

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 19 NOVEMBER 2010

Question from Mrs J O'Donnell, President, Hereford Guild of Guides

Question 1

What is the justification for the closure of the tourist information office in Hereford with the consequent loss of jobs when tourism is a £410 million industry and Hereford is the County town?

Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

Answer to Question 1

Unlike some other local authorities in the country, we are not closing the tourist information service in Hereford. We are remodelling the service throughout the county to ensure it is both affordable and fit for purpose in the future; the current arrangement does not represent good value for the public pound, there is no intention to end tourist information services for the city. I would caution against any assumption that decisions taken in respect of individual premises equate to removal of service.

I am pleased that, like ourselves, Mrs O'Donnell recognises the value of tourism to the local economy. However in the current challenging economic climate the council has a responsibility to ensure that public sector resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible, whilst doing everything in our power to protect front line services. This does mean doing things differently, ensuring that we work with community volunteers and private sector partners to best effect, but it does not mean that Hereford, or any other market town in the county, will be left without a tourism information service.

Supplementary Question

Is Hereford to be the only cathedral city without a manned TIC?

Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw Cabinet Member Economic Development and Community Services

Responding to the supplementary question provided a further opportunity for the Cabinet Member to confirm that Herefordshire Council would provide TIC services in Hereford City and market towns; such an approach bucked the national trend. In addition to the TICs other information and tourism points will be developed.

Question from Mr P Cocks, Hereford

Question 2

What is the overall council policy of equating income from car parks with maintaining a friendly shopper/visitor balance and fairness across the county and will council staff, like most other workers in the city of Hereford, have to pay for parking on the proposed new 600+ spaces car park at Plough Lane?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

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Answer to question 2

The Council's Countywide Car Parking Strategy forms part of the Local Transport Plan published on the Council's website. This sets out the approach taken to the provision and management of the Council's public car parks. Charges are set to balance the competing demands for parking by different users and to prioritise spaces for shoppers and visitors. The charges are generally lower than those in comparable centres in neighbouring counties and charges are benchmarked to ensure the county remains competitive and charges are reasonable.

As part of the Council's continuing drive to ensure resources are used to best effect we are reviewing staff car parking policies.

Supplementary question

There is significant variation in car parking charges across the county which is inequitable. When compared with charges in Hereford City, Leominster parking charges are substantially more with Ledbury's parking charges significantly lower.

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

There is a Council Countywide Car Parking Strategy. The revenue from parking charges in the city supports the funding of wider transportation projects. In the market towns, some parking is free, some is levied.

Question from Ms A Sancha, Hereford

Question 3

Could the Council explain what fuels road transport will be powered by in 2020-25 and what will be the relative importance of each?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 3

We can of course only speculate, but it is likely that transport in 2020-25 will be powered by a variety of fuels both traditional and alternative including petrol, bio-fuels, electricity, hydrogen, LPG, and, in the case of cycling and walking, no direct fuel at all.

It is not possible to be certain of the relative importance of each type of fuel as this will depend on a range of technical, legislative, supply and market factors over the next ten to fifteen years.

Supplementary question

What provision is being considered to support people in relation to the Inner Relief Road?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Whilst stating that the supplementary did not related to the original question of answer, the Cabinet Member informed that issues relating to the relief road will be a matter for debate.

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Question from Mr L Clements, Hereford

Question 4

Why is the Council sticking to imposed central targets planning targets for house building and retail land requirements.

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis Cabinet Member Environment & Strategic Housing

Answer to question 4

The targets were initially set out in the Inspectors' Panel Report into the Regional Spatial Strategy published in September 2009 following a very thorough examination of the evidence at a formal Examination in Public in April, May and June 2009.

These targets were not 'imposed' but supported by Herefordshire Council, being securely based on good evidence and having been tested at the Examination in Public. The evidence base and the justification for the targets remain, and the Council continues to promote growth in a planned way as part of the overall strategy which it believes necessary to both meet local need and secure the future sustainability and vibrancy of the County.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Mr R Priestly, Hereford

Question 5

The term "sustainable economic growth" is used in the LDF without proper definition. Please define both terms "sustainable economic growth" and "unsustainable economic growth".

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Environment & Strategic Housing

Answer to question 5

A common dictionary definition of "sustainable" is "able to be maintained at a certain rate or level". That is the sense used in the draft Local Development Framework (LDF) in this regard. The term "unsustainable economic growth" is not used in the LDF.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Ms J Straker, Hereford

Question 6

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Has the Council researched the likely impact on traffic numbers of the inevitable steep rise in fuel prices over the life of the Local Transport Plan Strategy and what are the conclusions that have been reached?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 6

The Council has used Department of Transport national trend predictions for transport to inform the development of the transport strategy. The resulting draft Local Transport Plan 3 places significant emphasis on supporting and encouraging the use of non-car modes such as public transport, cycling and walking.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Mr B Widdowson, Kington

Question 7

Could Herefordshire Council say how much the adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy to pay for the relief road will add to the average cost of a home being built within this plan?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment & Strategic housing

Answer to question 7

No. The government intends to review the legislation for the Community Infrastructure Levy and it would therefore be unwise to speculate over developer contributions when the legal provisions for requiring them are as yet unknown.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Dr E Parker, Hereford

Question 08

Concerning the buildings within the Northern Magazine Section of the Rotherwas Munitions Factory, which individual, what department, and when was the decision taken to demolish most of these unique heritage assets?

Answer from Councillor AJM Blackshaw, Cabinet Member Economic Development & Community Services

Answer to question 08

None of the buildings on the North Magazine were identified as 'unique' in the specialist historic management study of the surviving factory buildings, which assessed the historic

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significance of each of the remaining buildings based on English Heritage criteria, and made recommendations for how protection of the historic fabric of the site could be achieved while still accommodating future commercial development.

Some of the most important buildings identified on the site have, however, been identified for retention including In the North Magazine, the shell store, at least one bunker, a group of other buildings, associated blast walls and some connecting roadways. This will ensure they are made safe for the future and, in due course, accessible by the public.

The Rotherwas Industrial Estate, including the North Magazine, has been zoned for employment use for many years with the decision to progress the project through a joint venture with Advantage West Midlands being taken by Cabinet in September 2006. The Rotherwas Futures project remains a key element in the county's overall strategy for ensuring the future sustainability of the local economy.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Ms P Mitchell, Hereford

Question 9

What does the Council's evidence base (i.e. the 'Hereford Relief Road – Study of Options' Report (Aug 2010) referred to in para 4.13) predict for the amount of time saved on the average trip (please give duration and length of the average trip) with a relief road for the PM peaks in 2026 compared to the 2008 baseline?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 9

The forecast year of 2026 has been used for all modelling scenarios as this represents the time horizon of the emerging Local Development Framework.

Based on the preferred option for 2026 (planned growth, western relief road and sustainable transport package 2) average journey times, for all forms of transport, will be as follows:-

- Morning (a.m.) peak average journey time will increase by 17.6% compared with 2008
- Afternoon (p.m.) peak average journey time will increase by 18.5% compared with 2008

It is important to note, that these travel times include projected increases in journeys on foot & cycle, over and above those for car journeys, (ie a modal shift away from motorised transport) and therefore although indicate an overall increase in journey times, cannot be taken as an increase in car journey times.

No supplementary questions asked.

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Question from Mr A Simmonds, Hereford

Question 10

Can the council provide clear financial detail demonstrating how Herefordshire can afford both the bypass and the other infrastructure required?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis Cabinet Member Environment & Strategic Housing

Answer to question 10

The delivery plan to accompany submission of the LDF will address this question, and will take account of recent and expected government announcements.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Mr A Fisher, Hereford

Question 11

The Vision states that 'dependency on the private car will be reduced' (para 2.5) and that a network of cycleways, footpaths and bus priority lanes will reduce residents' reliance on the private car' (para 2.4). If this is to be the case then how have the 'overall costs of travel' to people travelling on foot by bicycle and public transport been calculated and what weight have these been given in choosing transport and housing options for Hereford?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 11

The Council has followed Department of Transport guidance in its modelling work.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Ms M Burns, Hereford

Question 12

In its numerous consultations on the Core Strategy (i.e., on issues, vision, objectives, and developing options) which the Council sites as giving popular support for its Hereford Outer Distributor/Relief Road, what information were people given about the traffic reduction effects of a Relief (or Outer Distributor) Road, and alternatives to road building?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 12

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The Council has made evidence available as studies have been completed on the growth proposals and transport impacts. The studies, currently available on the Council's website, include:

- Multi Modal Model Forecast Report, September 2009
- Delivering a Sustainable Transport System Study, May 2010
- Hereford Relief Road Study of Options, August 2010

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Mr S Horsfield, Hereford

Question 13

Herefordshire needs to shoulder its share of the burden of English population growth. What modelling has taken place of the economic and social consequences and outcomes bearing in mind population/demographic profile of the county, the decline in employment in the private and public sectors and insufficient transport links?

Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips Leader of the Council

Answer to question 13

Based on Office for National Statistics projections, Herefordshire has an older age profile than both the region and England and Wales, with a noticeably higher proportion of its population in the older age groups. People of state retirement age and over constitute a quarter (25%) of the county's population, in comparison with a fifth both regionally and nationally (20% & 19% respectively). The number of people aged 65+ is forecast to continue to increase, but more rapidly than in recent years, and is expected to be 61% higher in 2026 than in 2008. In particular, the number of people aged 85+ is expected to almost double, from 5,200 in 2008 to 10,200 in 2026.

Conversely, less than a third (31%) of Herefordshire's population is under 30, compared to 38% both regionally and nationally. There are forecast to be 6% fewer people aged 16-64 living in Herefordshire by 2026 than in 2008.

It is therefore essential that the strategies pursued by the council focus on attracting and retaining economically active residents, and ensuring necessary infrastructure is in place to support the economic growth needed to ensure the future sustainability and vibrancy of our community.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Mr D Straker, Hereford

Question 14

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What evidence does the Council have on whether the single river crossing could be discouraging car use and what studies have the Council undertaken of the potential for an additional river crossing to encourage increased numbers of car trips?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 14

I refer the questioner to my answer to Q12.

No supplementary questions asked.

Question from Mr C Grover, Much Birch, Hereford

Question 15

In February this year the Standards Committee upheld a complaint (SC0916) against a parish councillor that he had breached the Parish Council Code of Conduct Paragraph 3(1) and failed to comply with Rule 5. Three sanctions were imposed by the Committee but to date (8 November) only one of those sanctions has been complied with and even this sanction, a letter of apology, was delivered to the complainant well outside the time limit set by the Committee and has not yet been considered by the Parish Council as required. Will the Council state what it is doing to resolve this contempt of a decision by the Standards Committee?

Answer from Robert Rogers, Chairman, Standards Committee

Answer to question 15

The Standards Committee, in upholding the complainant in case number SC0916, imposed two penalties on the parish councillor concerned, namely that:

- an apology be given to the complainant, with a copy of that apology provided to the Parish Council for their consideration; and
- the subject member undertake training arranged by the Monitoring Officer .

The letter of apology had to be sent within 28 days of the councillor's receipt of the letter. I am told that the councillor may have been away around that time so that a precise date cannot be given but it appears that there was no undue delay. A copy of the letter was provided to the Parish Council at that time. Neither the Standards Committee nor Herefordshire Council can require the Parish Council to take specific action upon receipt of the letter.

Appropriate training has been arranged with Herefordshire Association of Local Councils whose training programme is carried out on an annual basis. I understand the session will take place early in the new year.

The Standards Committee also suggested that the Parish Council carry out a governance review in relation to commons management. This is a recommendation not a requirement.

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Supplementary question

Doesn't the Council consider that the sanctions imposed were ineffective?

Answer

A response by the Chairman of Standards Committee was provided outside of the meeting.

Question from Ms F White, Hereford

Question 16

Is there a plan or model available for the 'sustainable communities' and energy neutral housing that will be required for these developments?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis Environment & Strategic Housing

Answer to question 16

No. The Council is strongly committed to carbon reduction and these issues will be taken into account when decisions regarding developments are made.

No supplementary questions asked.