

HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AMBITIONS – CONTRIBUTION MADE BY THE ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Report By: Director of Environment

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To advise upon the Directorate's contribution to the ambitions contained within the Herefordshire Plan, in particular those relating to "protecting and improving Herefordshire's distinctive environment" and "developing an integrated transport system for Herefordshire".

Financial Implications

2. There are no direct implications as a consequence of this report. However, both direct and indirect financial contributions to activities and measures are made through existing budgets.

Background

3. The Herefordshire Plan is the Community Strategy for the County. Such plans are required under the Local Government Act 2000. It also acts as a Local Agenda 21 Plan, which Government requires Councils to produce. In September 2001 the Strategic Monitoring Committee agreed that:
 - It should receive a report on an annual basis bringing together key activities and themes in relation to the Plan that are being progressed or emerging; and
 - Individual Scrutiny Committees should receive six monthly reports setting out progress to date, work in hand and future timetables in relation to the work of the Ambition Groups undertaken by the different parts of Herefordshire Council.
4. The Environment Scrutiny Committee received its last 6 monthly report on 21st November 2003. The Strategic Monitoring Committee received its latest annual report on 13th October 2003.
5. It should be recalled that the mechanism for implementing the Community Plan is through 10 Ambition Groups established to deliver each of the ambitions contained within the Herefordshire Plan. This Scrutiny Committee has a role in scrutinising progress towards the following ambitions:
 - Protecting and improving Herefordshire's distinctive environment
 - Developing an integrated transport system for Herefordshire

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Bill Bloxsome, Chief Conservation Officer
on 01432 261783

6. These two ambitions fall to the Environment Ambition Group and the Transport Ambition Group respectively which in turn relate to the portfolios of the Cabinet Members for the Environment, Councillor Phil Edwards, and Highways and Transportation, Councillor Mike Wilson.
7. In addition there are three Golden Threads, which run right through the Plan to connect with all ambitions. These are:
 - Geographic Communities
 - Communities of Interest
 - Tools and Mechanisms
8. An updated Herefordshire Plan was published towards the end of last year. This identifies achievements and “measures of progress” since the Plan was first produced. Ambition Groups are also asked to produce Action Plans to guide their work. The Herefordshire Partnership prepares an annual report on progress outlined in “The State of Herefordshire Report”, which looks at a number of indicators to help the work of Ambition Groups. A major review of the Herefordshire Plan is to be undertaken in 2004, leading to a new Plan in 2005.

Achievements

9. Achievements of the Environment Ambition Group included in the new revision of the Herefordshire Plan include:
 - Herefordshire Biodiversity Action Plan adopted – Council officers have been involved in the preparation of this Plan and are now working with Herefordshire Nature Trust upon its implementation. Financial contributions continue to be made to this work and a review of the Biodiversity Action Plan is about to commence.
 - Development of a Climate Change Strategy for Herefordshire is underway – Councillors received a presentation on climate change in November 2003. A public consultation will take place over the summer with the aim of completing the strategy by the end of December 2004.
 - Kerbside recycling available in most urban areas of the County. Some 38,000 properties, mainly within the urban areas are covered by the kerbside collection of recyclables (approximately 50% of the County’s properties).
 - Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+ programme developed – the Directorate has sought to utilise this scheme to assist with a range of environmental projects, also attracting other external funding. The Archaeology section within the Council recently published the outcome of a pilot study in the Arrow Valley entitled Arrow Valley, Herefordshire – Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation. A further project has commenced within the Frome Valley.
10. Achievements by the Transport Wider Reference Group (Transport Ambition Group) are listed as:

- New Safer Routes to Schools introduced – the number of new “Safer Routes to Schools” projects introduced rose from 4 in 99/00 to 8 in 02/03. The Transportation Unit within the Division is currently helping to develop a Government’s School Travel Initiative in partnership with the Education Directorate and local schools in order to increase the number of schools with Travel Plans.
 - New rural bus routes and more frequent services introduced – this has been possible through the availability of new grant schemes, in particular, through the Department of Transport’s Rural Bus Grant.
 - Hereford City Transport study completed – Over the past year the group has been involved in developing the long-term strategy for tackling Hereford’s transport problems through a comprehensive multi-modal study, Hereford Transport Review.
 - Herefordshire public transport website launched – this was launched on February 2003.
11. The Environment Directorate has contributed to the work of a number of other Ambition Groups. In particular in relation to achievements through the Golden Thread of Geographic Communities, the Directorate has contributed to work being advanced through the Community Development and Local Services Ambition Group of preparing parish plans. Five Parish plans have now been completed and a further 32 parishes are undertaking plans. A representative of Planning Services sits on the Parish Plan Steering group and 17 officers from the Environment directorate are nominated ‘key contacts’ for consultation purposes and to provide service information. Planning Services and the Planning Committee are adopting the planning elements of completed parish plans as interim Supplementary Planning Guidance and this has been done in 4 instances so far.

Updates

Environment Ambition Group

12. There are four ‘measures of progress’ which are referred to in the present Plan under this Ambition:
- a) Percentage of New Homes built on brownfield sites – this continues to rise (62% in 02/03, 69% in 03/04). The Environment Directorate’s influence on this measure is through the Planning System with the UDP setting the policy basis for such development and Development Control Officers and the Planning Committee implementing this through decisions on planning applications.
 - b) Percentage of household waste recycled (including composting) – again progress has been made with the percentage in 99/00 being 11.4% and in 02/03 being 15.4%. Again the Environment Directorate is directly involved with this measure. Indication is that an even greater improvement has been made to 19.4% in 03/04 due largely to the start of kerbside collection of recyclables in urban areas and the completion of refurbishment of household waste sites.

- c) Percentage of assessed areas within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in 'favourable' or 'recovering' condition – the percentage has fallen from 39.7% (2001) to 32.6% (2003). The Council can only influence a small fraction of such areas. It has a duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to seek enhancements to SSSIs when undertaking its duties. This can be through the Planning system, works to council land that may be SSSIs, or other works the Council undertakes or that might otherwise affect such areas.
- d) Area of land covered by Countryside Stewardship Studies – the number within the County continues to increase, from 1002 in 1999 to 1672 in 2002. The Council's Property Service seeks to assist those upon its small holdings in applying for Stewardship wherever it is able. In addition, advice upon a range of factors is provided to assist in the preparation of bids and officers have been discussing the sharing of database information with DEFRA. Two recent initiatives by the Directorate, utilising external funding, provide advice and guidance to the farming community upon conservation measures that might promote elements of the historic environment in stewardship bids. The first is the appointment of a Countryside Advisor (Archaeology) with funding from English Heritage. The second is a programme combining archaeology and landscape change, funded in combination by English Heritage and LEADER+. The pilot project for this was in the Arrow Valley and is now complete. A second project has now started within the Frome Valley. It is hoped to roll this out into the Lugg and Wye Valleys subsequently.

13. Additional contributions made by the Council towards this Ambition include:

- The major party in the financing of the Environmental Co-ordinator post. Funding is also received from a number of other agencies.
- Taking a lead role in a number of projects listed in the Ambition Groups Action Plan

Transport Wider Reference Group

14. The 'measures of progress' highlighted in the current version of the Herefordshire Plan under this ambition are:

- a) Number of people killed or seriously injured on Herefordshire's roads – this has continued to decline from 179 (1999) to 150 (2002). The Engineering and Transportation Division monitors accident statistics and identifies cluster sites bringing forward engineering and/or behavioural solutions to address problems.
- b) Number of passenger journeys per year on public buses – this saw a drop of 2.4% between 01/02 and 02/03. However, an increase is reported between 02/03 and 03/04 (see below). The Council's Bus Strategy is to maintain the supported network of bus routes.
- c) Percentage of non-principal roads in poor condition - the Council has set a target for improvement of these roads by 2005 as part of the Road Safety target of the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA). The Highway Maintenance Plan for 2004/05 has been prepared on the basis of this target, with the aim of achieving a 3% improvement in the condition of non-principal roads between 2002 and 2005. The Government has recently revised the

specification for measuring road condition, effectively preventing direct comparison between current and historic condition indicator data. For the purposes of the LPSA a special survey will be commissioned for Herefordshire in 2004/05 to measure condition based on the same survey methodology as that employed for the 2002 baseline.

15. To a large extent the work of this Ambition Group is also monitored through the Herefordshire Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Report published annually in July. This Plan forms the current action plan for achieving this ambition. Additional achievements that were highlighted in that progress report for July 2003 include:
- 4.8% increase in cycling at prime points on the cycle network and 6.3% in numbers of cycles parked in the centre of Hereford.
 - 3.4% increase in bus passengers on rural services (which are supported by the Council) and a 5.9% increase in patronage on low floor bus services;
 - 16% decrease in the numbers of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents; and
 - traffic volumes in both Hereford and the rural area have been constrained to meet the target of 1% growth from 2001 to 2002.

A new Annual report will be published in July this Year.

16. Over the past year both Ambition Groups have responded to the consultation on the Edgar Street Grid proposals. The Transport Wider Reference Group is currently considering a review of the Council's Parking Strategy and will be involved in the development of the next Herefordshire Local Transport Plan due to be published in July 2005.
17. Environmental and Transportation matters also have significant effects on the work of a number of other Ambition Groups. Reference has already been made to the links with the Community Development and Local Services Ambition Group. Examples, amongst others, of further such linkages include:
- Housing Ambition Group – developing the Housing Design Guide;
 - Business, Economic and Tourism Ambition Group – advising on planning and development matters and a joint sub-group upon Sustainable Land Use, and consultation on car parking strategy;
 - Community Safety Partnership – including road safety education, accident reduction, speed management, clearance of abandoned vehicles

Recommendation

THAT the report be noted

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Herefordshire Local Transport Plan
- Herefordshire Plan Environmental Strategy

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