

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.

Supplementary question

Hereford has not always had low bus use, as in 2001/02 over 2.5million journeys were by bus. However, when the frequency of commercial services was cut 50% by 2005/06 1million passenger journeys were lost. I am therefore heartened that the Council is looking to invest in improving bus services.

In October 2023 Cllr Price said that reopening Pontrilas station was a priority and this was reinforced by the Leaders report at the same time. However, I am unable to find any business case for this scheme on the council website so would he please provide the cost of the scheme and the impact the Pontrilas station reopening would have on reducing car use into Hereford?

Supplementary response

Thank you for the supplementary question. A strategic outline business case was submitted to the Department for Transport in December 2020 and was not successful. However, cabinet later in this meeting, is being asked to allocate funding of £50,000 to review the strategic outline business case, so as to progress this project further, it is only when developing the full business case that we will be able to consider the wider impacts on car use. Capital costs estimated at mid-2020 prices were £12.4 million and operating cost of £130,000 per year.

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.

Supplementary question

The new Herefordshire Local Transport Plan objectives support active travel and the use of public transport. The Dilwyn DW20 Footbridge farce illustrates Council's inability to support active travel to Weobley. How about public transport, the last bus for Weobley departs Hereford integrated transport hub at 18:15, one minute later, the train from Birmingham Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Worcester arrives at 18:16. So, if travel back to Weobley is required you'd better finish your Birmingham business or hospital appointments early, you couldn't make this up.

Can the Council use the influence with this county bus operator, to have departures five minutes after the train arrives? Therefore creating an extra productive hour. If the simplest Integrations of transport hub are not possible, then the reasonable conclusion would be that the plan has fine words on many pages, but no deliverable substance. Thank you.

Supplementary response

Thank you for the question. I will ensure that officers take this up with the actual operators, because this is an operational issue. I find it absolutely incomprehensible that the last bus leaves a minute before the train arrives. We will take on-board your point and get officers to ensure that they have discussions with the train and bus

people concerned. When the transport hub comes online we will make sure that we don't have mishaps in timetables of this manner. Thank you for your question.

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 integrated 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.

Supplementary question

Thank you for taking my suggestion 'on board', and may I ask that you draw the teams attention to the fact that sections of the Highways and Public Rights of Way Map can be printed, but sections of the Parks, Play Areas and Sports Pitches Map and Properties Map cannot be printed, and ask that development of this enables map sections to be printed facilitating constructive discussion?

Supplementary response

Thank you for the supplementary question. We strive to make Council information as accessible as possible and will investigate the practicalities of enabling personal printing thank you.

Question 6

6. Mr 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.

Supplementary question

Thank you for highlighting the council's efforts to develop internal resources and expertise while acknowledging the necessity of external consultants for the Hereford Western Bypass project. Given the importance of fiscal responsibility, could you elaborate on the measures in place to ensure that consultant costs remain within reasonable bounds and that value for money is achieved?

Additionally, how does the council plan to assess the effectiveness of these cost-control measures and ensure transparency in consultant expenditures throughout the project's lifecycle?

Supplementary response

Thank you for highlighting the council's efforts to develop internal resources and expertise while acknowledging the necessity of external consultants for the Hereford Western Bypass project. Given the importance of fiscal responsibility, could you elaborate on the measures in place to ensure that consultant costs remain within reasonable bounds and that value for money is achieved?

Additionally, how does the council plan to assess the effectiveness of these cost control measures and ensure transparency in consultant expenditures throughout the project's life cycle?

The council follows its financial guidelines and a set of contract procedure rules that ensure value for money is achieved in all contracts and that all expenditure on consultants is both transparent and managed effectively. I will furnish you with the links and they will be found on the minutes of this meeting when they are published thank you.

[Part 4 Section 6 Contract Procedure Rules.pdf \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

[Part 4 Section 7 Financial Procedures Rules.pdf \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

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.

Supplementary question

My substantive question explained how prioritising the building of motor roads worsens traffic congestion and emissions, largely through induced demand, an effect long understood by transport planners. I am pleased to hear the Cabinet Member accepts that.

In a meeting last week (19 March) he was reminded of his promise complementary active travel measures and public realm improvements (a 'boulevard') would be delivered for the Commercial Road/Blue School Street corridor conditional on the City Link Road. They were designed ten years ago but not delivered due to overspend on the CLR. Now they have been redesigned but without the same level of ambition for modal shift to sustainable travel in view of the lack of challenge to the induced increase in car traffic since the CLR was opened, an entirely predictable result.

What has the Cabinet Member learned from this experience which should be applied to his 'New Roads Strategy'?

Supplementary response

I remain committed to maximising the advantage of the traffic reductions in the centre of Hereford that the Hereford Western Bypass will deliver. Active travel measures will encourage more walking and cycling by making it safer and more attractive, thereby supporting economic growth in the city. These measures will also help to minimise any induced traffic that might arise as a result of reduced congestion and improved journey times.

Active travel measures in the city will be designed to meet current LTN1/20 guidance wherever possible. In an historic city like Hereford, what can be achieved is a delicate balance between ambition, available road space, design standards and budget. I believe that the proposals for Commercial Street accurately reflect that balance for the constraints we face today and for the funding that is available. 90% of the feedback from the stakeholder briefing was positive and I shall continue to strive to deliver what is both practical and affordable.

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.

Supplementary question

"Thank you for your reply. However, as Herefordshire Council only permit the public 1 minute and 140 words to pose a question I did a little research in neighbouring counties.

- Worcestershire allow 3 minutes per question and no word limit
- Powys have no limit to words or time except for 1 minute time limit for the supplemental question
- Shropshire permit up to 250 words per question
- Gloucestershire allocates 30 minutes for public questions without any limits on words or time per question.

I clearly recall the Chairman of the Council saying at the meeting on 8th December last year, that they would have to review the Constitution regarding public questions in discussion with Group Leaders. Isn't about time that you did review this issue as your current policy does not compare favourably with others?"

Supplementary response

Thank you very much for the question Mrs Banks and thank you for the comparisons that you've set out with other authorities. It's my understanding that the constitution will be reviewed, which will include reference to questions to members of the public and we will bear this in mind when we come to that review, thank you.

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.

Supplementary question

While the explanation went at length about what was outside the council's ability to alter, little was said about where it had power and influence. The council currently have propositions including building beside the River Wye. One proposed development, were it to be approved, stands on the floodplain of the Wye and squarely next to a site of special scientific interest - proposing permission for the building of 350 houses, with little or no protective infrastructure for either locals or the river. Given the council's rhetoric over protection of the river, can it be assured, after such rhetoric, that Herefordshire Council will not entertain development in this or similar situations in future, under their planning control, refusing both adoption or approval?

Supplementary response

Thank you for your question and thank you for attending in person. Planning is a quasi-judicial process, so therefore there's a process of application and planning officer judgement inputs, environmental constraints will be identified and if they can't be mitigated then that will be a material consideration, so this is not for the cabinet to make a decision here and now. It's a planning application, so therefore has to go through the process of all planning applications and therefore I can't say here and now what the outcome of that would be, because it would be prejudicial to the application. Thank you

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.

Supplementary question

The road modelling shows the average journey time saving on the longer routes through Hereford is 1.5minutes and just 0.5 minutes on the shorter journeys, neither of which would be thought to be significant by most Herefordians, especially at a cost of £0.23billion for a road, ahead of any other interventions.

To reduce carbon emissions across Herefordshire, the Council would get a much better return on investment by tackling the 50% of emissions arising from journeys between 10-50 miles. Why then is the Council not considering the needs of the whole county, investing in an integrated network of public transport connected to a safe, active travel across Herefordshire, improving access and opportunity for everyone and sharing the benefits of such a high level of transport investment whilst meeting their Local Transport Plan Objectives?

Supplementary response

Thank you Mrs Morawiecka for your supplementary question. There's a lot that has been asked for here, but in response, the next stage of the Local Transport Plan development is to develop a longlist of options, to assess them against their ability to deliver the objectives and then produce a shortlist of the best performing options. This assessment process will determine the extent to which public transport, active travel and other measures contribute to the objectives, including providing viable low emission options for most journeys. Thank you

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.

Supplementary question

The western bypass is justified by building thousands of houses in the catchment of flood zones, upstream of the City. Who will be liable for the much higher environmental impact costs from flooding, developing the road and lands west of the City, higher in the catchment of the City flood zone?

Supplementary response

Thank you Mr Morfett for your supplementary question. The development of the Hereford Western Bypass and the development of any future housing sites, will require planning permission and approval of the Environment Agency to take account of flood risk and will need to include measures to mitigate those risks. Thank you.