

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mrs Monkley, Much Marcle	<p>According to government National Statistics (<i>Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Statistics 2017 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, National Statistics</i>), agriculture accounted for 10% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions in 2017.</p> <p>In the light of the present and accelerating climate emergency, given that Herefordshire is such a farming based community and is therefore contributing more than the average to this figure, will the Council agree to set up a working party of Councillors, local farmers and climate change mitigation experts to design a county plan to reduce Herefordshire's agricultural greenhouse gas contributions and to devise and implement farm-based carbon sequestration measures please?</p>	Cabinet member infrastructure
<p>Response: As I mentioned in my response to public question 6 at the February meeting of Council, I have asked the General Scrutiny Committee to build into their work programme in 2019/20 consideration of the policy options and practical actions available to us to help in the global action needed to address climate change, and I hope that they will consider this work a priority. It will be a matter for the scrutiny committee to determine how best to engage with relevant experts and local stakeholders.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: Can you assure me that you understand the existential threat posed by climate change and provide reassurance that the council will seek to reduce agricultural carbon footprint through sequestering of carbon?</p>			
<p>Response from Cabinet Member to supplementary Question: Herefordshire Council has worked well with the farming community, particularly through the nutrient management plan, which has engaged many partners to look at farming practices and how to better farm and look after soil in the future. Provide assurance that the council does and will continue to do this work and with the farming community and will take this up with the National Farmers Union and other organisation that we work with to ensure they are aware of the assistance the council can provide.</p>			
PQ 2	Dr Geeson, Hereford	<p>With respect to the Motion on Climate Change, the changing weather patterns we are beginning to experience (for example with unseasonal heat, cold, droughts, floods or high winds) are likely to interrupt crop-growing cycles and make it much more difficult to ensure the successful provision of food crops to feed the UK population. Do Councillors recognise that the especially fertile Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land of Herefordshire is nationally rare, and therefore this very important and valuable asset should be kept for food production and not be built on?</p>	Cabinet member infrastructure

<p>Response: Herefordshire Council recognises the value of good quality agricultural land and is aware of the advice in the National Planning Policy Framework that indicates that where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrably necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality.</p> <p>In order to meet adopted housing targets and the associated key elements of strategic infrastructure in Herefordshire it has been demonstrated that there is a need to develop on agricultural land close to its largest settlements. The potential capacity of the urban areas falls well short of that needed.</p> <p>The quality of farmland available, including around the urban areas is such that utilisation of some of the best and most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) will be required in accommodating necessary development. This is particularly so around Hereford where very significant areas of agricultural land around the city falls within the best and most versatile categories. It is also the case that much of the remaining land lies within areas subject to other significant constraints on development, such as being within the functional floodplain or being subject to national or international environmental designations. A balance has to be struck between competing needs and protections to enable necessary development yet minimise any negative impacts, so it would not be practical to place a blanket ban on development of higher-grade agricultural land.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: In September 2018 the Office of National Statistics projected that household numbers in Herefordshire during 2011-31 would increase 10,660, which is 35% less than the 2015 core strategy figure 16,500. Does the council recognise the needs to review housebuilding targets and review the intended sacrifice of grade 1 and 2 land that will be needed instead to secure future food production and security?</p>			
<p>Cabinet Member response to supplementary question: A review of the core strategy would begin in 2019 which would examine housebuilding numbers. Grade 1 agricultural land should be protected where possible. There was a lot of grade 1 and 2 agricultural land around Hereford and if there was to be further development it was likely to be on better quality agricultural land. Housebuilding figures and development allocation would be looked at through the review of the core strategy.</p>			
PQ 3	Ms Shore, Hereford	The 8th March is International Women's Day, an appropriate day to ask a question about Herefordshire Council's 2018 Equality Analysis of the workforce and councillors. The median gender pay gap, although improved from 2017, is 12.8% lower for women than men. This means that a woman employed by the council earns, on average, 87p for every £1 earned by her male colleagues. What is the Council's action plan for reducing and eliminating this inequality?	Cabinet member finance and corporate services
<p>Response: As noted in the publication <i>Personnel Today</i>, tackling a gender pay gap can be a slow and difficult process, taking time and resources. The causes of a gender pay gap are a complex mix of work, society and family, so employers will only be able to influence some factors, which might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A perception that higher level roles are less flexible (eg. flexible/reduced hours, working from home); • Risk of bias at recruitment stage and nature of recruitment literature; • Promotion and progression of female employees to higher level roles; • Instilling confidence in the female workforce to advance in the organisation. 			

We have a number of actions in progress targeted at these factors. These include:

1. All recruitment literature and web pages to have a statement about flexible working options;
2. Providing recruitment training for managers to include equality considerations and unconscious bias;
3. Carrying out further detailed analysis of the statistics to identify areas for targeted work, and engaging with our workforce to identify possible actions;
4. We have in place family friendly policies and will continue to promote these to existing and prospective employees and promote the shared parental leave policy with a view to encouraging uptake by male employees;
5. A programme to review all our policies and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose, clear and accessible.

Supplementary Question:

What is the timescale for the detailed analysis; will the findings be made public; and once the analysis has been carried out, how will the Council translate the results into an action plan? What are the measures that are in place to promote the Council's family friendly policies to existing and prospective employees?

Cabinet Member response to supplementary question:

More women and under-represented groups should stand as councillors. The median gender pay gap is by definition an average; employee gender bias for roles at the council can reflect societal norms and the closing of the gap will not be achieved easily. The ethos of the council is to reward competence irrespective of gender. Recruitment is undertaken on the basis of competency and for some roles there may be a gender bias in the applicant pool however it would not necessarily represent value for money to enforce quotas even if gender pay gap was closed more rapidly. There was a need to prioritise retention of staff, particularly women who have children to ensure career progression is not prejudiced. As an authority the council was committed to appropriate representation to reflect the society in which we live.

PQ 4	Ms Sharp, Hereford	The public have heard that the budget for the Active Travel Measures for the South Wye Transport package has been cut from £8million and is now down to £5million. What budget is available for the walking, cycling and bus proposals included in the Hereford Transport Package currently being consulted on?	Cabinet member infrastructure
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Response:

The estimated cost of active travel measures that, together with the Southern Link Road, will form the South Wye Transport Package and as set out in the Strategic Outline Business Case (which can be seen on the council's website) was £5m so it is not correct to say the budget for the element of the package has been cut. I am due to take a decision on 8 March in relation to our commitment to investment in active travel measures in the South Wye area alongside the delivery of the new road. The Strategic Outline Business Case for the Hereford Transport Package can be seen on the council's website and sets out an estimated £29m of possible walking, cycling, public transport and public space improvements alongside a new bypass scheme. We are currently consulting on this issue and the feedback we receive will inform the further development of potential improvements; cost estimates will be updated as this work progress. This is the normal process for scheme development and fully in accordance with Department for Transport business case stages.

The report informing the decision that I will be taking on 8 March is available on the council's website and provides information about the process of selection. The measures recommended for inclusion in the full business case will be effective in meeting the objectives of the South Wye Transport Package because:

- Together they are considered to maximise the benefits of investments across the area;

- They would constitute value for money;
- The walking and cycling infrastructure would improve access to the HEZ, city centre and other local destinations, which will encourage uptake of these modes;
- The walking and cycling infrastructure and reduced speed limits would contribute to a reduction in the severity and incidence of road collisions and would improve the perception of safety of active travel modes;
- The uptake of walking and cycling would contribute to a reduction in traffic noise and reduce air pollutants associated with vehicle traffic and improve public health; and
- They support many actions in the Living Streets Groundwork for the Hereford Walking Strategy document.

PQ 5	Mrs Morawiecka, Breinton	The original need for the Southern Link Road was supposedly to open up new land for housing, with property developers contributing £5million to the new road cost. With cuts to so many local services and no funding available for sustainable modes of transport for schools, why is the taxpayer now expected to foot the full £30million bill for this road scheme?	Cabinet member infrastructure
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Response:

Your statement that the original need for the Southern Link Road was to enable housing growth is incorrect. Whilst delivery will assist in unlocking land for much needed housing, the aims of the South Wye Transport Package are:

Economic:

- Reduce congestion and delay
- Enable access, particularly to developments such as the Hereford Enterprise Zone

Environmental:

- Reduce the growth in emissions such as CO2, NOx and PM10s
- Reduce traffic noise

Health:

- Encourage physical activity
- Reduce accidents

The Strategic Outline Business case set out both growth funding and local contributions for this £35m package and indicated possible sources for local contributions. That business case enabled Herefordshire Council to secure £27m funding from the Department for Transport (DfT). Cabinet has confirmed a local contribution of £8m which would be funded from local transport plan funding allocations or other funding sources. This remains the case as has been set out in published decision reports, and will be confirmed in the final full business case when submitted to DfT later in the year.

I would also challenge the assumptions made in the question that the funding could be used to support other local services; there is a significant difference between the use that can be made of non-recurring capital funding and the requirement for ongoing revenue funding to sustain local services. We always explore funding options to ensure that public resources are directed to best effect and that essential services for our residents can be maintained.

The question also explicitly references the lack of funding available for sustainable modes of transport to schools. Central government ended its funding of that work in 2011. Although we no longer have a ring-fenced budget to support this work we continue to fund relevant activity through existing schemes such as Destination Hereford.

PQ 6

Ms Setterfield-Milln,
Hereford

As a Sixth form college student who cycles daily to college I am aware that 80% of Hereford's traffic congestion is due to people making short journeys within our city boundary.
Making walking and cycling safer and public transport cheaper and more efficient would help reduce our carbon emissions substantially, getting people out of their cars and living healthier lives. If you declare a Climate emergency please can you commit Herefordshire to taking bold decisive action with real sustainable transport investment such as a tram system? That would be an excellent use of the £50 million just received from selling off all our county farms. Thank you.

Cabinet member
infrastructure

Response:

Firstly, thank you for making your journey to college each day by bike – every individual's contribution matters. Because making walking and cycling safer and more attractive and supporting public transport can help reduce short, car based journeys this is already reflected in the objectives of our Local Transport Plan.

I don't recognise the figure of 80% of traffic congestion being caused by short journeys, as this is not data that we collect. You will see a range of transport statistics set out in the Hereford Transport Package consultation information and the sources of this data. These statistics confirm that 49% of commuting trips within Hereford of less than 5km are by car, and that walking makes up less than 20% of all journeys - a pattern of travel we wish to change. We continue to fund improvements to the physical infrastructure to encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport both through our public realm annual plan and as part of wider transport projects such as delivering the Hereford Bypass, which will assist in reducing congestion, and improving air quality in the city. We also continue to provide subsidies to support maintaining bus services, despite cuts in our funding from central government.

Whether or not Council declares a climate emergency, I can assure you that we will continue to invest in sustainable transport and other measures to protect the environment. I cannot confirm that this investment would include a tram system in Hereford as any such scheme needs to be deliverable within the existing built environment and economically viable. However there are other options that can be considered which take account of technological developments such as electric buses, or autonomous vehicles, and we will continue to explore these options.

Because of your interest in this issue, I would like to encourage you, and anyone else with an interest, to respond to the Hereford Transport Package consultation currently underway that closes on 11 March. All suggestions put forward will be considered, alongside our evidence base. We hope to be able to confirm a final package later in 2019. You will find the consultation at: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/HTP>

Supplementary Question:

If the Council agrees the climate emergency motion will it abandon the western bypass and focus on active travel measures?

Cabinet Member response to supplementary question:

There was a need to grow the economy in Herefordshire for young people in the county to have a future. To enable growth, infrastructure and housing was required, which included a bypass. Active travel measures in Hereford would facilitate walking, cycling and public transport. In the Hereford Transport Package (HTP) Consultation there was commitment for £29million in active travel measure in Hereford.

PQ 7

Mr Milln, Hereford

20 mph vehicle speed limits in residential areas are shown to reduce car use and road accidents, particularly those of our children, although it is clear such orders are not being adequately enforced at the moment. They also encourage walking and cycling, although the Council's current HTP consultation on walking, cycling, bus and public space fails to mention the 'Twenty is Plenty' programme as advocated by the Green Party (among others). With climate change an emergency, will this Council step up implementation of the scheme?

Cabinet member transport and regulatory services

Response:

This council has delivered many 20mph schemes in Hereford city across residential areas, adjacent to primary and secondary schools and on city centre shopping streets, and remains committed to delivering further schemes. The current Hereford Transport Package consultation is focused on key movement corridors in the city and how these could be improved to produce safe and continuous routes for walking and cycling in Hereford as well as opportunities for public transport improvements. Whilst the current consultation boards do not make specific reference to possible 20mph zones it is anticipated that these and other traffic management schemes such as weight restrictions would form part of a package scheme. Indeed this was referred to in our consultation in 2018. As we consider feedback to the current consultation and develop the package, traffic management schemes (including 20mph zones) will be included and we will be consulting again later this year when this will be detailed and feedback invited. If a parish or town council wishes to progress a Traffic Regulation Order in their area to aid accelerated delivery of traffic calming measures it is also open to them to directly fund this work.

Supplementary Question:

There was a lack of enforcement of 20 mph zones in Hereford in particular East Street which suffered from rat running and was dangerous at its crossing with church street. It was asked what the Council was doing as a matter of urgency to enforce 20 mph limits and address the problems in East Street.

Cabinet Member response to supplementary question:

We are looking in the HTP how can make the city a safer place. An issue with the church street junction was acknowledged which would be looked at very shortly.

PQ 8

Mr Cramsie,
Newton St
Margarets

In the event of Herefordshire Council declaring a climate emergency, will the Council appoint a Councillor with the specific remit to oversee the application of the declaration's aims to all appropriate areas of current and future policy?

Leader

Response:

Thank you for your suggestion. As Councillor Price indicated at the last meeting of Council, he has asked the General Scrutiny Committee to consider placing the issue of policy options and actions to respond to climate change, on their work programme. Councillor Price is the cabinet lead for environmental promotion, protection and sustainability; in light of the elections scheduled for 2 May, it would be a matter for the Leader of the

Council to determine the remit of future cabinet member portfolios, and the appointment of any member champions after the annual meeting of Council on 24 May.

Supplementary Question:

Why is it that no minutes of the Herefordshire Local Nature Partnership have been published since 2015?

Leader response to supplementary question:

A written response would be provided.

Response provided on 12 April 2019:

The minutes of the Herefordshire Local Nature Partnership (HNLP) are not published on the Herefordshire Council website. Herefordshire Wildlife Trust leads in forming the link with local biodiversity and similar organisations through 'Wildlife Link' and maintains a specific website for that mechanism –

<https://herefordshirewildlifelink.wordpress.com/> . HLNPs agendas and minutes are located upon this site. Following the question posed at Council the HNLP Facilitator has been informed that recent minutes were not available on this website and has rectified the matter.

PQ 9	Mr Palgrave, How Capel	Priority 1 listed in Herefordshire Council's Corporate Plan is to, "Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives". The vision expressed in the Health and Well Being Strategy is that, "Herefordshire residents are resilient; lead fulfilling lives; are emotionally and physically healthy and feel safe and secure." Do you agree that to meet these objectives, Council must take full account of the risks to human health, well-being and security posed by accelerating climate change, (the Climate Emergency) and that Council should now give higher priority to its work to address climate change, ensuring its plans and investments are updated whenever they are no longer consistent with the emerging scientific evidence?	Leader
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Response:

I agree that in order to meet the Health and Wellbeing Strategy vision, and indeed the Council's own vision of "People, organisations and businesses working together to bring sustainable prosperity and wellbeing for all, in the outstanding natural environment of Herefordshire" we must take full account of all the risks to human health, well-being and security, wherever those risks arise. I also agree that the decisions we take should, in accordance with our principles of good decision-making and our code of corporate governance give due weight to all material considerations, only take relevant matters into account, and make sure the action is proportionate to what the council wants to happen.

I am proud of the significant investment and action this Council has already undertaken in delivering measures to improve our energy efficiency. This includes investment in LED lighting across the county both for street lighting and within council owned buildings; installation of solar panels; electric car charging points in public car parks; fuel efficient cars for use by staff; and a new natural flood management programme. We also encourage staff to travel by bike or to walk as far as is practicable when carrying out their work. At the last meeting of this Council, Councillor Price advised that he has asked the General Scrutiny Committee to consider placing the issue of climate change and carbon management, on their work programme; the outcome of their work will inform our decision regarding future action to ensure that residents have a good quality of life in our beautiful county.

Supplementary Question:

How would local MPs and relevant government departments be made aware of the outcome of the debate on the climate emergency?

Leader response to supplementary question:

The Council had undertaken a lot of actions to reduce its environmental impact and carbon emissions but it could not do it alone and needed help from others both countywide and nationwide. The council would be asking others for this help.

PQ 10	Ms Toynbee, Hereford	It is good to see Herefordshire Council consulting on walking, cycling and buses for the Hereford Transport Package. This is a great opportunity for efficient, joined-up transport in and out of the city, as well as within it. However, the consultation does not show how the council plans to link this package for the City with existing transport packages, such as that for South Wye and the City Centre, as well as with rail, at the transport hub. Why is this?	Cabinet member infrastructure
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Response:

Thank you for comments about the current Hereford Transport Package consultation. I am very pleased that large numbers of people have come to see the proposals at the public events we have run since the consultation commenced in January and those who have viewed the proposals on line. We have already had over 300 responses to the consultation and hope many more will respond in the next week as the consultation runs to 11 March 2019. The focus of this consultation is on the Hereford Transport package rather than city-wide design which will be addressed both in the Hereford Area Plan and Hereford Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document. However, the consultation boards do show route corridors' links to other schemes such as the proposed Blueschool Street and Newmarket street improvements, the City Link Road and proposed transport hub, and the St Owen Street contraflow scheme, which is an element of the Hereford City Centre improvements. As we progress the detailed design of these improvements we will ensure that they are linked to ensure a comprehensive and improved network throughout the city

PQ 11	Mr Coppock, Kington	<p>As someone who has focused and campaigned on this issue for the past 15 years could I stress the urgency with which we immediately need to act. We need to focus on the reduction of the whole Herefordshire county carbon footprint to a net zero by 2030 at the latest. The urgent need to declare a climate emergency by the council and to vote for this motion should be very clear to anyone who has read the special report of this past year from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change</p> <p>As a concrete action following the Re-Energising Herefordshire project would the Council please consider the creation of a county wide Zero Carbon Herefordshire project to be achieved by 2030 within the action of declaring a Climate Emergency motion?</p>	Cabinet member infrastructure
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Response:

As has already been referenced in previous responses, I have asked General Scrutiny Committee to include in their workplan some focussed work on the issue of climate change and will ask them to consider this suggestion as part of that work.

Supplementary Question:

Herefordshire has a large proportion of buildings with a poor level of insulation in comparison to the rest of the country. As part of urgent actions needed to reduce the county's carbon footprint would the council consider initiating a system that reduces council tax for well-insulated buildings; to stimulate take up combined with support for further insulation at the same time?

Cabinet Member response to supplementary question:

The council encouraged the better insulation of buildings. The suggestion of a council tax reduction would be looked into and a written response provided.

Response provided 26 April 2019:

Council tax is a local taxation used to fund a variety of local service costs such as looking after vulnerable children and adults, collecting and disposing of waste and road maintenance. Discounts are restricted to those permitted under legislation. Councils are able to apply some discretionary reductions that fall under the Welfare Reform Act 2012 however these council tax reduction powers are restricted by the Act and the reference to the insulation status of a property is not currently permitted.

PQ 12	Ms Spearman, Newton St Margarets	From the number of people attending our student demonstration, it is clear that students and young people in Herefordshire want change to address the climate emergency. If the Council ignores the impact of climate change do you acknowledge that this will be against the interests and concerns of your constituents?	Leader
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Response:

The council hasn't, and won't, ignore any impacts that affect Herefordshire or the welfare of its residents. We have already taken action through our carbon management plan, and Re-energising Herefordshire to address this issue as outlined in my response to public question number 9 above, and will continue to do so. As has already been referenced in previous responses, Councillor Price has asked General Scrutiny Committee to include in their workplan some focussed work on the issue of climate change and I hope that the new committee to be formed after the elections in May will make this a priority.

Supplementary Question:

What more can the Council commit and promise to provide to reassure young people of Herefordshire and how can we work together?

Leader response to supplementary question:

A document would be produced shortly which would set out what the council had already done and what it intended to do in response to climate change. Herefordshire was the first county to ensure that there was 100% coverage of LED streetlights which since 2011 had ensured a 65% reduction in the level of energy used in street lighting and resulted in significant savings to the council. Offices had been sold and staff had been consolidated in fewer buildings. Staff were encouraged to walk and cycle to work and after 2019 electric vehicles would be purchased as pool cars at the council.