

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 NOVEMBER 2011

## Question from Mr P Mitchell, Herefordshire

## Question 1

It was recently reported in the Hereford Times that the Council will press ahead with their commitment to a new bypass for Hereford without further public consultation on the assumption that the wider council taxpaying public would support this – and by implication this priority over other capital spend options such as schools, care homes, other essential civic infrastructure maintenance or new build.

Given the adverse Council funding conditions which have been prevailing in recent years and which are likely to continue for some time (inflationary costs have risen significantly ahead of Council's funding receipts)

*Can the Council justify and demonstrate the wisdom, feasibility and financial affordability of committing to its decision (and explain its assumption of public support).*

This against a backdrop of confirming its first priority must always be to meet rising financial costs of maintaining essential public services and support to the vulnerable whilst at the same time also ensuring council tax payments will not be allowed to rise. Even if justifiable in this context, in the absence of suitable asset disposals this will inevitably result in reducing its available funding to meet any of its capital spend aspirations.

There has previously also been implied dependency that developer/s will be sufficiently commercially incentivized to meet a substantial proportion of the 9 figure cost of this bypass. The extent is also a highly questionable contention and equally difficult to justify and demonstrate given that unless the developer can commit to on balance sheet funding they will otherwise (in an unfavorable climate) need to seek very difficult to obtain project finance. In either event to be justifiable any such development will have to generate sufficiently attractive and financially sustainable rates of returns to cover their financing costs, overall development costs (including contribution to the bypass) against realistic and achievable asset valuations and any associated supporting income streams going forward in today's less than rosy economic climate. Always of course assuming mutual desirability of associated proposed developments – with Council meeting their civic duty to ensure they socially and responsibly achieve, not at the expense of, the wishes, aspirations, interests and needs of the people of Hereford.

The wisdom and validity of such assumptions and commitments by the Council and the dependency on the developer to deliver low risk (to the Council / Taxpayer) and suitable support in meeting what the City wants and needs must be very questionable at least for some considerable time to come. Particularly given that council taxpayers themselves are under enormous similar financial pressures and are therefore likely to find **any** increased risk of council tax rises unwelcome if not intolerable.

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**Question from Mr P McKay, Hereford**

Question 2

*With a year having passed since I last enquired and it still not being known which of our unsurfaced roads suffer from long term obstructions to equestrians, even though they are inspected annually on foot if need be, and our meeting subject of reply to question at May Full Council meeting being unrecorded, may I enquire if you could confirm that Council is considering modification to the roles of Highways and Rights of Way to make them more efficient and effective, so that highways undertake all surface maintenance functions, that being what they are best at, and more importantly that Rights of Way undertake all access inspections with any follow up actions, that being what they are best at, so that it will be known within 12 months which of our unsurfaced maintained and non-maintained roads are obstructed, ploughed, have broken gates, where signs would be beneficial, etc., they comprising about 30% of available equestrian routes, with appropriate action being taken in similar manner as is done for our ramblers with footpaths?*

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**Question from Mr T Packham, Grafton, Hereford**

Question 3

I refer to routes A301 SC1 and A302 SC2 in the October 2010 Amey Plan. Link SC2 runs to the south of Hayleasow Wood to avoid what is an area of Ancient Woodland and a SWS, and was the route favoured by the Study of Options Environmental Assessment Report Hereford Relief Road August 2010 (see page 51).

I am therefore very concerned about the 3rd route, shown red, that has now been hastily proposed, without any consultation with the Parish Council or local residents and which has not been assessed for its environmental impacts on the surrounding area, in particular the Ancient Woodland site.

*Why has the Council re-routed the road in response to just three objections from the Haywood Lodge area, without wider consultation, and with no environmental assessment of this new proposed route?*

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**Question from P Churchward, Breinton, Hereford**

Question 4

*Can the Council confirm the value of its assets, loans and liabilities and the ratio of this figure against assets held on the balance sheet?*

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**Question from AT Oliver, Hereford**

Question 5

In the light of the fact that violence towards women is said to be increasing; that on average one woman per week in the UK is killed by their partner; that apparently a significant number of young people believe it is alright to slap, punch, abuse a female partner for any misdemeanour and that teenage pregnancies are still increasing.

*Would the Cabinet Member for Children's Services give a categorical assurance that this Council will insist on Herefordshire's secondary schools providing comprehensive sex education?*

(Sex education which includes not only the biology of sex but also the issue of relationships between the sexes, which makes clear that it is not acceptable behaviour to abuse, or use violence towards your partner, and also informs young women that it is not normal to be in a relationship which involves physical violence and controlling behaviour and that society will provide help and support if they are trapped in such a relationship.)