

Appendix 2 - Questions from members of the council

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1	Councillor Kema Guthrie, Sutton Walls	I was told by Balfour Beatty at the recent Members' Briefing that "If a Parish can fund a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) then we can start the process through Community Commissioning". Sutton St. Nicholas Parish Council have applied for a TRO and can demonstrate that they are able to fund the project but Balfour Beatty have only put them on a list! What's the problem, what's holding things up?	Cabinet member infrastructure and transport
<p>Response:</p> <p>Thank you for your question Cllr. Guthrie. I appreciate that the matter of this TRO has been the subject of some discussion. As I understand the correspondence has to date covered funding of this order from developer contributions but this money has not yet been released for this purpose. The timescale for delivery is therefore limited until these funds are released and available. If the parish wish to progress this TRO using parish funds the Community Commissioning process would enable this but would require parish council funding to deliver in this way. I am advised that an application has not been made to progress in this way but if this is intended then a Community Commissioning request should be made to BBLP to begin this process and ensure delivery of the TRO is not further delayed until the developer funding is released. I am also happy to discuss with the parish either the Section 106 or Community commissioning route further asap.</p>			
<p>Supplementary question:</p> <p>The parish council have the funds to progress the TRO and are not reliant on section 106 contributions which was confirmed in an email to balfour beatty living places (BBLP) on 13 February. It was queried why BBLP had not started the process or sent the community commissioning forms to the parish council.</p>			
<p>Cabinet member response:</p> <p>There was some confusion concerning whether a technically correct application had been submitted. An officer would be in contact with the Councillor Guthrie to discuss the situation.</p>			
MQ 2	Councillor Louis Stark, Ross West	In February Cllr. Symonds' sensible motion for a £3m fund for investment in market towns' public realm, to address under-investment as a consequence of spending skewed to Hereford and busier A/B roads, was lost.	Leader

		<p>Since then, a cabinet support role has been created to work with town councils and parishes to enhance local services/assets, develop shared service partnership models, and enable parishes to have an active role in delivering and managing local priorities and assets. While laudable, what we have as usual is focused on Hereford, through the creation of a Hereford Town Deal Board to lead on a bid for £25m for Hereford city.</p> <p>In that light, can you confirm exactly what performance targets the cabinet support role has, including timescales for delivery and how market towns will be engaged?</p>	
<p>Response:</p> <p>Thank you Cllr Stark for your question which is very timely.</p> <p>Part of the support role is to work with town councils and parishes to enhance local services and assets, develop a shared service partnership model, and enable parishes to have an active role in delivering or managing local priorities and assets.</p> <p>Cllr Bartlett is especially qualified given her work over many years in Leominster. She worked with fellow Leominster Town Councillors in a number of ways including the challenges of taking on public toilets in two locations when they were closed by the previous administration, investing in a new Town Council multi hub premises and bringing the Tourist Information Centre in-house, taking on assets including public open spaces and play areas, investment in new play equipment through grant and Section 106 awards, grass cutting and planning for better biodiversity management of open spaces and appropriate verges. Leominster Council encouraged taking part in annual public consultation and participatory budgeting every year, to shape residents priorities for the town and parish of Leominster.</p> <p>Of particular note is the work she has done in securing the award of £1.8m of Heritage Action Zone funding to Leominster which will be the subject of a Cabinet decision at its meeting on 23 July. In appointing Cllr Bartlett I am hopeful that opportunities will be opened up for other Market Towns, drawing on her experience of pulling together the economic, social and environmental plans and aspirations Leominster has, into a coherent business case suitable for attracting grant and inward investment money.</p> <p>Your question refers to the Town Deal Board which is a project specifically for the City of Hereford. This is a central government offering. In November 2019 government selected 101 towns across England, including Hereford, for Stronger Towns Funding, with the potential to access up to £25m to enable the regeneration and growth of towns and cities. A requirement of accessing the funding is to form a Town Board, and to develop a Town Investment Plan. The board has now been formed, and work will commence on the Town Investment Plan for submission to government in January 2021.</p>			

I have continued the initiative begun by Cllr Lester to have half yearly Parish Summits to which Market Town Councillors are invited. The purpose is to give a voice to, and engage with, representatives of all Parishes and Market Towns. We have a Parish Summit meeting planned for 23rd July 2020 to highlight parish's responses to the Covip-19 virus, focusing on community resilience, recovery and renewal.

For market towns we have invited representatives to attend an Economic Development Forum on 22nd July 2020. The purpose of this initial meeting is to initiate the process of developing Market Town Economic Development Investment Plans. Following this we intend to hold individual market town meetings.

Recognising the critical role market towns play in terms of employment and access to community services, earlier this year the council allocated £14m in the capital programme to enable the development of business space and employment land in the towns. The development of these Investment Plans for each town will identify their growth needs and opportunities, providing a basis for prioritising how the funds can be best utilised to support each area.

To complete the picture we now have regular meetings with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Hereford to exchange information on projects and share views.

So far as performance targets are concerned I, and previous Leaders I am sure, have very motivated cabinet and cabinet support who know what they want to achieve. Their commitment together is to deliver the County Plan, with a view to being re-elected at the next election.

How long it will take to develop Economic Development Investment Plans for The Market Towns will depend on the enthusiasm of the participants. Cllr Bartlett, Cllr Chowns and I look forward especially to working with the Ward and Parish Councillors for Ross who have no shortage of enthusiasm. If Ross would like to have other regular meetings with me and other cabinet members I am sure this could be arranged, but I am hopeful that the meetings to discuss the Economic Development will enable a good dialogue to take place making such additional meetings unnecessary.

Supplementary question:

Why was Leominster the only market town involved in the bidding for the high street heritage action zone fund?

Leader's response:

A written response would be provided.

Response sent on 31 July 2020:

The decision to enter Leominster into the first stage of the linked Heritage Action Zone scheme was made by the cabinet member for Economic Development under the previous administration. This decision was based on an assessment of which market town best met the English Heritage criteria at that time.

MQ 3	Councillor Roger Phillips, Arrow	<p>In the interests of pedestrian safety due to the extremely narrow footway of the highway bridge and high level of traffic on the B4362 (4,000 per day including 1,000 HGVs); Shobdon Parish Council has identified the provision of a pedestrian crossing at Tanbridge a community priority. I have been working with them and Balfour Beatty in order to provide this important project which will be paid for out of the parish precept.</p> <p>Given its proximity to the existing road bridge we require Balfour Beatty to sign off the works. I wrote to the Cabinet Member on the 8th June with a gentle reminder on the 29th June. Can the Cabinet member confirm he is willing for the Council to cover the design costs so that this scheme can progress?</p>	Cabinet member infrastructure and transport
<p>Response:</p> <p>Thank you Cllr Phillips for you question and apologies for any delay in getting back to you. For future clarity – and courtesy - if you are requiring a direct response, which I always do my best to provide members, it is best to address me by name rather than ‘Dear All’ with my name third on the list in the address bar’ – it helps me to understand how much of my time and intervention you are requiring or whether you are simply copying me in on discussion with officers.</p> <p>I’d like to start by congratulating the parish for the work they have undertaken. It is a great credit to them that they have taken this responsibility upon themselves and a source of concern that we as an authority cannot do more to support such initiatives financially. Unfortunately, as you well know, substantial cuts by the Conservative governments – cuts shamefully supported by both our MPs in the voting chamber – have left us considerably less funded as a rural authority, losing £60 million a year (£90 million if adjusted for inflation) with the almost complete withdrawal of the Revenue Support Grant for example, making it harder and harder to support residents as the physical fabric of our communities continues to erode and decline. This makes it challenging for authorities to undertake their statutory responsibilities let alone support requests or initiatives like this.</p> <p>That all said and done – and apologies for appearing political but it is important to be honest – I am determined that parishes such as Shobdon, that are prepared to do so much of the heavy lifting themselves, should have that determination and commitment matched by the local authority and I am happy to agree to a site meeting as a matter of priority, with further detailed discussion following that on the best way to proceed to enable the parish to achieve its ambition of a separate foot crossing.</p>			
<p>Supplementary question:</p>			

The offer of a site meeting and detailed discussions were welcomed but it was felt that this happened at the virtual meeting on 8 June. What outcomes of the meeting were unacceptable that required further discussions?

Cabinet member response:

The cabinet member was unaware of the meeting and would follow up the outcomes from it.

MQ 4	Councillor Nigel Shaw, Bromyard and Bringsty	<p>Holden Aluminium Technologies have announced their closure in my ward. The loss of 50 direct jobs is distressing news for Bromyard. Additional to the loss of livelihoods for the workforce, living locally and shopping in the town, there will be the knock on effects of their loss of purchasing power for retailers already suffering from the economic effects of Covid.</p> <p>Bromyard's recycling centre was late to open, it's library remains indefinitely shut, the council's housing development on it's old depot site has been mothballed yet the council invests £600k in Hereford's theatre and ignores requests for capital assistance from Bromyard's Conquest Theatre for their plans. This administration throws £4.5m of council funds at a moribund shopping centre in the centre of Hereford, but what initiatives are they bringing forward to encourage economic investment and hope in market towns like Bromyard?</p>	Cabinet member environment, economy and skills
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Response:

I and all my colleagues were very saddened to hear of Holden Aluminium Technologies' announcement last week. During these unprecedented times we recognise that businesses across Herefordshire are facing significant challenges and are having to make some very difficult choices about their future. The council has been doing all it can to support businesses during this difficult period. We have paid out over £56 million of central government grant funding to 4,825 businesses in Herefordshire; we launched a Discretionary Grant Scheme; provided online training on subjects such as planning your finances; secured funding to support the recovery of the visitor economy, and provided advice and guidance to hundreds of businesses.

In planning for recovery of the local economy it is essential that we support both our city and our market towns to thrive. They all play a critical role in terms of employment and access to community services.

To take your points in order:

Re the recycling centre: The approach to reopening household recycling centres across the county has been phased recognising the restrictions imposed by government in response to Covid-19 and the primary need to ensure the safety of both staff operating the sites and the public. This required detailed planning on a site by site basis and the Bromyard site was opened as soon as possible earlier this month with appropriate social distancing arrangements in place.

Re the library: Council staff are working closely with Halo to secure the re-opening of Bromyard's Library, located within the Leisure Centre, to ensure the safety of customers and staff in accordance with Covid-19 guidelines.

Re the Courtyard in Hereford: The council has agreed to loan (not give) £611k to the Courtyard Theatre to enable their continued successful growth, helping create the conditions to attract people to live, work, learn, visit and invest in the county.

Re the Conquest Theatre in Bromyard: We are keen to do what we can to support the cultural sector across the county and I know Cllr Davies is in communication with the Conquest Theatre and is looking forward to supporting them. She is currently arranging a visit where they will be able to discuss their plans. This administration is fully committed to supporting the arts in Herefordshire hence why we removed the previous budget saving of £250,000 savings target in this year's budget.

Regarding the Council's purchase of Maylord Orchards: This purchase was made in order to ensure that a strategically important site in the centre of Hereford did not further fall into disrepair with increasing numbers of vacant units and declining footfall. The council has proactively intervened to prevent such a decline, and secure this strategic site so that it can help drive the transformation of the city, to the benefit of all our residents, for many years to come. The Maylords Orchards site a) is a going concern that 'washes its face' financially; b) provides us in the short term with excellent opportunities to proactively support post-Covid recovery in the city centre, and c) offers exciting long-term opportunities for regeneration of the city centre. As I reported to councillors last month, Hereford is one of 101 towns across the country that have each been invited by central government to apply for up to £25 million of investment. The newly-formed Hereford Town Deal Board is currently working to develop a Town Investment Plan for our city.

This administration has always been deeply committed to supporting economic development in the market towns. That is why, several weeks ago, I pushed for initiation of Market Town Economic Development Investment Plans to begin. You may recall that, earlier in the year, the council allocated £14 million in the capital programme to enable the development of business space and employment land in the towns – precisely because we recognise the importance of this work. We have now launched the process of working with the town councils, ward members and local residents to establish Economic Development Investment Plans for each market town. These will identify investment needs and development opportunities, and will a) enable us to prioritise how the earmarked funds can be best utilised to support each area, and b) identify viable projects for which further funding can be proactively sought. A meeting with the town councils is already scheduled for the 22 July to commence this process, and town-specific meetings will follow shortly afterwards. We have set aside £200k to support the process of developing these investment plans over the coming 18 months and I am very much personally committed to supporting this process. While central government is offering funds only for Hereford City, we as an administration are proactively working, using our own resources, to support the market towns – because we recognise that they play such a vital role in our local economy and community.

Supplementary question:

There was concern that there was no date for the reopening of Halo in Bromyard. Would the cabinet member support a review of the capital spending plans to evidence if there was a fair allocation of investment in the market towns?

Cabinet member environment, economy and skills response:

The council was committed to equal treatment across the county, the market town economic development investment plans was evidence of the approach of the administration to a fairer allocation of funding for improvements. It was a matter for scrutiny to determine what issues were considered.

Cabinet member commissioning, procurement and assets:

A water issue at Halo in Bromyard was preventing the reopening of the centre. Plans were being progressed to utilise an alternative building for a click and collect service for library books.

MQ 5	Councillor Barry Durkin, Old Gore	<p>At June's cabinet meeting part of the statement on proposed active travel measures by the Member for Infrastructure and Transport was false; viz '<i>....if the council does not implement them, the government are going to do it for us</i>'. I believed this an untruthful statement and thus misleading the residents of Herefordshire. The DoT subsequently verified, in writing "<i>....it is not the case that the Department will step in itself to do the works if the council fails to do so</i>".</p> <p>Leader would you agree with me that any untruthful statement does not represent the expected personal qualities required to underpin essential ethical standards in public life? Such statements do nothing to give confidence to the residents of Herefordshire on decisions now and in the future and thus undermines confidence in the council and impairs the credence of the administration.</p>	Leader
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Response:

The Cabinet member made this reference after reading this article in the respected industry journal <https://www.transport-network.co.uk/Councils-wait-on-details-of-250m-allocation-but-warned-they-must-act/16633> which describes that "*councils are forced to make the changes and central government could step in to take powers away from councils to ensure interventions are made*", "according to legal advice received by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling and Walking".

The statement made by the cabinet member to the June meeting was made based on the above information which was what the cabinet member honestly understood to be the position.

When the DFT made its announcement it did not contain this reference. At the time of the cabinet member's statement he was not aware of this omission. The cabinet member accepts that the assumption he made was incorrect, apologises for providing information which wasn't accurate and thanks Mr Bill Wiggin MP for writing to the department for clarity.

Supplementary question:

How may the council and residents of Herefordshire be reassured that statements on which decisions based will be based on verifiable facts and sound judgement? Clarification was sought on the element of the original question concerning public life.

Leader's response:

The issue of public life was being addressed. The cabinet member made the statement in the honest belief that it was true which was entirely appropriate.

Cabinet member infrastructure and transport response:

The cabinet member explained that the advice that was being issued was being updated rapidly but he had made a mistake and apologised.