

## **PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 23 NOVEMBER 2012**

### **Question from Mrs P Churchward, Breinton**

Question 1

#### Refurbishment of Hereford's Historic Butter Market

*The Executive Rolling Programme indicated that the Cabinet Member Corporate Services and the Cabinet Member Enterprise and Culture were due to make a decision on the refurbishment of Hereford's historic Butter Market on 18 October 2012 and how the Council plans to fund that refurbishment. Considering that the Council has so far spent millions supporting the ESG retail development could one of these Cabinet Members please advise what the current situation is regarding funding the Butter Market refurbishment?*

### **Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips Cabinet Member Enterprise and Culture**

Answer to question 1

Options, including the potential for private sector investment, for refurbishment of the Buttermarket have been explored and a detailed survey of the structure and mechanical & electrical services must next be carried out along with an evidence based assessment of private sector market readiness.

The outcomes of this work will help to inform any decision to include the refurbishment of the Buttermarket in the council's Capital Programme. In the meantime we continue to support activities that bring increased footfall into the city and therefore support existing retailers, as evidenced by the recent Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival and promotional activities such as the Truffle scheme and Shop Herefordshire.

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### **Question from Mrs E Morawiecka, Breinton**

Question 2

#### Webcasting of Council Meetings

As part of its drive to make democracy more transparent, accessible and open, Herefordshire Council carried out a trial webcast of a planning meeting in February 2012. The Head of Governance said that this was one of the Council's priorities and it also increased the accessibility of such meetings to members of the public and staff who cannot travel to meetings or miss them because of other commitments. The Council press release stated that "The first webcast of a Herefordshire Council meeting proved a resounding success with more than 1,000 people having viewed it...Consideration will now be given to extending webcasting to all of the council's public meetings".

*With this resounding success and the fact that many other councils already provide this service for local taxpayers to engage in democracy, can the Cabinet Member responsible for Governance and Democracy confirm when they are due to extend webcasting of meetings to help deliver this priority of Herefordshire Council?*

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### **Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member Corporate Services**

Answer to question 2

The trial webcast of the planning committee in February was successful and we received lots of positive feedback. This is an initiative that the Council is looking to extend and we are currently reviewing how best to achieve this as part of our new office accommodation plans for a civic hub at the Shire Hall. This approach will enable us to acquire the right technology, in the right place, at the right time and keep costs to a minimum

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### **Question from Mrs BC McHarg**

Question 3

Herefordshire Council Capital Overspend on Supporting Retail Development

*The budget report to Cabinet on 18 October 2012, in Appendix 2, states that there is already a “capital overspend on the Link Road in excess of £1.5million on property purchases”. What other additional costs is the Council incurring in order to facilitate the delivery of this new retail development?*

### **Answer from Councillor GJ Powell Cabinet Member Education & Infrastructure**

Answer to question 3

Capital expenditure on the Link Road is not linked to the retail development at the Old Market Site; the ‘capital overspend’ noted in the budget report is a matter of spend profile rather than capital budget overspend.

There is no ‘overspend’ on the retail development; as part of the variation agreed by Cabinet the Council will forego £500,000 of capital receipt from the £1.5m to be received from the developer, but there are no additional costs to the council.

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### **Question from Mr P McKay, Leominster**

Question 4

Car Parking Charges

Leominster Town Council minute 09.09.83 of 21 September 2009 records Leominster Town Council request to review waiting restrictions in Broad Street with objective of bringing parking bays marked double yellow lines outside Hintons into use, with minute 09.10.98 of 19 October 2009 advising will be included on list for ranking, with the June 2010 TRO work program showing review of Broad Street waiting restrictions has a project start date of 28 May 2013. Leominster Town Council minute 11.01.129 & 130 of 17/01/2011 record concern about the way in which other parking bays are marked with

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single and double yellow lines enforced by wardens throughout Leominster, due to waiting restriction orders dating back to 1977 not having been updated when town centre redesigned, seeking to bring all these other parking bays into use, with minute 11.02.159.2 of meeting 21/02/2011 recording that Leominster Town Council's request for a review of waiting restrictions in the town was noted and that the request would be included on the lists for ranking in June/July 2011.

*Requests asking for current information regarding these project start dates remain unanswered, so may I enquire just when we may expect these projects to start, aiming to make Leominster more parking friendly in these times of austerity, and to reduce parking demands on adjacent residential streets?*

### **Answer from Councillor GJ Powell Cabinet Member Education and Infrastructure**

Answer to question 4

It is unacceptable that the requests for an update on the progress of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) remain unanswered. We are currently reviewing our communication channels to resolve the issue.

In regard to this particular scheme, which affects Broad Street Leominster, it currently ranks at number 55 out of 99 TRO projects that are with the service to pursue. Realistically this means a projected start date of July 2014. I am working closely with the highway service to improve timescales for TROs as a consequence of greater productivity, improved resource management, and a revision of the current process. I anticipate issuing a briefing to all Members within 30 days.

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### **Question from Mrs V Wegg-Prosser, Breinton**

Question 5

#### 5 year Housing Land Availability Target

*Could the Cabinet Member responsible for Planning confirm that the Council's decisions to delay the completion of the 5 year housing land availability target and to delay the preparation of the core strategy were agreed in order to take advantage of the relaxation of planning rules that can occur (in accordance with the NPPF) in the event that 5 year housing land availability and core strategy are not in place?*

### **Answer from Councillor RB Hamilton Cabinet Member Environment, Housing and Planning**

Answer to question 5

No, the Leader's Report to Council (appearing elsewhere on the agenda today) provides an update regarding the progress of the Core Strategy, which itself will be used to establish the future 5-year housing land availability target for Herefordshire. There is certainly no hidden agenda as may be inferred from the question.

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### Question from Mr P Mitchell,

#### Question 6

#### Explanation and justification of capital funding priority over essential service provision

Against a background of tightened central government funding and relatively stagnant council tax receipts, would the Council explain and justify its reduced budgetary allocations to increasing demand and cost of social and health care support against its clear preference towards provision of land and funding significant project costs to underpin developer profit on the Edgar Grid development (thus compounding the reduction impact to budget due to debt financing costs).

I would ask the Council to address this (and any other) capital funding priority in the context of its primary duty to meet essential core services and especially to provide support to the most needy and vulnerable in society. In particular

- *Provide assurance and demonstrate how it will address recently reported management failures to meet adequate (legal minimum) requirements for ensuring safety and care of children at risk or in care and maintain necessary resources to achieve its statutory and more important moral obligation to ensure good or excellent standards of care provision.*
- *Explain and justify reported cuts in the extent of service provision for care of the elderly against an increasingly demanding demographic going forward.*
- *Explain and justify reported cuts in support to vulnerable families at a time when they are suffering particularly badly due to the current economic climate and are increasing in numbers.*
- *How it will ensure required resourcing of care and support to those with mental health problems under reported reductions in available funding having already being been targeted with more stringent benefits requirements (and will otherwise require more care and support getting into and maintaining suitable employment and safeguarding their personal circumstances).*

### **Answer from Councillor PM Morgan Cabinet Member Health & Wellbeing**

#### Answer to question 6

I would like to make it clear that we have not reduced budgetary allocations to social care support or our support for vulnerable families. It is of course true that reducing central government funding and rising demographic pressures mean that resources are being stretched more thinly, that difficult choices around prioritisation of those resources are and will continue to be needed; however we remain committed to ensuring that vulnerable people receive the services they need, and to ensure that we do our best to support activities which help to prevent people requiring such services in the future. It is a principle underpinning our budget setting that resources are directed towards supporting the most vulnerable.

It is important to take an holistic approach to overall health and wellbeing. Without jobs and homes we know that people's health suffers and costs to health and social care services increase. That is why we must continue to invest in things that contribute to

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overall health and wellbeing within our community whilst ensuring that the most vulnerable receive the support they need.

We are very disappointed by the findings of the recent inspection of children's safeguarding but accept the findings and are using them as an opportunity to change and improve the support we provide to vulnerable families. The improvement plan in response to the findings has already been presented to the Health & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the council and its partners are committed to maintain improvement over the coming weeks and months. Additional resources have already been identified to support these necessary improvements.

The scale of the issue we face is significant, and it is not Herefordshire's alone. Our proposed corporate plan (appearing elsewhere on the agenda today) makes clear our continued commitment in this area. Despite the challenge that exists we will, through our root & branch reviews and the budget planning process, continue to ensure that the right resources are in the right place to meet the needs of the most vulnerable as well as the wider community.

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### Question from Ms Paige Mitchell, Hereford

Question 7

#### Completeness of traffic modelling for policy evaluation and soundness of the Local Development Framework

The Council is about to embark on another consultation on another version of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, in part because of concerns expressed by statutory organisations, including the Highways Agency, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

In their 28 November 2011 letter to the Council on the Revised Preferred Option consultation, the Highways Agency stated:

'The Agency currently finds the Revised Preferred Options Consultation as **unsound** due to lack of supporting transport evidence base.' (Letter from Serena Howell, NDD West Midlands Area 9 to Forward Planning)

To remedy this lack of 'supporting transport evidence base', the Council planners proposed, and the Cabinet agreed (at its meeting on the 12th of July), that from July to September of this year there would be 'continuing work on outstanding elements, including ... completion of road studies and **upgraded modelling**' in preparation for 'Consultation upon a Draft Plan and SA/SEA [Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment] and HRA [Habitats Regulation Assessment]' (para 50)

The Local Transport Plan 2011-12 Annual Progress Report (APR, October 2012) describes the 'Hereford Transport Model Upgrade' as

'a standard process all models go through every 5 years or so, [to] ensure the model

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accurately represents existing transport conditions for all types of transport and so can be used with confidence to predict transport conditions in the future to help the council develop its transport strategies and business cases for transport investment.' (p6)

However the APR also reports that. due to 'the very poor weather in the spring' completion of the upgraded model is not expected until spring 2013.

This indicates that not only will the evidence base for revising the Core Strategy and presenting it at the forthcoming consultation still be incomplete but so will the statutory components of the plan — the Sustainability Appraisal, the Strategic Environmental Assessment, and the Habitats Regulation Assessment.

Can Cllr Hamilton confirm either that:

a) *further consultation on the Local Development Framework will be delayed until the upgraded transport model is available to inform policy including 'the business cases for transport investment' and the statutory environmental assessments of the LDF;*

*or that*

b) *if consultation is to proceed, reasonable alternative policies whose impacts can be assessed will be presented alongside the Council's preferred option which, it appears, must remain unsound until the problem of incomplete evidence has been addressed.*

### **Answer from Councillor RB Hamilton Cabinet Member Environment, Housing and Planning**

Answer to question 7

I believe that there is widespread recognition and support for the need to have an agreed Core Strategy in place and that it is important that progress continues towards adoption, including the consultation that is planned for the spring. The council is continuing to work closely with the Highways Agency and others in respect of a number of important local proposals including the LDF Core Strategy and development of the Rotherwas Enterprise Zone. We are seeking to ensure that the Agency is supportive of the Core Strategy and its evidence base as this will be important in progressing it through to adoption. Officers are meeting with the Regional Director of the Highways Agency in the near future for further discussions on this issue.