

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 29 JUNE 2022

Question 1

From: Mr Kerry, Hereford

To: Cabinet Member, Commissioning, Procurement & Assets

Discussions concerning the deteriorating condition and possible future use of the Hereford Town Hall have been ongoing for many years. Several proposals have stalled because Herefordshire Council have not been able to offer clear and detailed agreements, with commitments to dates and essential works. There has been a lack of clear sense of direction. Ahead of any planned meetings between officers and members, does the cabinet member have a funded programme for carrying out the long overdue urgent repair and resilience works, and can they confirm that any discussions with potential partners will be supported by a comprehensive plan which would enable a genuine asset transfer?

Response

Thank you for your question Mr Kerry. I can confirm that the Council has a plan of action to allow an informed decision to be made on the future use and ownership of the Town Hall campus by Herefordshire Council.

I cannot agree with your comment that there has been a clear lack of direction. I have made it clear since I started as Cabinet member that the desire to work with the city council on an asset transfer has been a priority. Furthermore, I have advised you and previous Mayors of the ongoing work on Herefordshire Council's asset management strategy where the Town Hall has been identified as a potential disposal be it via an asset transfer or sale. I cannot speak for events prior to this.

The city council has been informed previously that Herefordshire Council currently has no 'funded programme' for the Town Hall campus and has not committed to one at this time. It is however, carrying out urgent works to damp ingress at the front of the building. Herefordshire Council does have appropriate Revenue and Capital budgets to fund repairs and maintenance of all of Herefordshire Council's Assets.

Further to General Scrutiny Committee on 10th August 2021 where the Mayor was invited to address the committee, a recommendation was taken forward to review listed sites within the city so that a wider and more inclusive decision could be made. This work has been ongoing and feeds into a Cabinet paper on 28th July 2022 where cabinet will be asked to make a decision about retention / disposal/ investment on a range of sites. The outcome will then require detailed work and consultation with those affected, including the City Council. Until such a decision is reached, no further details can be provided.

It should be noted that if Cabinet decide to dispose of any of the sites, it would be highly irregular to provide a dowry upon disposal, especially considering the likely transfer value.

Supplementary Question

I understand the Cabinet Member's wish to distance herself from the past, but to focus on the here and now, we've had serious structural timber failings due to spreading dry rot for several years. Urgent repairs were first promised two years ago, and given the confirmation that the Council has appropriate revenue and capital budgets to fund the repair and maintenance of all its assets, and the fact that these works were promised well in advance of any councillor in the building, what month of the year can we expect to see those essential and overdue works going ahead?

Response

Thank you Mr Kerry for the further question. With regards the urgent works to the water ingress and dry rot that the Council committed to, we can confirm that tenders have been returned and funding is being confirmed as prices are higher than anticipated as you might expect at this point in time and current conditions. Works will commence as soon as possible.

Question 2

From: Mr McKay, Leominster

To: Cabinet Member, Infrastructure & Transport

With an integrated Highways, Public Rights of Way and Open Spaces Map being made viewable, with the Public Rights of Way service now back in-house, and having made successful representation to Government that the 2026 cut-off date should be deferred, will you work with Parishes to identify and resolve any anomalies, tidying up the records, with consideration given to incorporating this in the 2021 – 41 Local Plan Place Shaping, within that time period, with further representation to Government should any issues hinder achieving this in an efficient manner?

Response

Thank you for your question Mr McKay. The council recognises and welcomes the announcement by DEFRA to repeal the 2026 cut-off date for recording historic rights of way, as set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and I hope our lobbying and support from Jesse Norman MP was a contributory factor in achieving that pragmatic outcome.

The council will work with all user groups in resolving any anomalies, the council process in applying for a Schedule 14 Definitive Map Modification Order Application is on line, link below:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public-rights-way/definitive-map-statement-dms/3>

Resource to process the current applications is finite which prevents a commitment to identify routes but will support where possible. Resources and commitments may change in future years which may enable a review and change as circumstances and resources allow.

Supplementary Question

It is some time since the list of anomalies identified by yourselves was viewable online, it being taken offline being considered to be a working document, and I ask if you still have that information which together with an evidence base setting out how the records were originally compiled helping to put matters into context, will be made available as part of this process?

Response

The aim is still to make the anomalies list available online as soon as possible though, due to the commitment this is reliant on when the resources become available. We have made a bid for funding internally and hope to have news on that shortly.

The anomalies list and available supporting information can be viewed at our offices, please contact and arrange with the PRow team, email: prow@herefordshire.gov.uk