

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 4 MARCH 2011

Question from Mr P McKay, Hereford, to the Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Question 1

My previous questions have identified shortcomings in the Council's highway records; which term includes public rights of way; and now that Amey have settled in and our highways are being managed well, may I please enquire if we can progress and take into consideration the 2026 cut-off date imposed in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, when unrecorded rights of use are extinguished and it may be costly to reinstate such rights.

Is it the Council's objective to have complete and correct highway records by that date, if this date will be taken into consideration when determining priorities, and if the Right of Way Improvement Plan update will incorporate a section encouraging and promoting Parish Council participation with this objective?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Yes it is our objective. The proposed date has not been confirmed and in any event is not relevant as we would wish to maintain and update records as necessary. We will continue to work with Parish Councils in addressing this objective.

Supplementary Question

It was requested that priority be given to making a combined road and rights of way map available so that Parish Councils could check what was recorded or not recorded, and make positive and constructive representations to meet this objective.

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

The Cabinet Member would be happy to take the suggestion into consideration and see if it could be accommodated in discussion at a future Local Access Forum meeting.

Question from Ms J Stanton, Hereford, to the Leader of the Council Councillor RJ Phillips

Question 2

Deloittes have calculated the repayment of Environmental Information charges to be £6m at one council. What contingent liability is Herefordshire Council putting in their accounts and who is paying it?

Answer from Councillor H Bramer, Cabinet Member Resources

A maximum of £165,000 would be necessary were it required in full, but past experience has shown that a contingency has not been necessary.

No supplementary question was asked.

Question from S Horsfield, Hereford to Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Question 3

What energy efficiency standards will the Council require for new homes in Herefordshire?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Currently, all building control submissions should meet the requirements of the current Building Regulations. The regulations with regard to energy efficiency were last updated in October 2010. It is the Government's proposal to increase the Building Regulation standard again in 2013 and 2015. The emerging Herefordshire Core Strategy (part of the LDF) will ensure that, as a minimum, these standards are met in the future planning framework.

No supplementary question was asked.

Question from R Priestley, Hereford to Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Question 4

Our economy in Herefordshire is based overwhelmingly on the use of fossil fuels: coal for electricity, gas for heating and oil for transport. All of these fuels contribute to climate change, and their continued use is not compatible with the sustainability of a healthy biosphere, upon which we are utterly dependent. All these fuels are also finite; their use cannot possibly be maintained at current levels indefinitely. There is much economic data to suggest that extreme price increases are probable over the coming few years: long before 2026 they may simply be unaffordable. Prosperity can only be sustainable in the longer term if it is based on energy efficiency, 100% renewables and a proper stewardship of the biosphere. It will take time to transform the economy: now is the time to start.

For how long do you envisage the economy of Herefordshire being able to maintain a certain rate or level of growth based on the massive and continuing use of fossil fuels?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Herefordshire is no different to other areas of the country in its current use of fossil fuels. The Council recognises this is a significant issue for the future of the county, and is already working with partners to develop strategies to address this issue. The county is well placed to maximise the use of new technologies, and build on the ingenuity of local entrepreneurs in enabling the local economy to continue to grow.

No supplementary question was asked.

Question 5 disallowed on the grounds that the question is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (19 November 2010) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.14.7 c.

Question from Mrs E Morawiecka, Breinton, Hereford to Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Question 6

The Sustrans/Connect 2 River Wye crossing to the East of the city of Hereford, linking Tupsley and Rotherwas still has not materialised into a planning application. Planning applications have however been submitted for a link road (with no bus lanes) and a large Plough Lane car park with 644 spaces.

After well over 2 years debate over a route, how much longer does this council think it will take before they can determine a route for a footpath and cycle way to cross the River Wye on the eastern side of Hereford City, which will improve the sustainable travel options for local residents and can they guarantee they will be able to complete this route before the funding is lost?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

It is anticipated that the route will be determined within the next few weeks following receipt of final views from stakeholders; I am confident this will give sufficient time to draw down the funding and complete implementation of the scheme.

Supplementary Question

How long does it take to design, deliver and fund a footpath and cycle way across the Wye?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

The time taken would be dependent on the funding and resources available. It was important to determine if the public wanted such a scheme; and the appropriate route that should be taken. With the necessary mandate the scheme would be given the priority level it deserves.

Question 7 disallowed on the grounds that the question is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 February 2011) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.14.7 c.

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Question from S Brown, Bucknell, Herefordshire to Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Question 8

What Quality Assurance or other nationally or internationally recognised procedures and standards apply to the production of council reports and documents intended for public scrutiny such as consultation documents?

Answer from Councillor J French, Cabinet Member Corporate & Customer Services and Human Resources

The standards applicable to the production of Council reports are contained in the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and the Council complies with this. The format of reports varies from council to council but will typically ensure that the facts and recommendations are clear and that all relevant factors are taken into account. For key decisions, details of proposed consultation arrangements are contained in the Council's Forward Plan.

The content of consultation documents is not generally prescribed and will vary according to the matter under consideration. Sometimes the law dictates the content and questions and the number of variations mean this question is not capable of a general response. However, the council has guidelines for producing documents which encourage good practice covering aspects such as use of plain English and ensuring the document is accessible to the intended audience.

No supplementary question asked.

Question from Mrs M Brown, Bucknell, Herefordshire to Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Question 9

How have the findings of the November 2008 Herefordshire Public Services Strategic Options Public Consultation influenced the Council's policy development, expenditure and financial strategy (please cite examples)?

Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

The strategic options consultation, of 2008, taken with the results of other public satisfaction surveys conducted more recently, gives a degree of consistency about things that are regarded as both important to local people and in most need of improvement. The three highest are:

1. Affordable, decent housing
2. Clean streets and
3. Public transport

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These are all reflected in the joint corporate plan approved by Council, and which itself informs spending priorities and financial strategy. Some specific examples of activity include:

- Homelessness prevented in 488 cases in the year to September 2010, which was already higher than the 397 cases prevented during 2009
- 90 affordable houses delivered in the period April 2010 to end January 2011 at a time when, nationally, house building has been minimal
- Improved street cleansing has been achieved through the formation of our community protection team and the transformation of our contractual arrangements with Amey Herefordshire. Performance in relation to improved street environmental cleanliness has seen continued improvement with reduced levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly tipping.
- Working with Amey and the Safer Herefordshire partnership we were one of only 12 authorities selected to be a partner in the National Chewing Gum campaign, working with a private sector organisation (Gumdrop Ltd) and their innovative product, to achieve a 39% reduction in inappropriately discarded chewing gum.
- Despite a challenging financial settlement and a reduction in national grant funding for concessionary fares, we have largely been able to protect public transport services in the county.

No supplementary question asked.

Question 10 disallowed on the grounds that the question is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 February 2011) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.14.7 c.

Question 11 disallowed on the grounds that the issue raised in the question is not a matter for which the Council has a responsibility – Herefordshire Council Constitution 4.1.14.7 a.

Question 12 disallowed on the grounds that the question is the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 February 2011) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.14.7.

Question from Ms V Wegg-Prosser, Breinton, Hereford to Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Question 13

The 'Vision' of the Hereford Preferred Option states in para 2.5 that 'The provision of a relief road will be key to enabling a congestion free city by enabling *an alternative trunk route ...*'

Can you point to any other local highway authority in England, Wales or Northern Ireland that has provided a developer funded 'alternative trunk route' for the Highways Agency

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and, if so, were any of these 'alternative trunk routes' roads that had been dropped from the National Roads Programme after failing at a Public Inquiry?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

An example of major highway schemes, funded by a combination of public and private sector contributions is the Birmingham north relief road. The history of the funding of the national roads programme is not known.

Supplementary Question

It was believed that further investigations would be of benefit to the Council to find out if the original proposals for an eastern bypass rejected in 1994 as a trunk route, would not apply also to a western route and that the existing A 49 could not be de-trunked?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

The A49 would be expected to follow the new route around the city. The roads between the new connecting junctions through the city could then be de-trunked.

Question 14 disallowed on the grounds that it was the same or similar to a question raised in the last six months (4 March 2011 - the same question has been raised at question 13) Herefordshire Council Constitution Part 4, 4.1.14.7 c.

Question from Professor L Clements, Hereford to Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Question 15

I understand that contraflow cycling on St Owen's Street is ranked 2nd in cycle schemes for Hereford and has been a priority for cyclists since the days of Hereford and Worcester County Council. I further understand that several years ago Councillor Wilcox took the decision that an informal contraflow should be introduced. Could you please inform me what are Councillor Wilcox's plans for delivering this scheme?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

A range of options for improving cycle access in St Owen Street has been considered and cyclists, retailers and local residential communities have been consulted on their views on several options. The hope that an 'informal' contraflow could be introduced depended on the speed of the traffic; subsequent speed checks identified that this was not possible. It has not yet been possible to achieve a consensus to enable a preferred option to be selected. However, a Living Streets audit of St Owen Street has been undertaken to identify a more holistic solution to the issues affecting all movements within the street.

No supplementary question asked.

Question from D Phelps, Hereford to Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

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Question 16

When will the Council be conducting the poll on its proposals for a road going around the west or east side of Hereford and what laws and regulations will apply to the poll? Please cite specific relevant legislation and regulations.

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Cabinet will be receiving a report at its first meeting in June regarding the further consultation, including a community poll, and the timetable, logistics of carrying out a poll, the possible questions to ask and background information to be provided. The poll will be carried out in accordance with the relevant legislation as part of the LDF process.

No supplementary question asked.

Question from Ms P Mitchell, Hereford to Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

Question 17

The Hereford Preferred Option consultation document states that the Delivering a Sustainable Transport Policy Study (DaSTS) (2010) 'concluded that the level of growth planned through the Core Strategy would need both a strong package of sustainable transport measures and also new road infrastructure' (para 4.30)

Where is this conclusion arrived at in the DaSTS (please give full quote and paragraph references) and does 'new road infrastructure' specifically mean a relief road?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

The conclusion to the DaSTS study confirms a relief road is necessary and states at paragraph 8.5:

"in Hereford the single river bridge is a constraint on development, whilst the planned level of growth (39%) is greater than the reductions that have, to date, proved to be achievable through smarter choices interventions alone"

And at paragraph 8.7

"there is potential for a Relief Road to play a significant role in addressing the congestion which is already evident on the A49 trunk road, by providing an additional crossing over the Wye".

Supplementary Question

Questioner stated she had a different reading of the paragraph quoted. When would the phase 2 study with the suggestions in three areas be available and would Council make sure it is available?

Answer from Councillor DB Wilcox, Cabinet Member Highways and Transportation

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It would be a public document and would be made available at the appropriate time once the working stage had been finished.

Question from Professor A Fisher, Hereford to Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Question 18

It is clear that at the time the Council consulted on the Hereford Preferred Option the viability study on the road proposal was 'ongoing' (para 4.26) and therefore could not have informed that consultation.

How many weeks before the Council's advisory poll on the road will the 'viability' study be available for public scrutiny and how will the public be informed of its availability?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Cabinet will be receiving a report at its first meeting in June regarding the further consultation, including a community poll, supporting information and timetable.

No supplementary question asked.

Question from Ms P Churchward, Breinton, Hereford to Councillor RJ Phillips, Leader of the Council

Question 19

The Council emphasised through out the consultation on the Hereford Preferred Option and in other communications, its view that the spatial strategy and specifically the Hereford Urban Expansion are dependent on a relief road. *(eg. At paras 4.11 and 4.31 of the Hereford Preferred Option consultation)

What impact will the potential non-deliverability of a relief road have on the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework, and in particular on the amount of housing built around Hereford?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Hereford's essential infrastructure, including roads, electricity, water and sewerage systems is acknowledged as reaching its capacity and will require enhancement to ensure future resilience and support the predicted growth. Without a relief road the core strategy would have to be revisited and it is clear that significantly fewer houses, including affordable housing, could be delivered without this necessary infrastructure.

Supplementary question

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On the basis that the latest consultation results have rejected the option for Hereford, including the inner relief road, would officers be revising the whole core strategy before it came to Council for consideration?

Answer from Councillor JG Jarvis, Cabinet Member Environment and Strategic Housing

Further consultation, including the poll, would advise future Cabinet deliberations.
