

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 5 October 2023

### Question 1

**Mrs E Morawiecka – Breinton, Hereford**

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

Regarding reopening of Pontrilas station Councillor Price said "I would be unwilling to saddle the council with the additional financial risk that building a new station would present at this time," despite the support of Transport for Wales, and the local MP. Worcester Parkway station opened February 2020 and is already performing way ahead of schedule with 544,270 journeys made from the station between April 2022 and March 2023 – the kind of volume not expected to be achieved for at least another eleven years. The last transport project Councillor Price oversaw cost taxpayers 25% more than budget and failed to deliver the Hereford Transport Hub.

Where is the evidence to justify allocating £12.3million on a new road scheme will offer better value for money, have lower financial risk, and comply with Council Policy on Climate, than opening the Pontrilas station?

### **Response**

The reopening of Pontrilas station is a priority for this Council, and my role as Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Transport, working with my colleagues, is to facilitate discussions with all local, regional and national stakeholders, including Midlands Connect, the Department for Transport and Network Rail, to make the case for this station, benefitting not only the rural areas of the Golden Valley but to the wider county and the region, by improving connectivity within the County and beyond.

I have already met with representatives from Midlands Connect, and set out our ambitions for improving infrastructure across the County, and beyond. With the formation of the new Marches Forward Partnership, which brings together the Leaders of Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys and Shropshire, we will take every step to explore and promote the project as a priority for future cross-border working

A proposal was submitted to Government to reopen Pontrilas station, as part of the Restoring Your Railway programme, and the response received has provided a number of issues that need further consideration, and I will continue to work with partners to strengthen that case. The original outline business case was very clear on the benefits the reopening of the station would bring, including better access to jobs and health care provision, as documented in the outline business case, including -

- enhance the catchment of Herefordshire Colleges
- 'level up' the local economy
- reduce road traffic in the city of Hereford
- reduce car-parking pressure at Hereford and Abergavenny stations;
- address the decarbonisation agenda by reducing the car mileage associated with accessing long-distance rail services, or driving all the way to one's destination

During a review of the Capital Programme, we have identified an opportunity to invest in essential infrastructure in the County, and the allocation of £12.3m will enable us to develop the necessary business cases, and review this in line with the 2021 South Wye Transport Package report

The council will consider every opportunity to promote a choice of travel for the residents in Herefordshire. Pontrilas offers the potential to improve our transport infrastructure, now and in the longer term.

## **Question 2**

**Victoria Wegg-Prosser, Breinton, Hereford**

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

Councillor Price assured Cabinet (28.9.23) that 'due process' will be followed as regards the SLR and the Western bypass which he proposes to revive. 'Due process' in 2020 revealed these projects to be inadequately costed, in conflict with climate emergency targets, and likely to achieve minimum traffic reduction in the City of Hereford. Cabinet is now being asked to endorse the transfer of £12.3MN Current Capital funds away from critical programmes such as Partnership Activities, Fastershire and Super Hubs to the SLR proposals, all three weeks in advance of the 'due process' of deliberating a Key Decision for the SLR. Is this an example of Councillor Price following 'due process' ?

## **Response**

I can confirm that due process will of course be followed, and the allocation of £12.3m budget for the Southern Link Road will ensure the Council has allocated funds to commence the Strategic Outline Business Case.

The report on the Cabinet agenda – Capital Programme Review and Update sets out the rationale for changes to specific projects and programmes, and how these funds would be reallocated. Subject to the decision of Cabinet, and approval by full Council, governance and decision making requirements will be followed before any spend commences against these budgets.