

**Questions from Mrs M Morawiecka for Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 21st
February 2011**

Question 1

The Sustainability appraisal (Sept 2010) states that “the employment land provided within the new livestock market development is to be accessed via the planned western relief road, which indicates that car use may remain high in terms of employee transport.” Is it appropriate that this council should consider a plan for a “relief” road which directly benefits this council especially in respect of land which it only recently acquired and had previously been used purely for agriculture?

Response:

The Sustainability Appraisal related to the published Preferred Option for the strategy which specifically made provision for a “Blended package” of transportation measures including both Sustainable Transport measures in the City (such as improved bus, cycle and pedestrian facilities) and an outer Relief Road. The supporting documentation in both the LDF and the LTP made it clear that the blended package need to be considered as a whole because any one element on its own (for example just restricting traffic movement in the centre without providing additional highway capacity elsewhere) would not offer a comprehensive solution to such issues as air quality on the existing A49 through the City, traffic congestion or the economic needs of the City and County. Hence it is inappropriate to try to separate out one aspect of the blended package without considering its relationship to the whole scheme. The question of the ownership and previous use of the cattlemarket site is not linked to the justification of the policy.

Question 2

With the City water intake now a short distance downstream from the proposed relief road, it seems surprising that no risk assessment has been made of the risk of pollution of the city’s water supply. Pollution could happen in a number of ways but in particular, spray from vehicles and lorries travelling high over the river being carried on the prevailing winds which funnel down that part of the Wye Valley, and also from a vehicular accident on the western high level bridge overspilling to the river below. What is the risk of contamination of the City’s water supply from a western river crossing and how does the committee feel about exposing the residents of Hereford to such a risk?

Response:

The risk of an accident on a road bridge resulting in pollution down wind and down river applies to all bridges over all rivers. For example the replacement bridge at Bridge Sollers is upstream of the Broomy Hill intake and does not represent a pollution risk in the manner suggested. It is a matter of designing in appropriate road drainage. In terms of pollution risk overall it is worth considering the current situation of Greyfriars Bridge – where, at present, one of the key impacts of congestion on Greyfriars Bridge is the poor air quality in Victoria Street

and other residential streets that form part of the A49 – and the resultant Air Quality Management Area. By distributing traffic between the existing bridge and a new purpose built bridge elsewhere significant environmental advantages can be gained for existing City residents.

Question 3.

The movement policy makes no reference to improving access to rail services at locations such as Pontrilas; Tram Inn; Withington and Moreton-on-Lugg where regular trains already operate. Access at these locations could generate a modal shift from the car for people in more rural areas, on routes which, as they converge on Hereford, become heavily congested. These might be more cost beneficial than an Outer Distributor Road (ODR). Natural England report on the Multi modal study reports that “The ODR does not appear to be financially viable. Although the outputs of the model are presented in terms of generalised time savings, TRL calculated that the ODR would produce journey time saving benefits of around £46.5M over fifteen years; this is small compared with the projected costs of the ODR of £130M, and suggests that, when estimated, the Benefit to Cost Ratio for the scheme is likely to be low.” (Page 3 para 6).

Is a western relief road the best use of public money for improving movement within Hereford and the wider county?

Response:

In respect of the potential for additional railway stations, there is no realistic prospect of passenger railway stations being opened at any of the sites proposed. Withington is the closest to being viable (as acknowledged in the Unitary Development Plan) but the others have been demonstrated to fall a very long way short of economic viability.

At Moreton on Lugg there is a railhead which is mentioned in the Preferred Option but only in the context of the minerals policies. It remains an important railhead for the shipment of aggregates and will be a protected facility in future.

The Natural England review pre-dated the Amey Study of Options and the source of its financial data is uncertain. The basis for the cost of the road is the Amey Study which was based on a secure study of routes and their transport implications.

Question 4.

“Our farmland is a national resource for future generations and the very foundation of our food security. However, under Labour the protection of our best farmland has been downgraded and the Government has rejected councils’ calls to keep in place local protection of this valuable asset. We will introduce into our national planning framework rules preventing the development of the most fertile farmland, in all but exceptional circumstances.” (**Conservative Green Paper on Planning; Policy Paper No 14**)

“The development planned lies outside of the existing built up area, and will take place mainly on Greenfield land which may offer few opportunities for reusing existing buildings, therefore having a negative effect on the efficient use of land”. (Sustainability Appraisal page 23 Sept 2010). “ The housing growth is to accommodate further inward migration” (Preferred Option page 4) With the RSS no longer mandatory and a change in central government is the housing growth proposed by the Preferred Option the best use of high grade agricultural land for this county and the country?

Response:

The quality of farmland remains a material planning consideration but it does not have the same prominence in plan-making that it once had. Effectively the issue of agricultural land quality has been subsumed into wider sustainability issues and dealt with through such mechanisms as the Sustainability Appraisal. The RSS is currently, as a matter of law, still mandatory until such time as it is revoked by an Act of Parliament – which is expected to happen later this year. The evidence base behind the RSS is however secure and the overall growth for the County (of 18,000 houses over the twenty year period 2006 to 2026) is actually slightly less than the growth over the previous twenty years (18,571 for the period 1986 to 2006).

Question 5

Any residences built in the western area of Hereford will lie under the flight path of Forces aircraft. This can cause considerable disturbance to residents, often in the early hours of the morning. What consideration has been given to this in allocating new housing to the west of Hereford and how will future residents of these new estates be protected from such disturbance?

Response:

The same issue applies to all housing in Hereford – even more so to those communities much closer to the Credenhill base than the proposed housing areas. It is controlled by measures outside the planning system.

Question 6

Many of the freewrite responses to the March 2010 consultation were not summarized and published before the preferred option was issued. How were these responses considered by the planning department and were any incorporated into the final preferred option? With an overwhelming rejection of the Hereford preferred option at the latest consultation, how will these responses be used to inform the next LDF proposal now due to go to consultation in July-October 2011.

Response:

The freewrite responses were all considered as part of drawing up the Preferred Option – the results have been published in summary form on the Council's website in the form of analysis schedules – and they are all available for public inspection. The responses will be given due weight alongside all of the responses received at the different stages of the LDF consultation.

Question 7

I attended a workshop on Saturday for Sustainability and resilience in Herefordshire, and many people attending, who were well informed on many matters relating to planning, development and sustainability felt that their views had not been sought or even considered through the LDF process. When will this committee review the LDF process to date to assess the performance of the Council and that the residents are getting best value for the increasing sums spent on this project, especially in light of the increase in reserves for the LDF of £270,000 at a time of significant financial constraint?

Response:

The suggestion that the public's views had not been sought on the LDF is not supported by the facts. Herefordshire Council has carried out more comprehensive publicity and consultation than any other local planning authority on an equivalent policy document. The money spent, of course, increases with each round of publicity and consultation. It is open to the Committee to review development of the LDF as it sees fit, taking into account progress with the timetable for the LDF.