

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 28 September

Question 1

Councillor Hitchiner, Stoney Street

To: Cabinet Members, Economy and Growth and Transport and Infrastructure

The paper to Cabinet on the Marches Partnership refers (para 21) to the new administration's priority to address congestion on the A49 "through developing a western bypass to Herefordshire". Can the Cabinet member confirm that for the time being at least the new administration is continuing the work instigated by the previous administration to look at the viability of building a new bridge to the East of Hereford, and when the results of this work will be provided to Councillors and the public. This project, and the associated active travel measures will deliver the same benefits to relieve congestion on the A49 as a western bypass at much lower cost and much more quickly.

Response

The Council is continuing to work with Aecom to deliver the Strategic Outline Business Case for the Eastern River Crossing. This work is expected to be completed in the next few weeks. The projected cost of the project has now grown significantly since the original scheme was mooted by the previous administration. It is therefore no longer the cheap scheme that was envisaged. To ensure that the residents of Herefordshire are presented with a scheme that delivers the best value and rate of return this administration is seeking to explore the development potential that the creation of a western bypass will present.

At the same time we are looking to reinvigorate the construction of the Southern Link Road, a project that will provide some relief to the business traffic that is accessing the Rotherwas Enterprise Zone and will also create an essential link should the western bypass be adopted as a part of the Council's plans.

Supplementary question –

Thank you for your response. I know you refer to an increase in costs and suggest that will apply equally to a Western Bypass. The WSP report from October 2020 shows an indicative price of £55million for the Eastern River Crossing and £190million for the Western Bypass. I suggest whatever the increase in price for the Eastern River Crossing will also apply to the Western Bypass as well as the Southern Link Road. You refer to the Southern Link Road to be built to provide relief to business traffic going to Rotherwas from the A465. The previous administration were unable to produce this, what has changed to make this more viable now. What the city and county need is another bridge, not a relief road to the south which will do very little to relieve congestion on the Belmont Road. Where Councillor Price do you expect to find funding for the Southern Link Road and the Western Bypass. Isn't it time you accepted that the Eastern bridge would be much more viable and more of a priority.

Supplementary Response

There was quite a bit in that question and a number of items you want addressing. We have support for the Eastern River Crossing and we're awaiting the AECOM report which I understand is due next week or the week after. We will take view of what it actually says in regards to the strategic outline business case and what it will cost us. I appreciate costs have risen all round. As far as we were concerned in the previous administration, we had got the Western Bypass to a point where we were discussing financing with the Department of Transport Treasury and we were assured the money was coming forward and the final business case of planning was due in a short period of time. The Southern Link Road which you refer is a policy we are adopting because it is necessary, whatever future infrastructure is built around Hereford East or West, should have the Southern Link Road. I have to say, having not been a councillor in the last

administration, I was able to stand back and see what was happening and I was quietly gobsmacked that the Southern Link Road was cancelled by the previous administration in which you were involved. It's quite clear that we had to do something. The Local Plan is bringing forward even more houses to be built, we just have to have a reach across that river. Whether it's to the East to the West or both, it'll get clearer as we move forward. Either way the Southern Link Road is a necessary part of either bridge or both bridges. I'll leave it there and see how we progress as the evidence comes forward.