

Public questions to Council 16 December 2016

Question from Mrs C Protherough, Birch Hill

Question 1

Hereford bypass

As, in the council's submission for funding for the Hereford transport package, it is generously proposed that the "bypass will make the A49 an alternative for M4/M5 traffic to ease congestion on the motorway network", could the council provide statistics for the likely resulting increase in through traffic, both car and HGV, on the A49 between north of Leominster and Ross, and could they confirm that these figures will be widely available in public consultation on the bypass in the future?

Answer from Councillor Philip Price, cabinet member infrastructure

The A49 forms part of the strategic road network managed by Highways England, which is responsible for maintaining journey times for longer distance traffic. Modelling of the strategic road network to 2040 identifies increasing congestion on the M5/M6 corridor with only limited deterioration on the A49 corridor, most notably in the vicinity of Hereford city. This modelling information can be viewed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387222/npsnn-print.pdf

The large local majors bid submitted by the council referenced this information and noted that with a bypass for Hereford the A49 could have an enhanced role and provide an alternative for some traffic on the parallel M5/M6 (not M4/M5 as stated in the question) which is forecast to become increasingly congested. As modelling work is progressed the scale of this will be established and will be made available when it is completed and agreed with Highways England.

Question from Mr P McKay, Leominster

Question 2

Green highway infrastructure and planning obligations.

Following my September question I am getting positive feedback from two parishes regarding play areas and parks, they now being aware of and conditions regarding planning obligation funds available for that purpose, but the November Local Access Forum minutes report that our paths are in poor condition with lack of funding leading to idle volunteers. This seems to boil down to our green highway infrastructure not having been specifically mentioned in the local transport plan delivery strategy nor monitored in the annual progress reports, even though the local transport plan recognises our green highway infrastructure as being the single most important means of accessing the countryside, providing for quiet recreation and improving health, leisure, tourism, with the management subject of ever increasing partnership working whether that is with health providers to encourage greater walking and recognition of health benefits, with tourism partners to encourage access or with local councils and volunteers to ensure as far as possible that routes are available and free from obstruction.

So may I ask if reference to this green highway infrastructure could be mentioned when transport planning obligations are sought, so that parishes and volunteers may also be aware of and conditions regarding available transport planning obligation funds, with our green highway infrastructure included in the annual transport plan progress reports?

Answer from Councillor Philip Price, cabinet member infrastructure

I am pleased to confirm that improvements to the rights of way network are already a matter that is discussed in relation to potential developments.

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The spend of any contributions towards the rights of way network will be reported in the core strategy authority monitoring report and published on the council's website in the new year.

Question from Ms K Sharp, Hereford

Question 3

Southern link road

I have seen correspondence from the Department for Transport, including letters from Andrew Jones Minister for Roads, stating that the Southern Link Road is a 'retained scheme' and that the Local Growth funding of £27m allocated for the Southern Link Road will only be released when DfT approve the Final Business case. As the Final Business Case for the SLR is yet to be approved, do you not agree that it is very misleading for Council to repeatedly tell residents that "the funding is secured"?

Answer from Councillor Philip Price, cabinet member infrastructure

No I do not agree. Funding for the south Wye transport package (which includes the southern link road) has been secured and indeed that funding has already begun to be drawn down against development costs as applied for. As is inevitably the case with funding of this nature and projects of this scale there are conditions to be met in order to draw down the full amount of secured funding. A formal grant funding agreement is in place between the council and the Marches local enterprise partnership (through which the funding from the Department for Transport is delivered) which confirms that the funding will be available to be drawn down as the council continues to deliver the south Wye transport package as applied for.

Question from Mr J Perkins, Hereford

Question 4

Air pollution

On 29th April, the Supreme Court ordered the British government to boost its fight against air pollution, which could lead to drivers of diesel cars facing higher road taxes and daily charges to enter city centres or even being banned from them.

Many areas are discussing banning such vehicles from their city centres including London.

In Britain, about 29,000 premature deaths a year are thought to be caused by air pollution. When will Herefordshire Council make an announcement banning these sources of illegal pollution?

Answer from Councillor Philip Price, cabinet member infrastructure

Herefordshire Council currently has no plans to make such an announcement. The council has an obligation to review and assess its air quality and as a consequence has declared two air quality management areas, the first along the A49 corridor in Hereford and the second at the Bargates junction in Leominster. These designated areas are subject to air quality action plans which look to reduce the impact of traffic related air pollution upon the community by implementing a variety of different measures. Progress on this is reviewed annually and reported back to Defra.

The proposal to ban such vehicles from city centres using clean air zones (like in London) has been considered. It would only be viable to ban such vehicles in the centre of Hereford if an alternative route existed, as proposed by the Hereford bypass. The need for such a road is already identified in the current suite of actions for both Herefordshire's air quality management areas are considered sufficient to reduce pollution levels to an acceptable level.

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Defra is currently consulting upon the implementation of clean air zones in five UK cities, namely Birmingham, Derby, Leeds, Nottingham and Southampton. This consultation does not currently extend to smaller cities such as Hereford. It is, however, understood that Defra's proposals are to be reviewed following the recent court judgement. Herefordshire Council will consider any further guidance that may be issued by Defra.
