath diversion DZC135 in Leominster being due to lack of resources, and the walked line now being obstructed, with your "Changes to PROW" webpage highways map showing this proposed diversion for some time, and it not clear which agenda budget heading this comes under, may I ask if this budget covers this, it being part of a popular walk from Leominster, and could you kindly advise when we may expect this diversion to be implemented?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
Response: Thank you for your question. The relevant team are fully resourced at present. The referred to lines should not be shown on the online map as it is not a current diversion case, they will therefore be removed in due course. If the path is obstructed, it should be reported in the normal way, the Public Rights of Way team will then investigate accordingly.			

PQ3	Ms Furniss,	Cllr Price has said that any proposal for cycling infrastructure alongside the Southern Link Road would have no cycling network to connect to at either end of the road so he is only looking to invest in further active travel infrastructure for the Holme Lacy area and nothing to link cycling networks in the Belmont area to schools, higher education, shops and jobs. The Park and Cycle site located at Belmont Abbey & NHS Trust services, could be linked to the City by upgrading the off-road footpath to a cycle path to link into existing active travel infrastructure in Belmont. Where is the option appraisal and traffic modelling that shows that with minimal funding this footpath upgrade offered poorer value for money and had a lower BCR than investing£40million in a new road?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
Response: The construction of a new road and active travel measures are not mutually exclusive. The council is committed to the development of a broader by-pass scheme to accommodate required growth in the county and reduce traffic within Hereford to enable roads to be more appealing to active travel users and Phase 1 will be the first step towards this. The council has always seen the new road as part of a broader package of proposals, including active travel measures and to this end, the council will be consulting on its Local Transport Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plans later this year to give a more comprehensive vision of transport infrastructure proposals for the Hereford area.			
Supplementary question: In answer to PQ6 the Cabinet member says that the original South Wye Transport Package (SWTP) had a full business case which demonstrates the viability of the transport scheme. This means that the active travel measures intended for the Belmont area in the SWTP are at the same stage of capital funding approval as the Southern Link Road, for which the Council is seeking to borrow £30Million. If this council is serious about tackling congestion on the Belmont Road, promoting healthier lifestyles and cutting carbon emissions will the Cabinet Member confirm the funding and the amount that is in place in the Capital Strategy to build the safe walking and cycling infrastructure needed in the Belmont area, such as linking the Park & Choose site at Belmont to the City cycling network, ahead of yet more road construction?			
Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure: It was explained that there were a number of schemes for cycling and walking in the south wye which would be forthcoming in the coming years.			
PQ 4	Mrs Morawiecka, Hereford	Cllrs Price & Stoddart told the Connected Communities Scrutiny meeting that “The Council has employed AECOM to undertake work to update the previous business cases for the Western Bypass”.	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure

		However, the Full Western Bypass does not appear as part of the Council's Capital Programme. Would they please confirm the total value of the contract placed with AECOM to do this work and the impact of this expenditure on the Council's budget?	

Response: In the paper to Cabinet in March 2024, titled New Road Strategy for Hereford, Cabinet gave approval for work to progress on both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Hereford Western Bypass. As part of this approval a capital budget of £10.3m was provided for Phase 1 development and a revenue budget of £0.76m for the development of Phase 2 to progress it to business case stage.

Contracts for the Phase 2 Options Review and Business Case are not yet finalised but are hoped to be in the coming days. Once sealed, the details of the contracts will be published. The cost of the work will be within the revenue budget made available.

Supplementary question:
Thank you for your response. The S151 officer has said in the report to the Full Council Budget meeting that in respect of pressures on the mainstream home to school transport & SEND transport services, a review has been commissioned "to introduce a new operating model for transport services in 2025/26. The timely delivery of actions to deliver efficiencies in transport services is critical to manage cost pressures in future years."
If there are such cost pressures on services vital to ensuring our young people across the whole county can safely access education and services, please confirm how much money, including staff costs, has been spent to date on the Western Bypass Project and what future revenue budget is required to continue to progress this £400million road scheme?

Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

PQ 5	Ms Laan	The Chancellor and the Transport Secretary have both said that new housing should be allocated close to commuter stations to enable sustainable transport links between homes and employment sites. Therefore, to access Government funding to bring forward the increase in homes proposed for Herefordshire why does the Capital Strategy omit capital investment to bring forward business cases to open new train stations to link housing settlements sustainably with new employment opportunities, as well as new GP, dental and hospital facilities to support such housing growth?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure / Cabinet member Environment

Response:
The Council is starting the process of reviewing its Local Plan to accommodate the additional new mandatory housing growth (27,000 new homes) that has been allocated by the government. The new National Planning Policy Framework published in December requires that growth which includes new housing and employment is established in deliverable and sustainable locations, this assessment includes access to transport options. As this plan develops there will be an opportunity for consultation on not only the location of the housing but also the medical, education and transport infrastructure needed to support the growth. This plan will impact on future capital strategies as government and developer investment becomes available.

PQ 6	Mrs Protherough, Hereford	At cabinet on 13th January 2025 Cllr Price said that "*The Hereford Western Bypass is at FULL BUSINESS CASE STAGE whereas a potential station at Pontrilas is only at Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC), considering where a scheme is viable."* However, at subsequent Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings it has been made clear that Cllr Price was wrong. The Western Bypass does not have a Full Business Case and nor does the Southern Link Road. If the Western Bypass is at Outline Business Case, the same as Pontrilas Railway Station (Cllr Price answer 13th Jan 2025) why has no capital funding been included in the capital budgets for this new station, especially when the Government last week said it is looking for new housing to be delivered near train stations ?	Cabinet member Transport and Infrastructure
Response: The two schemes are at different stages of development. The Western Bypass Phase 1 has planning permission and a former full business case which demonstrates its viability and has provided a Strategic Outline Business Case, therefore as per the council's Capital Guidance Policy, this means the capital scheme can be added to the Capital programme for approval by full Council. Golden Valley Railway Station and Phase 2 of the Hereford Western Bypass do not yet have a Strategic Outline Business case and therefore cannot be included as proposed additions to the Capital Programme. At its meeting in March 2024 Cabinet allocated a revenue budget to both schemes so that they can be developed to a stage for consideration within the council's Capital Programme.			
Supplementary question: The former Full Business Case referred to by the Cabinet member in the answer, was for the South Wye Transport Package, which included providing active travel measures & public transport improvements, including across the Belmont area, and not a standalone road scheme. As the Outline Business Case for the Southern Link Road says "the full potential benefits of phase 1 may not be realised should phase 2 not progress". The Golden Valley Railway station is a priority of this Council and is not dependent on a £350million road scheme. Funding was allocated in June last year to develop an Outline Business Case for the station. As the Council are looking to allocate 27,000 new homes in sustainable locations across the County, would the Cabinet member say when the Station scheme will be developed for consideration within the Capital Programme?			
Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure: It was explained that money had been set aside to look at the project to see if it is viable. All other partners involved were reviewing whether the scheme was viable therefore it was not possible at present to provide a timeframe for the project to appear in the capital programme.			
PQ 7	Mrs Morris, Hereford	The Capital Strategy says the Southern Link Road means Hereford City will have started on its journey to create resilience, better control of its traffic and allow for space within the city centre to be re-purposed, improve customer satisfaction, and a reduction in lost time traversing busy city centre corridors.	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure

		The Roman Road north of Hereford from the A49 to the Worcester Road is currently a single carriageway, dog legged, traffic light-controlled railway bridge crossing, prone to flooding and a risk to large lorries trying to access established businesses on Holmer Road and the city. With 1,000s of new homes at Holmer why has Herefordshire Council not identified this stretch of road and bridge as requiring an urgent upgrade and worthy of any funding in their Capital Strategy?	
Response: The Holmer road railway bridge is owned and managed by Network Rail, and outside of the council's control or direct ability to change. The current bridge does impact access to the north of the city, and we have raised these issues with Network Rail in the past. However, there are no currently known plans for Network Rail to make improvements to the bridge. Future phases of the proposed western bypass include the potential for an extended new connection to the Worcester Road.			
PQ 8	Mr Morfett, Hereford	It has been reported that Herefordshire Council is revisiting its car parking strategy. As the majority of vehicle traffic is seeking to enter Hereford and approximately just 5% is looking to go through Hereford, how can the Council's Capital Strategy allocate capital funds to new road infrastructure to reduce congestion in the City if it does not yet know where those car parks should be located?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
Response: The Council is currently undertaking a masterplan exercise to investigate the potential redevelopment opportunities around Merton Meadow and deliver a flood alleviation scheme for the area. Any development would likely mean the closure of the Merton car parks. A report has been commissioned to look at the impact of that closure, what alternative mitigation provision may be required, and provide a summary of the current and likely future usage of car parks across the City Centre. The Council recognises the need to provide sufficient parking for City Centre access, the hospital and the Transport Hub and this work will ensure that the council can consider appropriate alternative parking provision. The council has to date only allocated capital funds to the Phase 1 of the Western Bypass, which whilst it is anticipated will reduce traffic in the south of the city, will have limited impact on public parking demand in the city centre and therefore parking locations is not a prerequisite to progressing that proposal. The council is commissioning a masterplan to consider how housing targets and growth can be best be accommodated within the city by the provision of a growth corridor alongside the proposed Phase 2 of the bypass and will include wider infrastructure demands such as parking need and improved active travel measures.			
Supplementary question: There is an urgent need to reduce car dependency in our transport network design for the City, and the substantial increase in local traffic expected from 10,000 new car dependent houses on the west of Hereford will result in daily gridlock. Safe cycling and walking networks are an essential component of modern City design and funds are available to optimise design of sustainable transport systems. Active Travel England is the government's executive agency responsible for making walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred choice for everyone to get around in England. I understand that meetings with Active Travel are low priority, and no minutes are taken. Why has the Council failed to draw on available funds and utilise the extensive expertise of Active Travel England in its strategic long-term decision making?			

Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure: Officers are engaged with active travel England to design the schemes to be produced this year. A lot of money has been invested in walking and cycling for 2025/26. A written response would be provided.			
PQ 9	Mr Frecknall, Hereford	'It has been reported that Herefordshire Council is to re-examine its car parking strategy. Given that most traffic entering Hereford has business within the city, with less than 10% passing straight through, how can the Council's Capital Strategy allocate funds to building new roads if the distribution of additional car parking is as yet unknown?'	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
Response: The Council is currently undertaking a masterplan exercise to investigate the potential redevelopment opportunities around Merton Meadow and deliver a flood alleviation scheme for the area. Any development would likely mean the closure of the Merton car parks. A report has been commissioned to look at the impact of that closure, what alternative mitigation provision may be required, and provide a summary of the current and likely future usage of car parks across the City Centre. The Council recognises the need to provide sufficient parking for City Centre access, the hospital and the Transport Hub and this work will ensure that the council can consider appropriate alternative parking provision. The council has to date only allocated capital funds to the Phase 1 of the Western Bypass, which whilst it is anticipated will reduce traffic in the south of the city, will have limited impact on public parking demand in the city centre and therefore parking locations is not a prerequisite to progressing that proposal. The council is commissioning a masterplan to consider how housing targets and growth can be best be accommodated within the city by the provision of a growth corridor alongside the proposed Phase 2 of the bypass and will include wider infrastructure demands such as parking need and improved active travel measures.			
PQ 10	Mr Milln, Hereford	In January 2019 Herefordshire Council consulted on various active travel improvements within the City for the 'Hereford Transport Package'. There was no published report and none of the measures were implemented. Councillor Proctor reminded me recently that among them were works to tackle the barriers caused by the road/rail pinch points which particularly affect his College ward residents. https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/16799/route-1-college-road According to its post-opening assessment, the CLR significantly increased traffic on College Road; making the narrow rail over-bridge linking to Widemarsh Street even more hazardous. With simple and effective measures like this still not addressed how will the administration explain why it now wants to borrow a further £30m capital for its SLR with a hugely elevated and expensive bridge across the rail line which lacks active travel provision, business case or design agreement with Network Rail?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
Response:			

Each scheme in the council's capital programme is considered on its own merits and the value they provide to the county.

Phase 1 of the Hereford Western Bypass will enable immediate improved access to and from the Rotherwas estate for both commuter and freight transport and reduce the traffic on other routes, such as Holme Lacy Road, enabling active travel to be a more attractive and convenient option than a route along the proposed new road. Phase 1 of the Hereford Western Bypass will set the foundations for the completion of the wider bypass and 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.

A business case and design approval from Network Rail were previously in place for this scheme and these are currently being revisited to ensure that they continue to comply with contemporary requirements and standards of both the council and Network Rail.

Supplementary question:
Following concern expressed by Cllr Proctor, I'd asked why the cabinet member resists addressing the existing road/rail pinch points which are chronic barriers to active travel in Hereford, but instead seeks to borrow millions to create another, the SLR; falsely claiming it had a Full Business Case, something the Council had to admit it didn't at the closing statements to the Public Inquiry, and design approval from Network Rail which requires the overbridge from the 2016 planning to be raised by another 0.5m.

The response failed to answer the question, but instead pretends the SLR will reduce traffic and enhance active travel on the Holme Lacy Road, both of which had been promised by the Rotherwas Link Road. He misleads himself, but no-one else. Is there anything he can say which might restore confidence in his administration's approach to transport infrastructure and its funding?

Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

PQ 11	Ms Seekings, Hereford	In 2019, Herefordians were invited to advise on alternative transport options to solve Hereford's traffic problems and make Hereford a safer, healthier place to move around. Many people spent extensive time making careful submissions. The data was never analysed nor any report published by the then transport councillor, Philip Price. Now that he is again in that role, could he tell us what he intends to do with that 2019 data, so that he might implement the many cost effective measures suggested, before he considers spending millions on transport options for car drivers. I understand that there are Plans for Local Transport, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure currently under development; please can Mr Price assure us that the 2019 data collected, which is still valid, will be taken into consideration and released to the public and by when.	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure

Response:
The Local Transport Plan and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan are being drafted based on all currently available relevant data and will be subject to full consultation. Both of these plans need to consider both the current and future needs of the county, including for example government's new mandatory housing target which will bring over 27,000 new homes over the next 20 years. Therefore, data previously collected in 2019 is now dated. However, all Herefordshire residents will have a chance to comment, and raise any previous suggestions, through the consultation process.

Supplementary question:
In his response to my question Cllr Price states that the information gathered in the 2019 cycling and walking plan is now dated. In 2019 I know of many Herefordians who submitted intelligent, informed and lengthy contributions in the spirit of finally having the opportunity to constructively voice and be heard in the Council plan to make the City a relatively safe place to cycle and to walk which it is not today. In the light of this effort and that the data will not be out of date as very few improvements have been made to cycling and walking infrastructure in the City, I ask again when will the cabinet member analyse the data, release the results of the analysis and can reassurance be provided that it will be considered in the development of any new ongoing walking and cycling infrastructure projects. If he does not, how can he expect the public to participate in future consultations.

Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure:

It was explained that significant walking and cycling infrastructure was being constructed across Hereford. A written response would be provided.

PQ 12	Mr Hardy, Hereford	Assuming it cannot be both, is the proposed road to the west of Hereford to be a bypass or a service road for new houses? If it is to be a bypass, and given that past research showed that only 7% of traffic crossing the river is through traffic, why is this administration not prioritizing more productive and far cheaper measures to solve congestion, such as a comprehensive cycle network, and Park and Ride, especially connecting to the NE quarter where peak flow is double that at other times?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure

Response:
The Hereford Western Bypass will enable through traffic to be removed from the centre of the city and form part of the Western Growth Corridor to enable government housing targets to be delivered sustainably. The council are working closely with National Highways with regards to the route potentially being adopted as trunk road and a formal diversion of the A49. This will ensure getting the balance of direct access from housing developments onto the proposed route and other urban corridors right to ensure that the new route remains an attractive alternative to travelling through the city.

The council has always seen the new road as part of a wider package of measures and not as a road in isolation. The level of mandatory housing growth that has been allocated to the council will only reinforces the need to have a balance of new roads and other active travel and public transport measures in place to accommodate the additional demand, for which it is very unlikely that active travel measures alone could support.

Supplementary question:
As the Southern Link Road is already included in the capital budget while the rest of the 'bypass' is not, it has to be justified on its own merits as a stand alone scheme in case the rest of the road is not built for whatever reason. The only justification for it seems to be that it would relieve congestion on the Belmont Road.

The vast majority of the congestion on the Belmont Road at peak times is caused by school and commuter traffic. Why does the council not consider that a far cheaper and less environmentally damaging solution would be to expand the park and ride facility in the Belmont Abbey area with suitable incentives to get people out of their cars, and also provide a dedicated cycle track into the city and up to the colleges area, a lot of which already exists in fragments?

Response from Cabinet Member transport and infrastructure:

A written response would be provided.

PQ 13	Mr Setterfield,	The capital budget line for Council to consider on 7th February includes £260k borrowing for restitution at The Weir following the failure of the Yazor Brook FAS and the damage which resulted in 2012. With the unanticipated post-damage works done at the outfall in 2012 and the £500pw rental payments for the 'temporary' storage area since 2012, what has been the total cost of this scheme?	Cabinet member transport finance and corporate services

Response:
The £260k in the delivery programme will be used to make good the site, remove the need for materials storage and resolve the need for any rental payments.