Agenda item no. 4 - Questions from members of the public

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Peter McKay, Leominster	**The Unclassified Roads, UCR's, shown on the Highways and Public Rights of Way Map include an estimated 90 miles of roads that are unsurfaced, and I ask if you could differentiate these by recording them as uUCR's, show with a different colour line, and add a section to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, presently at draft stage, covering the management policy for these?**	Cllr Durkin

Response:

Thank you for your question.

In response, I can confirm that not all our unclassified roads have a tarmac surface. Whilst I have noted the suggestion that the surface be referenced on our highway map, this would not be a current priority for the team due to the current amount of work currently being undertaken with regard to focussing on reopening Public Rights of Ways that are currently closed or dealing with the high volume of Definitive Map Modification Order requests.

We will bear this in mind when the team have available time to reconsider our priorities.

Supplementary question:

My question asked if you will add a section to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan covering the management policy for unsurfaced unclassified roads, without reply, such as an annual safety inspection logging obstructions, etc., on the new road defect webpage, when it moves to the next stage and if you have any prediction when that may be?

Supplementary response:

Thank you for your original and supplementary question. The Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan covers the period 2018 to 2028 and sets out the approach to inspection and maintenance. We will of course consider your suggestions provided when work is undertaken to produce the next Plan.

It is important to note that the Council's Highway Maintenance Plan also sets out the categories, frequencies and modes associated with undertaking safety inspections, including unsurfaced roads and unmetalled Public Rights of Way.

<table>
<tr><td>PQ 2.</td><td>Mrs E Morawiecka, Hereford</td><td>The Local Plan Regulation 18 Strategic Policies Document of March 2024 stated that the whole county of Herefordshire required only 9,608 new homes to be built to 2041, with 5,600 to be allocated to Hereford City along with 80hectares of employment land.

The 2025/26 Capital Investment Budget claims that the Hereford bypass “will deliver the Western Growth Corridor creating over 10,000 new homes and over 300 acres of new employment land”. Development to the west of Hereford poses the risk of the loss of over 3,000 existing jobs from pollution of water supplies to 2 of the city’s largest employers and increases the risk of flooding the City that lies downstream of the Yazor Brook.

When and where did Herefordshire Council agree this scale of development to be allocated to the West of the City?</td><td>Cllr Swinglehurst</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Response:

The council has not yet agreed to this scale of the development to the west of the city, it will be included in the re-drafted Local Plan which will be subject to a further Regulation 18 consultation period later in the year.

Government launched the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12th December 2024, which identifies a mandatory housing target for the county of 27,260 in the next Local Plan period (up to 2041). This is an increase from 16,100 new houses previously. To meet this increased requirement the council is reviewing where this level of growth could be accommodated, including the possible western growth corridor. The changes to the NPPF are so significant that the council will need to re-draft the current Local Plan which will be subject to a further Regulation 18 consultation period later in the year.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary question:

If the council has not yet agreed to this scale of the development to the west of the city what are the criteria it is using to enable the 2025/26 Capital Investment Budget to state that a new road in this area will result in the allocation of 37% (10,000 houses) of the total mandatory housing target for the entire County to an area that is nationally scarce, high grade agricultural land, a floodplain and poses such a huge risk to over 3,000 existing jobs and the wider local economy and flooding to the City of Hereford?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Supplementary response:

Thank you for the supplementary question. We are unable to confirm the specific number of houses that will be developed to the west of Hereford until options for allocation of the new mandatory housing targets are fully assessed and consulted upon through the Local Plan. We anticipate that a further regulation 18 consultation will be undertaken later in 2025.</td></tr>
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Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 3	**Carole Protherough, Hereford**	**"This Cabinet has said that the reopening of the Pontrilas Railway Station is a priority of this administration. If so, why is there no capital investment in the Capital Strategy or Capital budgets for the next 3 years for this transport project?"**	**Cllr Price**

Response:

The council has committed revenue funding to the development of a business case for a new station serving the Golden Valley area around Pontrilas and has set up a task force of key stakeholders to support this work. Until the business case has been completed to demonstrate that there is a viable proposal supported by DfT and Network Rail, it would be inappropriate to allocate any funding into the capital programme at this time.

Supplementary question:

Cllr Price says that no capital funding has been allocated to Pontrilas Station as the business case needs to demonstrate a viable proposal supported by DfT and Network Rail. Please explain why the Council has applied different standards to the allocation of funding to the Pontrilas and Southern Link Road schemes given that neither have business cases demonstrating they are viable proposals supported by DfT and Network Rail?

Supplementary response:

Thank you for the supplementary question. These schemes are not comparable as they are at very different stages of their development. The Hereford Western Bypass is at full business case stage whereas a potential station at Pontrilas is only at Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC), considering where a scheme is viable. Regardless, a new station between Abergavenny and Hereford would be delivered by Network Rail and requires their agreement and funding as well as other third-party approvals; whereas the bypass is being delivered by the Council and within the Council's powers as the Highway Authority.

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 4	**Jeremy Milln, Hereford**	**The proposed Southern Link Road (aka Western Bypass Phase 1) is now estimated to cost £40.3 million (£35m construction, £5.3m for D&M), apparently to be funded using £5M of capital receipts and £35.3M of public borrowing. The Capital Strategy states that funding above £6.7m is available to support capital investments that give a clear pay back through revenue budget savings. How much of the interest payable on this borrowing is contributing to the deficits of £1.217m in 2026/27 and £5.266m in 2027/28 and what revenue will be generated by the scheme to pay back the £35.3m of borrowings and interest over the 40 year repayment period?**	**Cllr Stoddart**

Response:

The additional borrowing to fund the proposed £30m addition to the capital programme for 25/26 has a revenue budget impact aligned to the term of borrowing.

Repayments of borrowing and interest will be accounted for by reducing the value of the borrowing in the council's balance and recognising an interest expense in the revenue account.

The impact on the revenue budget in each year of the MTFS is noted below:

- ***2026/27:** revenue impact of £0.25m (assuming borrowing of £5m in 25/26)*
- ***2027/28:** total revenue impact of £1.0m (assuming borrowing of £5m in 25/26 and further borrowing of £15m in 26/27)*
- ***2028/29:** total revenue impact of £1.5m (assuming borrowing of £5m in 25/26, and further borrowing of £15m in 26/27 and £10m in 27/28)*

The council is committed to bringing forward the first phase of the Western Bypass. Once completed, this new bypass connection for the A49, from the south to the north of the city, will deliver the Western Growth Corridor, creating over 10,000 new homes and over 300 acres of employment land.

Supplementary question:

The response confirms that, for the proposed Southern Link Road (SLR), we would be paying an additional £1.5m a year on the interest alone for another £30m of borrowing. The response doesn't answer the question as to what revenue budget saving the Council thinks will be generated by the scheme in line with its rules requiring a pay back on capital investments above £6.7m.

At the Public Inquiry Herefordshire Council insisted the SLR, as part of the South Wye Transport Pack, is a stand-alone project, not part of some larger 'bypass', or housing access road as is now being suggested. As such the Council has been unable to deliver a full Business Case for it, nor -given its low Benefit Cost Ratio - 'demonstrate that it represents value for money in its own right' as required by the OSBC (**Outline Strategic Business Case)** ***(item 8, appendix E).***
How does the Council propose to address this and what services might be cut in future years to meet the additional revenue deficit if the scheme proceeds?

Supplementary response:

Thank you for your supplementary question. The £6.7m refers to the amount which is corporately funded. Any amounts above this level are considered as part of the revenue budget and MTFS. This revenue budget and MTFS reflect the proposed borrowing. I also confrm there are no services that are planned to be cut.