

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 28 March 2024

Question 1

1. Mr A Morawiecki, Breinton

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

“The Hereford Road Strategy clearly shows this Cabinet’s focus on road building and compares outcomes on tackling congestion against “Do Nothing”. Any significant investment in transport infrastructure requires projects to be assessed against what performs best out of public investment across a variety of modes of transport, not road building vs Do Nothing.

Public transport is accessible by people of all ages and abilities and so does not discriminate on age, ability or means. What is the impact on congestion & journey times in and around Hereford, particularly during peak time in school terms, by investing in expanding the public transport offer, particularly buses and reopening the station at Pontrilas?”

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

The previous decision to stop work on the western bypass and pursue the Easter River Crossing and Link Road was taken after considering the Hereford Transport Strategy Review, carried out in November 2020. That review assessed the likely impact of a variety of transport options, including public transport, walking and cycling and road-building, against a wide range of objectives covering the climate emergency, the economy, the environment and society.

The analysis showed that, against those objectives, that no single option would meet all the desired outcomes. The review therefore combined various options into packages. The packages that included a new road crossing of the River Wye showed the greatest reduction in traffic levels and provided much improved resilience of the transport network, and the package including the Hereford Western Bypass performed best of all.

Plans for the Hereford Western Bypass will create the conditions to support more walking, cycling and use of public transport in the city.

Public transport use in Hereford and the rest of the county is among the lowest in the country. I would like to see more people using public transport but the challenge is meeting the annual revenue cost of providing and supporting the extra services needed. As you may know, our Bus Service Improvement Plan bid, submitted in 2021, was not supported by government, although we do have some additional funding through BSIP+ that we are investing to improve bus routes, times and frequencies.

The business case for reopening the rail station at Pontrilas was rejected by the Department for Transport in 2022. However, I believe that a new station has a role to play in a wider transport strategy and we will be working closely with partners to further investigate the case for the station.

Question 2

2. Mrs. V Wegg-Prosser, Breinton

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

Noting that the New Road Strategy for Hereford (Cabinet item 11) makes no significant reference to the known substantial decreases in journey time around Hereford during school holidays, that the Hereford City Masterplan is being deferred to the distant future, and that the effectively timed-

out Southern Link Road is being revived with no provision for active travel measures, what is the justification for favouring a 3.6km road across open countryside (using potentially the government's Local Transport Fund) rather than a strategic makeover for the Hereford Station transport hub as a gateway for sustainable economic growth, with its concomitant reduction in journey times around the City?

Thank you for your consideration.

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

There are significant traffic reductions expected in the city as a result of the Hereford Western Bypass. I believe that the scale of the traffic reductions and improvements in journey times are the key to encouraging economic growth and tackling the barriers to businesses to improve productivity.

The reductions in traffic will also support active travel and bus priority measures that would help to improve connectivity to the new Transport Hub, which is currently being delivered using Levelling Up Funds from the Government and the Council's own capital funding investments.

Phase 1 of the Hereford Western Bypass – the Southern Link Road – will form part of a package of complementary measures that aim to support more walking, cycling and bus use in the city.

Question 3

3. James McGeown, Weobley

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

If I understand correctly there are plans to make the area in front of the railway station an integrated transport hub.

What other forms of transport are intended to be integrated with rail services to Hereford (county bus, city bus etc)?

At present the area is a mess and very unwelcoming for those leaving the train and arriving in Hereford.

The front of the building is totally hidden so could Lorries etc. be re-sited away from the front of the lovely Victorian building.

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

The Transport Hub forms an integral part of the Council's work to improve access to sustainable transport in the city, linking trains with buses, taxis, bicycles and walking facilities. The proposed design will provide a mix of hard and soft landscaping as well as much needed shelter for bus users. Particular attention has focussed on preserving the view of the Grade II listed station building. The landscaping and lighting in the forecourt has been designed to ensure minimum obstruction of the building for users approaching the hub.

Question 4

4. Dr Nichola Geeson, Hereford

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

We read in the Hereford Times that Councillor Price has been “horrified” at the cost rise of an eastern road bridge to over £100 million. He prefers a bridge over the River Wye at Warham. However, this would need to be a high level bridge on pillars as the River Wye at that point is in a deep valley. As Warham is so rural, only reachable by narrow winding lanes, there would need to be lengthy specific access roads built for large construction traffic bringing in bridge-building cranes and materials including concrete. There must be preliminary costing figures for a western bridge available from previous bypass plans. How much would it now to cost to build just a western bridge, and construction access to it at Warham? Such a figure is needed to compare with the eastern bridging option.

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

The costs for the bridges required for both the Hereford Western Bypass and the Eastern Link Road and River Crossing have been identified and included in the overall scheme costs in the Cabinet report.

The cost of the bridge, road and all other costs, including construction access, for Phase 2 of the Hereford Western Bypass is £201m at today’s prices, and £232m when combined with Phase 1, the Southern Link Road. Cost estimates for the various options for the Eastern River Crossing and Link Road range from £84m to £158m at current prices, depending on the route and whether active travel measures are included alongside the road.

All road options and costs have been evaluated with The Western Bypass showing, more benefits in traffic reduction, better access to key housing and employment sites and the opportunity to de-trunk the A49 through the city – more than justifying the additional cost.

We will be working closely with the Department for Transport, Midlands Connect and National Highways to develop the business case and funding package.

Question 5

5. Peter McKay, Leominster

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

Will your strategy for the local transport plan include raising an intergrated map showing our paths and highways both those maintained by Council and privately maintained, together with our open spaces (with site boundaries), again both those maintained by Council and privately maintained, so that we may see where can go on one webpage?

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

Whilst it is very early days in the planning for delivering the Local Transport Plan, I will take this idea on board and pass it to the teams responsible. We have recently added council owned play areas and property links to the Highways and Public Rights of Way Map which was in response to a previous request. I will ask the teams to investigate the feasibility and resources required to implement the potential to widen the scope of the data covered under the programme.

Question 6

6. Mark Banks, Hereford

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

The New Road Strategy for Hereford acknowledges that progressing the Hereford Western Bypass will strain the council's internal resources, requiring staff to dedicate significant time and effort to this complex infrastructure project. Given the desire to minimize reliance on costly external consultants, what steps will the Council take to ensure adequate in-house technical expertise and project management capabilities? What is the Council's strategy to leverage its own workforce and limit the need for external support, thereby reducing overall project costs? Additionally, how will succession planning and knowledge transfer be addressed to mitigate risks around key staff turnover that could otherwise necessitate even greater external consultant expenditure?

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

I recognise the benefits of increasing the knowledge and expertise of our own staff and reducing dependence on consultants. I also understand the importance of our employees working alongside experts to ensure experience growth and knowledge transfer forms part of the programme.

The organisation has a 'grow our own' approach to existing internal resources through apprenticeships, training, development and offering up internal development opportunities. I am expecting to grow our technical team in the future and I am reassured that we already have significant project management experience.

However, with such a large and complex scheme as the Hereford Western Bypass that requires specialist knowledge and expertise, we must rely on consultants to provide a significant proportion of the resources for the project, working in conjunction with the objectives above.

Question 7

7. Jeremy Milln, Hereford

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

Transport engineers have long understood three important principles: 1) adding roads to a network frequently, if counter-intuitively, increases traffic congestion and reduces overall performance (Braess's Paradox); 2) increasing road supply leads to the same result through inducing demand (Jevons Paradox) and 3) traffic increases without limit until alternative/ public transport is made the more viable option (Downs-Thompson Paradox).

It is the application of these principles which have led more progressive administrations to avoid making such fiscally irresponsible and environmentally disastrous transport choices as implied by the 'Roads Strategy' decision report at item 11 of today's agenda. Does Herefordshire Council recognise these principles and, if so, how does it propose to apply them so as to demonstrate enlightenment rather than regression?

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

I fully recognise that building new road capacity can lead to induced demand and additional traffic. As with the previous plans for the Southern Link Road and the Western Bypass, a package of complementary measures will be included to encourage more walking, cycling and use of public transport.

The draft Hereford Masterplan contains city-wide proposals for such measures that would benefit from the reductions in traffic and increased road space.

I expect further details to be developed as part of the business case for the Hereford Western Bypass as a whole and the new Local Transport Plan.

Question 8

8. Carol-Ann Banks, Hereford

To: Leader of the Council

"Are there any plans actually in place to review the limits of public questions at Council Meetings?"

Answer: Leader of the Council

There are currently no plans to review the limits of public questions at Council meetings.

Question 9

9. David Pugh, Leominster

To: Councillor Swinglehurst, Environment

"Reporting" in the local and national press confirms worrying and ongoing damage, pollution and declining water quality in the scenic river WYE causing considerable public concerns.

A natural and beautiful resource for the county, the river, its flood plains, banks, meandering course and wonderful and important wildlife habitats include places of special scientific interest and other reserves that are home to myriad flora and fauna, far too much of which is threatened. Will the council resolve in all circumstances to give this ancient river described above total and ongoing protection, put it at the heart of council policy, and defend this legacy environment in totality both now and in the future along its ancient course through Herefordshire.

Answer: Cabinet Member, Environment

Herefordshire Council values and shares with our residents a passion for clean rivers and high levels of environmental protection. At the same time, we also need to create a sustainable and prosperous rural economy.

Herefordshire Council will continue to collaborate with all agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, landowners and businesses who are able to secure change.

We expect all those causing river pollution to work as quickly as possible to deliver their fair share of pollution reduction measures and we want to see them equipped with the tools and support to achieve that.

Whilst we are committed to swift action, we also need to be honest with ourselves and each other that there are no quick or simple solutions. Full river recovery may take several decades and will require changes from our agency partners, national government in England and Wales and our rural businesses and residents too.

The River Wye presents a complex challenge and the causes of poor water quality are varied with no simple solutions available to achieve recovery. As you can see, from the examples below, no one organisation has ultimate responsibility for the state of the River Wye -

- Environmental policy for the English Wye is set by the UK Government

- Environmental policy for the Welsh Wye is devolved and determined by Welsh Government
- Enforcement Policy of pollution events in England by the Environment Agency
- Enforcement Policy of pollution events in Wales is set by Natural Resources in Wales
- Farm support to make in improvements to protect our rivers is set by Natural England in England and in Wales by Natural Resources Wales
- The level of investment in Sewage treatment made by water companies is set between the Environment Agency and Ofwat whilst permitted discharges in Wales are set by Natural Resources Wales permitting arrangements.
- Diffuse agricultural pollution itself comes from many thousands of farms across England and Wales many of whom are not breaking the present rules.

All of the above examples sit beyond the Council's remit to direct and take action. For this reason, the Council has been pressing government in England and Wales for a Cross Border Task Force to take control of the problem and provide direction for a single coherent plan. In the event that such an approach does not work then sadly, I see no alternative but to press the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales to propose that their respective governments introduce a Water Protection Zone, a process which of itself would be controversial and would take years to come into effect.

I am grateful to the work of our communities for keeping the River Wye in the spotlight and placing pressure on all decision makers wherever they are to secure improvement for our river.

Question 10

10. Mrs Morawiecka, Breinton

To: Councillor Price, Transport and Infrastructure

The New Herefordshire Local Transport Plan Objectives says that this is an opportune time for the Council to support wider ambitions such as the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy and for the Council to demonstrate reductions in transport carbon emissions and progress in the areas of active travel (walking and cycling) and the use of public transport.

Despite going through new housing developments and employment sites, the New Road Strategy for Hereford is purely a road scheme for motorists and does not allocate any funding for public transport or active travel measures and excludes both from the plans. How does the road proposal take advantage of this opportune time to reduce carbon emissions and promote better health & wellbeing, and link new housing with employment and services via public transport or active travel measures?

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

The new road will bring about significant reductions in traffic volumes and journey times in the city.

Measures to make best use of these improvements – to encourage more walking, cycling and use of public transport – will be part of the overall package and will complement the road scheme itself. These measures benefit the local environment and people's health.

On Monday we launched the public consultation into proposals for the draft Local Plan alongside public engagement for the new Local Transport Plan. The Local Plan and LTP will work together

to encourage better walking, cycling and public transport links for new developments in order to manage traffic growth.

We are already delivering active travel measures across the city that will improve walking and cycling provision, and provide Safer Routes to School. More of these schemes can be introduced across Hereford as a result of traffic that doesn't need to be in the city transferring to the Western Bypass.

Question 11:

11. Mr. E. Morfett, Hereford

The objectives for the New Local Transport Plan set out clear targets for carbon reduction in Figure 4 Appendix C of the report. The report states Even under the most optimistic EV uptake scenarios, local transport emissions are still likely to over-shoot the upper national Net Zero Strategy Delivery Pathway and the Lower Delivery Pathway. Therefore, EVs cannot solve the carbon challenge on their own.

How does the Council intend to implement such a wide range of different interventions such as a safe cycling network and new rail stations to meet carbon targets, outlined under its new objectives, when its New Road Strategy for Hereford can never be completed within the targeted time frame?

Answer: Cabinet Member, Transport and Infrastructure

I fully anticipate that the Hereford Western Bypass will be completed within the timeframe of the new Local Transport Plan.

The reduction of traffic and improved journey times because of the new road will be integral to the delivery of wider Council goals and will support more walking, cycling and use of public transport

The Local Transport Plan objectives provide a means by which schemes are reviewed, prioritised and programmed. The Plan will include schemes for all transport modes and will incorporate an electric vehicle strategy, a local walking and cycling infrastructure plan, proposals to improve public transport and many other initiatives, as well as the new road.