

**Draft List of proposals for submission under the
Sustainable Communities Act – July 2009**

Transport

New train stations on existing lines

A number of places have been suggested where a new train station could be opened on an existing line. The most commonly suggested is at Pontrilas, which is in the south of the county between Hereford and Abergavenny. Other suggestions are at Woofferton (between Leominster and Ludlow) and Moreton-on-Lugg (between Leominster and Hereford).

Re-opening old train lines

Herefordshire used to have an extensive rail network but many of the lines have been closed and dismantled. Suggestions for re-opening rail lines include between Leominster and Kington, or between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye or Hereford to Kington. These could run either as tourist routes with steam trains (similar to the Severn Valley Railway), or as ordinary commuter lines.

Twin-tracking the line between Hereford and Ledbury

There is a train line from Hereford which runs through Ledbury and Worcester to Birmingham. The section between Hereford and Ledbury is single track, while the rest is double track. The single track section means that fewer trains can run at a time, and trains are more likely to be delayed or cancelled. There has been a suggestion to lay a second track along side the first, making it double track all the way from Hereford to Birmingham.

Preserving redundant railway lines

A suggestion for planning restrictions on old railway lines, to stop any development on them which would prevent them from being returned to rail, walking or cycling routes in the future.

Creating a public transport governing body

Bus and train services in Herefordshire are provided by a number of independent companies. A governing body might be able to ensure that services provided by different companies were joined-up (for example, buses timed to meet trains at the station). It might also make sure that buses covered routes everywhere they were needed, or allowed profitable routes to subsidise those which were socially necessary but unprofitable.

Public transport to all settlements

There is a suggestion that all settlements of over 100 people more than 3 miles from a town should have a public transport service.

Consideration of public transport alternatives to road-building

It has been suggested that whenever a new road is proposed to overcome a congestion or safety problem, it should be investigated whether the same amount of money invested in public transport, cycle paths etc could achieve the same result.

Highways Agency and local needs.

The biggest “trunk” roads in Herefordshire are maintained by the Highways Agency. One of these is the A49 which goes North from Ross through Hereford and Leominster. There is a request that the Agency should be required to take into account and act on local needs which are currently ignored. For instance, heavy and fast-moving traffic on this road can often put people off cycling. There is a suggestion that the Highways Agency provides a cycle path on the A49.

Reducing speed limits to encourage cycling

Fast traffic can often put people off cycling. There is a suggestion that where it is not possible to build a separate cycle path, speed limits are reduced by 10mph to encourage people to cycle. This would apply to roads in towns and in open countryside.

Canal Development

It is requested that the local Hereford to Gloucester canal is re-opened funded by the government or government agency.

Housing

Stop the “right-to-buy” social housing

Herefordshire Council has transferred all its social housing (sometimes called “Council housing”) to Housing Associations. Some social housing tenants who have lived in their house for a long time have the right to buy the house from the Housing Association. The right-to-buy scheme can give people an important first step on the housing ladder. However, selling social housing means there is less available for other people, and currently there is not enough social housing in Herefordshire for the people who need it. There has been a suggestion to stop the right-to-buy scheme, to keep more social housing available in the county.

Vacating social housing

There has been a suggestion that when a Housing Association or Council housing tenant comes into a large amount of money (for example by inheriting it or winning the national lottery), they are required by law to give up their house.

Priority for local people in social housing

Social housing is available in Herefordshire through Housing Associations. Apart from some new-builds, this social housing is available to anyone who meets the criteria. This means that people cannot get social housing in their own village. It has been requested that in rural communities, priority is given to people who live locally or have a connection to the area when allocating social housing (currently this is not possible under the existing legislation).

Planning

Reduced VAT on building conversions

Brand new buildings are “zero rated” for VAT, which means no tax is paid on the materials and labour. Conversions of existing buildings are taxed at the “reduced” VAT rate of 5%. It is suggested that the 5% VAT rate on converting buildings is altered to 0%, to encourage development of flats above shops. This would help in the regeneration of town centres, and reduce the need for houses to be built in open countryside.

Education

Farm visits for school children

It is suggested that every school – urban and rural – has to offer children one day's work experience on a farm a year. This would aim to increase children's understanding of where food comes from.

Shops and local services

Post banks

People who live in rural areas sometimes find it difficult to access banking facilities, particularly elderly people and those without transport. A "Post Bank" is an idea for a new bank run through Post Offices. This would make use of existing Post Offices to provide banking facilities to people in a wide range of locations, and would also help keep local Post Offices more viable and less likely to close. Access to free cash machines is sometimes seen as a problem in rural areas, and they would help on this front too.

Alcohol sales in supermarkets

It is sometimes claimed that supermarkets sell alcohol at a price which is lower than what the supermarket originally paid for it. This is known as selling at a loss. The idea is that cheap alcohol draws people into the supermarket, and the lost money is made back by also selling people other items. Cheap alcohol is sometimes blamed for anti-social behaviour. It is suggested that supermarkets are forbidden from selling alcohol at a loss, or that there is a minimum price per unit of alcohol.

Pub closing times

Pubs used to have to close at 11pm, but recently this restriction was removed. The idea was that lots of people turning out of a pub at once resulted in alcohol-fuelled violence soon after 11 o'clock, and by staggering closing times, this might be avoided. However, some people claim that longer drinking hours result in more anti-social behaviour. It has been suggested that pubs revert to the old 11pm closing time.

Chewing gum tax

Chewing gum that is spat onto pavements is expensive and time-consuming to clean up. It has been suggested that a tax is added to all chewing gum sales, to pay for its removal from pavements.

Broadband

Many areas in Herefordshire have no broadband, or a very limited service. Broadband is increasingly seen as a vital service for businesses and households. It is suggested that high-speed broadband is provided throughout the county.

Considerations when closing or moving public services

When closing or moving public services, it has been suggested that as well as the financial cost of different options, the environmental and social cost should also be considered. For example, closing a rural service might impact local people and the environment if they have to travel further to access the service. Service providers would have to choose the option with the least overall cost, even if this is not the cheapest in terms of financial cost.

Environment

Herefordshire Black Mountains

The Black Mountains are mostly located in Wales, but a small portion extends into Herefordshire. The Welsh part of the mountains are in the Brecon Beacons National Park, but the Park stops at the Herefordshire border. It has been suggested that the Herefordshire Black Mountains are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), or the National Park boundary extended to cover the whole of the Black Mountains. National Parks and AONBs provide additional protection to the land they cover, for example by having a say in granting planning permission.