

Minutes of the meeting of Council held at Online meeting only on Friday 12 February 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Sebastian Bowen (chairperson)
Councillor Kema Guthrie (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Polly Andrews, Jenny Bartlett, Chris Bartrum, Christy Bolderson, Dave Boulter, Tracy Bowes, Ellie Chowns, Pauline Crockett, Gemma Davies, Barry Durkin, Toni Fagan, Elizabeth Foxton, Carole Gandy, John Hardwick, John Harrington, Liz Harvey, Jennie Hewitt, Kath Hey, David Hitchiner, Phillip Howells, Helen I'Anson, Terry James, Peter Jinman, Tony Johnson, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Jim Kenyon, Jonathan Lester, Trish Marsh, Bob Matthews, Mark Millmore, Jeremy Milln, Felicity Norman, Roger Phillips, Tim Price, Paul Rone, Alan Seldon, Nigel Shaw, Louis Stark, John Stone, David Summers, Elissa Swinglehurst, Paul Symonds, Kevin Tillett, Diana Toynbee, Ange Tyler, Yolande Watson and William Wilding

Officers: Director for children and families, Director for economy and place, Interim Head of Legal Services, Democratic services manager, Acting Director of Public Health, Director for adults and communities and Solicitor to the council

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Felicity Norman declared a schedule 2 interest in agenda item no. 8, 2021/22 Capital Investment Budget and Capital Strategy Update, as a member of the LARC (Grange Court) management committee.

Councillor John Stone declared a schedule 2 interest in agenda item no. 8, 2021/22 Capital Investment Budget and Capital Strategy Update, as a member of the LARC (Grange Court) management committee.

Councillor Roger Phillips declared an other interest in agenda item no. 10, Pay Policy Statement, as the vice chairman of the national joint council (NJC) for local government services.

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Council on 11 December 2020 and the extraordinary meeting of Council on 22 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council noted the Chairman and Chief Executive's announcements as printed in the agenda papers and in the supplement published on 10 February.

41. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 11 - 12)

A copy of the public question and written answer is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 1.

42. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Pages 13 - 18)

A copy of the Member questions and written answers, together with supplementary questions asked at the meeting and their answers, is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 2.

43. 2021/22 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Council considered a report by the Leader to agree the council tax reduction scheme for 2021/22.

The Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Services proposed the council tax reduction scheme for 2021/22, with increased discounts compared to the existing scheme, for approval. In introducing the report it was explained that changes to the scheme responded to current economic pressures and provided broader support to people who were out of work. The changes to the scheme had been supported during the consultation exercise.

The Leader seconded the council tax reduction scheme for 2021/22 for approval and explained that there was a need for the changes proposed in the scheme for 2021/22 to respond to difficult times.

The principal points below were raised during the debate:

- The scheme would offer direct support to people who needed it most.
- There was concern for those local residents who were just above the eligibility criteria.

A named vote was held to agree the council tax reduction scheme set out in the report. The scheme was approved unanimously.

FOR (52): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Polly Andrews, Bartlett, Bartrum, Bolderson, Boulter, Bowen, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Durkin, Fagan, Foxton, Gandy, Guthrie, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Howells, I'Anson, James, Jinman, Johnson, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Kenyon, Lester, Marsh, Matthews, Millmore, Milln, Norman, Phillips, Price, Rone, Seldon, Shaw, Stark, Stone, Summers, Swinglehurst, Symonds, Tillett, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Against (0)

Abstentions (0)

RESOLVED: That

- (a) The council tax reduction scheme for 2021/22, with increased discounts compared to the existing scheme, is approved.**

44. 2021/22 CAPITAL INVESTMENT BUDGET AND CAPITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Council considered a report by the Leader to approve the 2021/22 capital investment budget and capital strategy update.

The cabinet member finance and corporate services moved the report and proposed the recommendations. She explained that the report contained detail of the investment necessary to provide community facilities and infrastructure. All borrowing was subject to review and a number of projects in the capital programme had been clarified. The building of affordable housing in the county was proposed to help address a shortfall and greater investment in the market towns. Delivering projects within the capital investment budget on time and within budget was key and a new programme management scheme would oversee delivery.

The Leader seconded the report and the recommendations. He explained that the capital investment budget reflected the county plan. It proposed investment across the market towns and took advantage of government grants where possible.

In discussion the following principal points were raised:

- A sustainable transport system and the suitability of electric buses in rural areas and the future of hydrogen fuelled transport;
- The continuation of the warm homes fund;
- The support provided to the market towns was welcomed and a suggestion that similar support is provided to large parish councils;
- The investment in the enterprise zone and recent job creation;
- The absence of a large infrastructure project in the capital investment budget, such as the south wye transport package;
- Capital receipts resulting from the disposal of council assets;
- The work with Western Power Distribution to ensure the resilience of the power network to cope with an increase in electric vehicles;
- The construction of quality affordable housing to meet a shortage and the revenue cost neutrality of the scheme;
- The scheduling of active travel measures projects which could be progressed more quickly following the cancellation of the western bypass; and
- The support for the principles of the County Plan through the capital investment budget.

The 2021/22 capital investment budget and capital strategy update was put to the recorded vote and carried by a simple majority.

FOR (46): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Polly Andrews, Bartlett, Bartrum, Bolderson, Boulter, Bowen, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Durkin, Fagan, Foxton, Gandy, Guthrie, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Howells, l'Anson, James, Jinman, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Kenyon, Lester, Marsh, Matthews, Millmore, Milln, Phillips, Price, Seldon, Stark, Summers, Swinglehurst, Tillett, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Against (2): Councillors Johnson and Rone

Abstentions (2): Councillors Shaw and Symonds

RESOLVED: That Council:

- (a) **approve the proposed capital programme from 2021/22 attached at appendix C; and**
- (b) **approve the capital strategy document at appendix D.**

Councillors Norman and Stone re-joined the meeting.

There was an adjournment at 11.44 a.m. the meeting reconvened at 12.04 p.m.

45. 2021/22 BUDGET SETTING

Council considered a report from the Leader to set the 2021/22 budget.

The cabinet member finance and corporate services introduced and moved the budget and explained that the budget reflected the challenges presented by the COVID pandemic. The budget needed to plan for an uplift in service delivery and a reduction in income; it proposed the largest savings programme to be undertaken at the council. Pressures involved in the delivery of adults social care services had informed the decision to propose a precept of 4.99% including 3% in respect of adult social care. A wide-ranging consultation had been undertaken and support had been expressed to increase council tax to support the provision of local services.

The Leader seconded the budget and explained the significant increases to the base budgets for adults' and children's services. The council tax increase was proposed reluctantly at what was a difficult time but the increase would allow for: the expansion of the tax base; an increase in support for people unable to pay council tax; and the council to take advantage of government grants. The budget that was proposed was a balance between savings, the preservation of services and a council tax increase.

Councillor Jonathan Lester expressed concern regarding the deliverability of the savings proposals and acknowledged the strain on resources due to the COVID pandemic. The precept increase was not supported and an amendment would be considered to reduce the level of the adult social care precept by using the New Homes Bonus.

Councillor John Hardwick explained that the budget supported the County Plan and if the precept of 4.99% was not agreed it would be difficult to access additional funding from government. The consultation had engaged with stakeholders, parish councils and the scrutiny committees.

Councillor Alan Seldon explained that the savings proposed were part of a high level of savings across the public sector and the additional pressures posed by adults' and children's services were significant and could impact upon the delivery of other core services.

Councillor Terry James explained that the proposed increase in the rate of council tax was too high and would have an adverse impact upon local residents who were just outside the thresholds for the council tax reduction scheme. Reserves should be used in place of the proposed increase to the precept.

Councillor Ellie Chowns explained that the council was facing significant increase in the level of demand for services. Savings and the precept increase would meet the cost of this demand whilst support for people who were struggling and unable to afford the council tax was in place.

Councillor Bob Matthews explained that the precept increase would affect rural communities with greater levels of poverty. Parish councils were expected to provide more services and there was concern about reduced street lighting levels.

In the discussion that followed the principal points below were raised:

- The precept would impact on local residents who were financially insecure;
- The increasing cost of adult social care;
- The work of the Adults' and Communities directorate and the Talk Community programme;
- Income from the rural sparsity grant and the pressures of providing services in a rural area;
- The loss of income for local residents and redundancies;
- A typographical error under paragraph 5 of the medium term financial strategy which stated the current financial year: 2020/21;
- The requirement for efficiency savings in the budget;
- Community support for priorities including the construction of affordable housing and the provision of care for vulnerable residents;
- The increase in costs to deliver children's services and the improvement programmes currently in progress;
- The reductions in grants from central government to local government;
- Alternative methods to fund services which could be considered in preference to an increase in the precept.

Amendment 1 – Proposed by Councillor Nigel Shaw and seconded by Councillor Jonathan Lester

Replace word(s) in paragraph c of the Recommendations (the Motion) with the following:-

- c) an additional precept in respect of adult social care costs of 2% applied to council tax in 2021/22 resulting in a total council tax increase of 3.99%, increasing the band D charge from £1,573.77 to £1,636.57 for Herefordshire Council in 2021/22; deferring a 1% increase until 2022/23 in line with government policy.**

Councillor Shaw proposed the budget amendment and explained that despite the council tax reduction scheme a number of local residents would have to economise to pay the proposed precept of 4.99%. The decrease of 1% would help local residents who were struggling to meet their council tax obligations. By reducing the precept to 3.99% and deferring 1% until 2022/23 the council would send a signal to local residents that it was listening and responding to difficulties encountered by local communities due to the COVID pandemic.

In discussion the following principal points were raised on amendment 1:

- Extra investment had been dedicated to help local residents who were struggling to pay council tax;
- During the consultation there had been support for the proposed precept of 4.99%;
- The proposals to reduce the adult social care precept should have been considered at scrutiny;
- Central government should be funding the council to meet the cost of the response to COVID;
- The impact of the proposal on sustainable transport plans;

- The potential hardship caused to local residents and the reduction in their spending power of a precept of 4.99%.

Councillor Lester seconded the amendment and explained that the amendment proposed a balanced approach that used existing funds to cushion local residents against the greatest precept increase whilst ensuring a balanced budget.

Councillor Harvey, as the mover of the original motion, responded to the amendment and explained that the New Homes Bonus funds identified in the amendments was to be allocated in part to sustainable transport measures to address traffic problems and also to the council tax reduction scheme to help people struggling to pay council tax. There was disappointment regarding the late amendments to the budget as opportunities for engagement with the budget process had existed at an earlier stage.

The amendment was put to the recorded vote and was lost by a simple majority.

For (17): Councillors Bolderson, Durkin, Gandy, Guthrie, l'Anson, Johnson, Mike Jones, Lester, Matthews, Millmore, Phillips, Price, Rone, Shaw, Stone, Swinglehurst and Tillett.

Against (28): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Bartlett, Bartrum, Boulter, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Fagan, Foxton, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Jinman, Kenyon, Marsh, Milln, Norman, Seldon, Summers, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Abstain (7): Councillors Polly Andrews, Bowen, Howells, James, Graham Jones, Stark and Symonds.

Amendment 2 – Proposed by Councillor Nigel Shaw and seconded by Councillor Jonathan Lester

‘Add an additional recommendation with the following at paragraph i’:-

- i) Defer delivery of proposed £200k savings for waste recycling, Saving S13 (appendix B, page 252). Funding the recommendation through £200k from the New Homes Bonus Funding.**

Councillor Shaw proposed the budget amendment and explained that the proposal to reduce the opening hours of the household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) was inconsistent with a priority to encourage waste minimisation. A reduction in the opening hours was likely to increase the level of fly tipping therefore the amendment proposed the use of the New Homes Bonus to defer the proposed savings.

In discussion the following principal points were raised on amendment 2:

- The amendment proposed reallocating money from sustainable travel measures which had been supported strongly by the general scrutiny committee;
- The reduction in opening hours would only be considered after other savings options, including the continuation of the booking system, had been explored;
- Concern that a reduction in opening hours would encourage fly tipping;
- The triaging of waste taken to the HWRCs should be considered to increase recycling rates and support potential income generation;
- A lack of evidence that any increase in fly tipping was linked to the introduction of the booking system over the period of the COVID pandemic.

Councillor Lester seconded the amendment and explained that the amendment was an attempt to ensure that savings did not need to be made and that the service at the HWRCs was protected.

Councillor Harvey, as the mover of the original motion, responded to the amendment and explained that the changing of the opening hours to achieve savings would only be considered after other preferable options, such as income generation and the booking system, were explored. The proposed saving was a small but important element of the savings programme; potential savings needed to be identified wherever they were possible.

The amendment was put to the recorded vote and was lost by a simple majority.

For (22): Councillors Bartrum, Bolderson, Durkin, Gandy, Guthrie, l'Anson, James, Johnson, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Kenyon, Lester, Matthews, Millmore, Phillips, Price, Rone, Shaw, Stone, Swinglehurst, Symonds and Tillett.

Against (29): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Polly Andrews, Bartlett, Boulter, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Fagan, Foxton, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Howells, Jinman, Marsh, Milln, Norman, Seldon, Stark, Summers, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Abstain (1): Councillor Bowen.

Amendment 3 – Proposed by Councillor Nigel Shaw and seconded by Councillor Jonathan Lester

'Add an additional recommendation with the following at paragraph j':-

j) introduction of grant scheme to fund an offer to parish councils to bid for schemes to alleviate and prevent flooding to be funded from 341k of New Homes Bonus funding.

Councillor Shaw proposed the budget amendment and explained that parish councils and lengthsman were often frustrated that they were unable to resolve local flooding issues. The amendment sought to provide funds to local parish and town councils to address perennial flooding problems.

In discussion the following principal points were raised on amendment 3:

- Parish councils had been very active and creative in seeking to address flooding problems but they required assistance;
- The fund was only a small sum of money and could help local residents affected by persistent flooding problems;
- The amendment would reallocate money dedicated to sustainable transport projects;
- The proposed fund represented only a small sum per parish council and flood alleviation schemes required significant funding;
- A system-wide approach to flooding issues needed to be undertaken and funding from central government was not sufficient to meet the need of local communities;
- Works to address local flooding problems should be undertaken through the public realm contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP).

Councillor Lester seconded the amendment and explained flooding was a significant problems and much could be achieved with only a small sum of money.

Councillor Harvey, as the mover of the original motion, responded to the amendment and explained that flooding alleviation works were being undertaken in consultation with community groups and through the BBLP contract which ensured a multiagency approach.

The amendment was put to the recorded vote and was lost by a simple majority.

For (20): Councillors Polly Andrews, Bartrum, Bolderson, Durkin, Gandy, Guthrie, I'Anson, James, Johnson, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Lester, Matthews, Millmore, Price, Rone, Shaw, Stone, Symonds and Tillett.

Against (28): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Bartlett, Boulter, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Fagan, Foxton, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Howells, Jinman, Kenyon, Marsh, Milln, Norman, Seldon, Summers, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Abstain (2): Councillors Bowen and Stark.

Amendment 4 – Proposed by Councillor Terry James and seconded by Councillor Kevin Tillett

This council is aware of the exceptional economic circumstances that households find themselves in, nationally and locally, and the financial hardships that are to be placed on council tax payers this year and next year. It is therefore proposed that the 2021/22 Council Tax increase is set at 3% instead of the proposed 4.99%.

Therefore, we amend item B as follows –

b. (Remove an and replace with Zero) increase in core council tax in 2021/22 (delete “of 1.99%”);

to read –

b. Zero increase in core council tax in 2021/22

The £1.4 million shortfall can be recovered from the following sources:-

- 1 - £700,000 from the New Home Bonus**
- 2 - £700,000 from the financial resilience reserves**

The effect on section (f)

f. the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) 2021-24 at appendix A; and

from changes to (b) will be solved by–

For the life of the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) the future impact of the zero increase of core council tax in 2021/22 is borne by the financial resilience reserve.

Councillor James proposed the budget amendment and explained that taxpayers in the middle band of income in the county and those just above the thresholds for the council tax reduction scheme would struggle to pay the proposed precept of 4.99%. The proposed amendment sought to assist local residents in financial difficulties by reducing the council tax increase.

In discussion the following principal points were raised on amendment 4:

- Local residents who were just about managing required support;
- Concern was expressed regarding the use of reserves in the amendment;
- The expansion of the council tax reduction scheme and the proposed precept increase to the maximum permissible amount without a referendum was questioned as illogical;
- The amendment would reallocate money dedicated to sustainable transport measures;
- The proposal outlined in the amendment should have been considered at scrutiny;
- Local authorities in neighbouring areas had proposed lower precept increases than Herefordshire Council;
- The budget consultation had produced support for the 4.99% precept increase.

Councillor Tillett seconded the amendment and explained the current financial difficulties experienced by a number of local residents. The amendment sought to support the budget and protect services whilst easing the burden on local residents.

Councillor Harvey, as the mover of the original motion, responded to the amendment and explained that it was not responsible to take money from reserves.

The amendment was put to the recorded vote and was lost by a simple majority.

For (20): Councillors Polly Andrews, Bartrum, Durkin, Gandy, Guthrie, Howells, l'Anson, James, Johnson, Graham Jones, Mike Jones, Lester, Matthews, Millmore, Price, Shaw, Stark, Stone, Symonds and Tillett.

Against (27): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Bartlett, Boulter, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Fagan, Foxton, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Jinman, Kenyon, Marsh, Milln, Norman, Seldon, Summers, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Abstain (1): Councillor Bowen.

Councillor Harvey, as the mover of the original motion, responded to the budget debate and thanked all involved in the setting of the budget. It was now important to deliver on the promises in the budget and meet the expectations of local residents.

The 2021/22 budget and associated medium term financial strategy and treasury management strategy as contained in the report was put to the recorded vote and was approved by a simple majority.

For (29): Councillors Graham Andrews, Paul Andrews, Bartlett, Boulter, Bowen, Bowes, Chowns, Crockett, Davies, Fagan, Foxton, Hardwick, Harrington, Harvey, Hewitt, Hey, Hitchiner, Jinman, Graham Jones, Kenyon, Marsh, Milln, Norman, Seldon, Summers, Toynbee, Tyler, Watson and Wilding.

Against (18): Councillors Polly Andrews, Bartrum, Durkin, Gandy, Guthrie, Howells, l'Anson, James, Johnson, Mike Jones, Lester, Millmore, Price, Shaw, Stark, Stone, Symonds and Tillett.

Abstain (1): Councillor Matthews.

RESOLVED - That:

Council approves;

- a. the council tax base of 68,355.22 Band D equivalents in 2021/22;
- b. an increase in core council tax in 2021/22 of 1.99%;
- c. an additional precept in respect of adult social care costs of 3% applied to council tax in 2021/22 resulting in a total council tax increase of 4.99%, increasing the band D charge from £1,573.77 to £1,652.30 for Herefordshire Council in 2021/22;
- d. the balanced 2021/22 revenue budget proposal totalling £161.0m, subject to any amendments approved at the meeting, specifically the net spending limits for each directorate as at appendix C;
- e. delegates to the section 151 officer the power to make necessary changes to the budget arising from any variations in central government funding allocations via general reserves;
- f. the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) 2021-24 at appendix A; and
- g. the treasury management strategy at appendix D be approved.
- h. a growth bid to fund a Armed Forces Covenant Support Officer, attached at appendix J.

46. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

Council considered a report by the chairperson of the employment panel to approve the pay policy statement for 2021.

The report and recommendation was moved by the Leader (as chairperson of the employment panel) and seconded by the cabinet member for finance and corporate services.

During the discussion it was requested that in future versions of the report the hourly rate reflects productive officer time and deducts elements such as annual leave, training and team sickness. *The Leader explained that he would discuss the request with the Assistant Director People.*

The pay policy statement was put to the vote and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED – That:

- (a) the pay policy statement at appendix A is approved for publication.**

The meeting ended at 3.46 pm

Chairperson

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.

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
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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
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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.

