

**Minutes of the meeting of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Wednesday 15 January 2025 at 10.00 am**

**Committee members present in person and voting:**      **Councillors: Bruce Baker, Frank Cornthwaite (Vice-Chairperson), Elizabeth Foxton, Ed O'Driscoll (Chairperson), Rob Owens, Roger Phillips and Stef Simmons**

Others in attendance:

R Allonby	Service Director Economy and Growth	Herefordshire Council
C Boyles	Town Clerk	Ross-on-Wye Town Council
J Debbage	Town Clerk	Leominster Town Council
L Kelso	Town Clerk	Kington Town Council
D Land	Head of Transport and Access Services	Herefordshire Council
H Merricks-Murgatroyd	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
K Mitchell	Town Clerk	Bromyard and Winslow Town Council
W Pratt		WSP
A Price	Town Clerk	Ledbury Town Council
D Thornton	Democratic Services Support Officer	Herefordshire Council
D Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council
D Wright	Head of Economy and Regeneration	Herefordshire Council

**31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Diana Toynbee.

**32. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Cllr Stef Simmons was present as the named substitute for Cllr Diana Toynbee.

**33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**34. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

**Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.**

**35. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Documents containing questions received from members of the public and the responses given, plus supplementary questions and their respective responses were published as a supplement to the published agenda and papers.

### **36. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

No questions had been received from councillors.

### **37. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN**

The committee considered a report on the Local Transport Plan. The Chairperson introduced the officers to present the council's report.

The principal points of the discussion are summarised below:

1. The Head of Transport and Access Services referenced the report as published in the papers and noted what the LTP development process is and the aim to have a draft LTP in place by the end of March prior to a period of public consultation.
2. The Chairperson asked what the risks of delay to the draft LTP timeline and what mitigations are in place.
3. The Service Director, Economy & Growth responded that the reason for delay to the programme is due to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was out to consultation following the General Election last year. The outcome of that was that housing numbers allocated to the county have risen significantly. Therefore, there needs to be consideration of the LTP alongside the growth in population in the county. In terms of the risks of delay from the original plans, there are no hard deadlines from government as to when the LTP needs to be finished. With the publication of the NPPF in December, the LTP team is working through the implications for that and how to take forward the Local Plan to manage that alongside the LTP.
4. The Chairperson asked what the likelihood of a draft LTP is for the March committee meeting.
5. Will Pratt (WSP) responded that a draft LTP and the required statutory environmental assessments should be ready by the end of March.
6. In response to a question about how alignment is ensured with the daughter documents to the LTP, such as the LCWIP, Will Pratt noted that the development of the LTP is cognizant of relevant related plans and strategies.
7. In response to a question about potential government revisions to the LTP guidance and funding for councils and LTPs, Will Pratt noted that the new government is looking to publish new LTP guidance and there might be links to carbon around that. The current draft Herefordshire LTP is mindful of the draft LTP guidance that was produced a few years ago.
8. In response to a question about whether the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is an iterative process and that the high-level objectives of the LTP have fully taken into account the SEA findings, Will Pratt noted that the objectives reflect what was approved at Cabinet and which went out to consultation. In terms of progressing the SEA, that has been done alongside and in an iterative process with the LTP. A draft of the SEA has to be consulted alongside the draft LTP which is being worked to.

9. Councillor Stef Simmons noted that in relation to the emerging strategy and priorities for the transport network, there is some concern that there is a lack of a priority for nature enhancement/protection in line with targets for a nature and climate emergency.
10. The Head of Transport and Access Services clarified that the council's engagement mechanism with bus operators is the Enhanced Partnership (EP), which is linked to the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Last week, a board meeting was held for the EP to facilitate dialogue with bus operators. The Department for Transport (DfT) is actively seeking to enhance bus services and is considering bus franchising. Additionally, the council has engaged in regular conversations with Midlands Connect and Transport for Wales.
11. The Chairperson asked how residents are being consulted.
12. The Head of Transport and Access Services responded that once the draft LTP is available by the end of March, a period of public consultation will begin.
13. Will Pratt added that there has also been an initial stage of consultation in 2024 which helped to better understand residents' issues and priorities which helped to develop a draft plan. Thereafter, there will be a second round of public engagement to consult on the draft plan as part of the development of the LTP.
14. Councillor Roger Phillips added that there should be more work done with other rural LTPs to help reaffirm what is already being done and helps to build stronger relationships with other local authorities, particularly when campaigning for investment in rural and semi-rural highways.
15. The Service Director, Economy & Growth added during consultation that in addition to the LTP, there is also the Local Plan, and there is the potential to have a coordinated approach to public consultation beyond March.
16. In response to a question regarding the feasibility of providing a consultation strategy with a timeline to the committee, the Service Director, Economy & Growth noted that this could be done.
17. In response to a question about the time-scale of delivering up-front, within the LTP programme, the Active Travel measures within the market towns in Herefordshire, the Head of Transport and Access Services noted that the council are close to going out to consultation with the Local Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Infrastructure Plan (LCWWIP) which provides further detail.
18. Will Pratt added that if a significant increase in government funding is allocated for active travel, more measures will be implemented sooner rather than later.
19. Councillor Stef Simmons emphasized that if those elements are developed in the LTP at an earlier stage, it can potentially benefit from government funding if made available at a later stage.

**Resolved:**

1. **As per a previous recommendation from Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee, environmental protection and enhancement needs to be better reflected throughout the high-level Local Transport Plan objectives and throughout its priorities for the transport network. This should reflect and align with our climate and ecological emergency declaration.**

2. **The Local Transport Plan team to work with other rural local transport plan teams in England, as well as our neighbouring authorities, to build on best practice and an alliance of rural local transport plans to strengthen the case for rural transport to the government.**
3. **To provide the committee with a consultation strategy for the local transport plan, to include a timeline for the consultation and a list of consultees.**
4. **To ensure that any active travel projects are ‘shovel-ready’ for any funding that becomes available.**

### **38. MARKET TOWNS INVESTMENT PLANS**

The committee considered a report on the Market Towns Investment Plans (MTIP). The Chairperson introduced the officers to present the council's report.

The Service Director, Economy & Growth clarified that the purpose of advancing the MTIPs was to facilitate the development of a Towns Plan in response to Hereford's allocation of funding from the Stronger Towns Fund. This plan was intended to inform the government on how the funding should be utilized. The commission was convened in 2020, with the objective of developing the plan locally in collaboration with town councils and local residents to establish an evidence-based framework for resource allocation. Subsequently, the MTIPs were utilized in the subsequent round of Levelling up funds to facilitate bids for government funding allocations.

In response to a question regarding the feasibility studies for the next stage, the Head of Economy & Regeneration stated that while limited funding opportunities have recently been offered by the government, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has been identified as a potential source of funding to support the development of feasibility studies for each market town. This will enable them to progress some of the projects outlined within their MTIPs. Engagement with town councils has been undertaken to identify the priorities that should be included in feasibility studies using the UKSPF feasibility funding, and then developing detailed specifications and commissioning consultants to take these projects forward between December 2024 and March 2025.

The Chairperson asked each of the town council clerks, present at the meeting, to feed back their views to the committee, particularly on the process initially for creating the MTIPs, and how it was handled, and whether they were engaged with sufficiently, in and how it can possibly be improved in the future.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion are summarised below:

1. Liz Kelso (Clerk of Kington Town Council) provided a brief overview of the MTIPs for Kington Town Council which included feasibility studies regarding, in particular, car parking, Kington High Street Regeneration and Kington Market Hall and surrounds and; Kington Police and Fire Station relocation and redevelopment.
2. Karen Mitchell (Clerk of Bromyard and Winslow Town Council) provided a brief overview of the MTIPs for Bromyard and Winslow Town Council which included feasibility studies regarding, in particular, an EcoHub, Bromyard Eastern Enhancement, Greenway, Health and Wellbeing Hub, and; skills development.
3. The Service Director Economy & Growth noted that bringing forward capital schemes is complicated when the council does not own land. A lot of the projects

that are in the MTIPs are long-standing ambitions for the areas that have not come about in the 2021-22 period. It helps to construct a case for them and helps to allocate resources when taking them forward.

4. The Chairperson commented that the potential for the feasibility studies to make recommendations that could unlock funding to take individual projects to a shovel-ready stage would be good so that if funding does become available, there are projects ready to be started.
5. The Service Director Economy & Growth added the investment to get projects shovel-ready is a revenue cost and it is where there is greatest pressure. Therefore, the main issue with large capital projects is how the revenue money is invested without knowing that the return on investment will be secured.
6. Angela Price (Clerk of Ledbury Town Council) provided a brief overview of the MTIPs for Ledbury Town Council which included feasibility studies regarding, in particular, employment land, tourism and events opportunities, and local railway station accessibility. It was noted that there were some items on the list as priorities which have not been developed in the time since.
7. The Service Director for Economy & Growth acknowledged that communication with town and parish councils can be challenging. However, the MTIPs have proven effective in streamlining these communications. An allocated economic development officer is now responsible for leading engagement with each town, and recently filled vacancies will further support improved collaboration with the councils. Additionally, it was noted that updates regarding related parties, such as Network Rail in connection with Ledbury railway station, should be communicated back to the clerks. The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive are currently doing a tour of each of the town councils as a way of covering the issues that come up with those respective town councils.
8. Julie Debbage (Clerk of Leominster Town Council) provided a brief overview of the MTIPs for Leominster Town Council which included feasibility studies regarding, in particular, the Marsh Court and Former Dales site, and the development of the Old Priory after its community asset transfer from Herefordshire Council in September 2022.
9. Carla Boyles (Clerk of Ross-on-Wye Town Council) provided a brief overview of the MTIPs for Ross-on-Wye Town Council which included feasibility studies regarding, in particular, the enterprise park, Broadmeadow and Tanyard Lane Development, and other improvements to support the visitor economy such as high street pedestrianisation.
10. The Head of Economy and Regeneration highlighted the difficulties in securing consultants for certain projects. In November, the council issued a tender for the Market House, Apron Plaza, and high street pedestrianisation but received no responses due to the project's broad scope. After discussions with the clerk, it was decided to narrow the focus to high street pedestrianisation alone for the next tender.

After each town council clerk had spoken, the Chairperson invited the rest of the committee to discuss the item.

In response to a question on whether stakeholders were sufficiently engaged in the initial development of the MTIPs, the clerks agreed that they and their respective town councils felt engaged.

In response to a question about Herefordshire Council's role to keep an eye on how things are changing in the market towns and keeping an evolving list of priorities for each of the market towns, the Service Director for Economy & Growth agreed that it would be a good idea to have a pipeline of regular review and to ensure that there is clear communication around the priorities for each of the market towns.

In response to a question about how many of the five-year targets are on course for completion and how long should any targets be moved forward, the Service Director for Economy & Growth noted that the outcomes can be reviewed as part of an annual review which will help to address some of the communication issues with the town and parish councils.

In response to a question about the council's awareness of the MTIPs, the Service Director for Economy & Growth explained that the MTIPs are active documents managed within the Economy and Environment department. The planning team is familiar with the MTIPs and reviews them when developing foundational evidence for the Local Plan and other documents. For instance, the MTIPs were taken into account during the creation of the UKSPF investment plan to align with identified priorities.

In response to a question about representation within the county BID, Service Director for Economy & Growth added that the town councils have a seat on the board of the DBID. The clerks noted the lack of feedback from DBID meetings and suggested there could be better communication in relation to the DBID.

The Chairperson added that an agenda item on the committee's work programme later in the year is looking at the DBID specifically.

Carla Boyles noted that there is a lot of difference between what the county Business Improvement District (BID) and the Hereford city BID do, and that the town council deliver a lot of the things that the BID deliver for the city.

The Service Director for Economy & Growth responded by noting that the BIDs for the city and for the county are separate organisations from the council. When a BID is created, it has a five-year term and there is a ballot of local businesses to decide as to whether they want to deliver a five-year business plan which dictates what the focus of each BID is. For the city BID, its members are mainly retailers who pay a levy and a lot of the focus is on city centre enhancements and public realms improvements. They have recently been through a ballot for the next five-year term which focuses more on tourism than previously. The county BID's primary focus is around tourism and independent retail enhancement and how Hereford is promoted as a place to visit.

In response to a question about whether the MTIPs have been fed through the Social Value Engine, the Service Director for Economy & Growth noted they haven't been as of yet but that they can be. There were elements of social value that were looked at by Rose Regeneration in drafting the reports, but there are no clear targets around social value at the moment.

The Chairperson thanked the clerks for attending the meeting.

There was a short adjournment to enable committee members to consider potential recommendations. The meeting recommenced and the following resolutions were agreed by the committee.

**Resolved:**

**Herefordshire Council to**

1. **Recognise that the market town investment plans are living documents with projects that are regularly reviewed and updated.**
2. **Work with town councils to review annually the list of projects in each of the market towns' investment plans.**
3. **Ensure regular communications between the council and Herefordshire's market towns.**
4. **Encourage town councils to engage with their rural hinterlands on their ambitions, thus strengthening the understanding and loyalty to their local service centre.**

#### **39. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the draft work programme for the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2024/25.

The committee unanimously agreed the draft work programme for Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee.

**Resolved that:**

**The committee agree the draft work programme for Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee contained in the work programme report attached as appendix 1, which will be subject to monthly review, as the basis of their primary focus for the remainder of the municipal year.**

#### **40. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next scheduled meeting in public was confirmed as Wednesday 12 March 2025, 10:00 am.

The meeting ended at 12.57 pm

**Chairperson**