

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 31 MARCH 2022

### Question 1

**From: C Wood, Hereford**

**To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

*This question was carried forward from 24 February meeting.*

Can the cabinet and Cllr Harrington confirm that they will look at investing in improving the pavements in our market towns as part of the Market Town Investment Plans (MTIP's) because I am aware that many of them in these locations are not currently accessible for those using wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

### Response

The market town investment plans have identified a number of projects, including improvements to the public realm including refurbishment and improved accessibility for high streets. This will encourage people to use the high streets more and encourage further investment. There isn't yet funding allocated for this projects but Herefordshire Council will work with the town councils to get quality plans drawn up and will then seek to identify funding streams once Cabinet has approved them. We will make sure that accessibility for wheelchairs and mobility scooters is considered fully and that we design any public realms schemes with those considerations in mind.

### Question 2

**From: Mr P McKay, Leominster**

**To: cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets**

Does Herefordshire Council have any map showing the location of our open spaces, such as common land, parks, children's play areas, and similar, that could be made viewable on the 'Highways and Public Rights of Way Map' webpage, so that all may see where they are and how to access them, and if not is there any prospect of such a map being raised?

### Response

Thank you for your question Mr McKay and I can see the benefit of linking the PROW map to our open spaces maps.

Our open spaces maps, which show all of the Parks, Play Areas and Sports Pitches in the County are available on our Herefordshire Council Website at:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/things/parks-play-areas-open-spaces>

Users are able to search via a map application and via Postcode. There is also a link to the list of Commons within Herefordshire:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/community-1/commons-village-greens>

Currently these maps are not integrated into the "Highways and Public Rights of Way Map" but I will ask officer to explore the possibility of developing this integrated approach.

### **Question 3**

**From: Ms E Cairns, Hereford**

**To: cabinet member, commissioning, procurement and assets**

Why did Hereford not get funds from the Changing Places allocation funds?

A further £6.5m will be made available later in the year, will Hereford be applying?

### **Response**

Herefordshire Council did not apply for the first round of Changing Places funding. However, subject to the requirements of the next round, we would intend to make an application. We understand that the next application round will be available from the summer 2022.

The importance of public toilets and changing areas are crucial to both the visitor economy and public health. A year or so ago the council was able to open back up the Maylord Orchards toilets to a great response. This year I will be speaking with our Director of Public Health, Corporate Director of Economy and Environment and partners to identify a way in which we can not only apply for these funds but also look to open as many public toilets in the county as possible, I will be particularly focussing on the disproportionate effect that not having public toilets has on those with disabilities, those with young children and on women.

### **Question 4**

**From: Mr M Willmont, Hereford**

**To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

The Council have placed 17 planters containing trees along the central reservations of Station Approach/Link Road. I do not have the true cost of this but understand it would have been at least £140,000.00.

I believe that the quote below is from Councillor Harrington?

“We have managed to secure funding to put tree planters along the road that can be re-used when we are able to put in a proper tree planting system.”

What was so complicated about planting the trees in the ground now?

This surely would have been a better solution financially. It surely would have resulted in a better appearance (in my opinion), saved money on maintenance and avoided having to find and move the planters to an alternative location at some time in the future (if one could be found!)?

## Response

Mr Willmont thank you for your questions, which I always appreciate and value, in part because of your expertise and past experience (I would welcome your input into the City Masterplan that is being drawn up currently if you want to get directly in touch).

The simple fact is I would like to see as many trees as possible planted in and around the City of Hereford and indeed all our county towns. Although a rural county with good tree cover around the County we have below the national average when it comes to tree cover in our urban areas. I would like as many good specimen trees planted back into the ground wherever possible and that is the direction we have given officers and will be supporting in new policy documents like the City Masterplan.

There are constraints to putting trees in the ground though, as you are no doubt aware (including capital funding time limits where grants are concerned) and we need to try to plan for them properly, spend good money on bedding them in carefully and solidly and future proof their siting to make sure someone like me doesn't come along in another few years and rip them out for some reason – spurious or otherwise. We particularly have to be careful about the glut of utilities that have gone into trenching underground around the City, often with little thought, in my opinion, because until we came in as an administration we didn't even have a proper Permitting scheme for the highways and public realm. It's not to say we can't plant where utility trenches lie but we need to put extra thought and resource into putting them in so their roots are protected and services aren't likely to be affected by roots – and roots are unlikely to be damaged by upgrading of utilities in the future.

On the City Link Road, the issue here is what we may want to do in the near future in terms of any changes and better provision of active travel measures (such as a segregated cycle lane as should have been originally delivered). Planting in-ground trees now may restrict or curtail best design in that regard, so we need to sort the needed changes first.

So whilst I share your preference for in-ground trees, and we will plan and budget properly in good time for trees in-ground going back into our City which desperately needs greenery back, we have also chosen to introduce tree planters to help green the City – and as we build up more in-house capacity in our transport and highways teams this will allow us to make the best choices for siting good in-ground trees which I hope will be allowed to grow for many decades without being disturbed. The planters along the City Link Road and elsewhere will bring enjoyment and pleasure to our residents – and there will always be somewhere to put them in the future, they will remain an asset.

## **Question 5**

**From: Ms M Albright, on behalf of Herefordshire Construction Industry Lobby Group**

**To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport**

Are Herefordshire Council confident that they are doing all that is possible and within their powers to find and implement restoration solutions (and create effective future protections) for the River Wye Catchment?

Various high level reports and recommendations have been published since 2019 focusing on the need to change land use and industrial agricultural practice yet the main action taken by HC remains the moratorium preventing small scale housing development in a section of the catchment. Restrictions and controls do not seem to apply up or downstream of The Lugg or against any other sector.

## **Response**

Ms Albright, thank you for your question, earlier this week I was passed a copy of the Lichfield's Economic Impacts Report compiled for the Homebuilders Federation which sets out their assessment of the enormous economic cost of the environmental challenges faced nationally and in particular here on the Lugg Catchment. We are all very conscious of what a severe impact that this has had upon homebuilders, construction workers and people wanting new homes in the North of the county.

As you know Herefordshire is in the process of purchasing three Integrated Wetland Sites and will consider purchasing further sites to protect the Lugg and if it is eventually necessary the Wye Catchment too. Subject to the completion of expert technical and legal reviews and the assessment of new advice from Natural England published last week, I am hoping that our next Cabinet meeting will be able to consider proposals to offer developers credits which will begin to get the north of the county building again.

We are also in the process of completing a new Agricultural Supplementary Planning Document which will contain a phosphate calculation tool which will enable a much better assessment of proposed agricultural developments in the catchment. We know that land use has to change if soils are to become healthy again and our rivers are to be protected. Our Agricultural SPD will help measure this but we very much depend on the statutory responsibilities held by Natural England and the Environment Agency being actively discharged to see such change happen and we will continue to press for change through the Nutrient Management Board (NMB).

That said, and following recent calls for a Water Protection Zone, we also believe that many of the issues the catchment faces are systemic and need much greater attention than the NMB is equipped to deliver, important though this body is. This is why we have been calling for a Phosphate Commission to bring together English and Welsh counterparts from across all the agencies, and with assistance from recognised industry experts, to focus greater attention on solving intractable cross border and cross partner issues such as those you mention in your question. I do hope you will support proposals

for a Phosphate Commission and we shall continue to keep you posted on the proposal as plans for its delivery develop.

We are also actively engaging with representatives from the farming community providing proactive assistance to encourage Environmental Land Management Schemes especially where this will bring cutting edge approaches to prevent further pollution and to accelerate the safe encapsulation of the deposits already built up in our soils. We also continue to engage with the Poultry industry who now recognise they have a part to play in finding solutions too.

Finally, I want to assure Hereford Constructors Information Liaison Group that we will continue to do all WE can to get the north of the county building again and to seek the restoration of our rivers which I am sure we all want to see.