

Agenda item no. 6 - Questions from members of the public

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Mr Fisher, Bromyard	<p>On 1 April 2022 the Planning Inspector directed the Council to determine 36 applications to modify the Definitive Map. A deadline was set for determining each application. All deadlines have now passed; none of the 36 applications have been determined. Moreover in the case of four other applications which were determined in 2021 (M344,M345, M346,M348), the required Orders have still not been made.</p> <p>Will the Council confirm that this important statutory area of work will be resourced to deliver the following minimum service level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A minimum of five DMMOs to be determined each year. 2. Where it has been determined to make an Order, the Order shall be made within three months of determination. 3. Where no objections are received to the advertised Order, the Order shall be confirmed within three months of the expiry of the objection period. 	Cabinet member local engagement and community resilience

Response: We can confirm that there are 36 applications which the Council have been directed to determine.

Due to staffing changes and the specialist knowledge required to make these determinations none have been progressed to date, as the officer who is able to investigate has been progressing other priority applications and training newer officers.

In respect of M344, M345 and M346 these are undergoing final checks and are due to be published imminently. M348 is being re-examined and a final determination will be made over the coming weeks.

To answer your specific numbered questions:

1. We anticipate the team will be able to progress a minimum of five Definitive Map Modification Orders each year.
2. In respect of order publication this will be determined by the volume and number of legal orders being progressed however we will endeavour to make the Order within three months of determination wherever possible.
3. If no objections are received to an Order, officers will confirm the order as soon as possible, however in certain circumstances physical works and possible enforcement action may be required which will dictate the timescales involved which may cause a delay in confirming the Order within three months of the expiry of the objection period.

PQ 2	Mrs Morawiecka, Hereford	Herefordshire Council has already spent £2.456million on the Hereford Southern Link Road with the Capital programme showing budgeted expenditure on this scheme of £13.5million in 2026/27. Cabinet has said that Council approval for a capital project is not approval to spend. Who gave approval to spend £2.456million to date on this capital project and how much can the Cabinet approve to spend on this road project before a full business case and a report on value for money needs to be prepared?	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
<p>Response: Cabinet in March 2024 agreed to an initial budget of £10.3m to develop Phase one and gave officers delegated authority to spend. The spend of £2.456m is in line with that decision. The money has been spent on progressing land purchase, updating designs, ecology work, developing planning applications in line with updated planning regulations and producing a revised business case.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question:</p> <p>The cabinet agreed an initial spend of £10.3million so with the Council approving a further £13million capital spend in 2026/27 for the Southern Link Road it seems they can approve up to £23.3million with no full business case or any evidence to show this will deliver the traffic benefits claimed for the full bypass scheme.</p> <p>Please answer my initial question which asked HOW MUCH EXPENSE OR CONTRACTUAL COMMITMENT can be incurred by the Cabinet, binding on the Hereford taxpayer, before there is any full business case or whether this investment offers Value for Money for the residents of Herefordshire?</p>			
<p>Response: Cabinet has authorised the use of £10.3m for the development of the scheme. Cabinet will consider the Full Business Case ahead of making the decision to authorise the award of the construction contract and use of the capital budget for construction.</p>			
PQ3	Mr Milln, Hereford	<p>While this administration, at agenda item 10, appendix B, proposes to make cuts and raise charges in a number of service areas, it fails to identify the clear saving it could make at Jacobs Court in my ward. I have raised this many times over the years, most recently at Council last July. The cabinet member, unable either to justify the circa £80,000 and rapidly rising cost to the Council of its eyesore scaffolding or provide a timetable for addressing it, refused to answer my questions.</p> <p>What is the total financial liability (ongoing and unrecovered costs and unrealised values) to Herefordshire Council of property not included in the capital programme which has delivered no public benefit for more than two years, including long term unresolved enforcement cases such as Jacobs Court as well as unused property in its own portfolio?</p>	Cabinet member environment

Response:

Jacobs Court is not owned by the council, it is in private ownership. The council's building control service previously undertook urgent action to prevent glass windows from the building falling on to the public through erecting scaffolding. The previous owners of the building went into administration, the council is at an advanced stage of negotiation with the new owners (a consortium of the owners of the individual flats in the building) to pass on the current financial liability (£400 per month), and to ensure they complete the necessary works to ensure the building is safe.

The council budget includes both a capital and revenue allocation to maintain the sites that we own and are directly responsible for.

Supplementary Question:

You failed to answer my substantive question which sought only a sum, namely the total unrecovered value on liability property cases going back over two years. Privately owned eyesore Jacobs Court is one example and here we are owed more than £80,000 on a botched planning case unresolved for fifteen years. Crumbling and long closed Council-owned lavatory blocks at St Peters Square and East Street also in may ward are another. The listed timber barns at New House, Almeley, left decaying following the folly of this administrations' treatment of the County farmed estate years ago a third. No public benefit in any of this – just a waste.

I ask for a breakdown identifying these costs showing which are recoverable and which are sunk or lost and how would these impact relevant budgets beneficially or adversely as these matters are addressed?

Response:

A written response would be provided.

Written response provided on 25 February:

The total Jacobs Court liability is £118,000 and we are reviewing the potential to recover this where possible, whilst noting the original business that owned the building went into administration a number of years ago .

The Nieuport, Almeley barns are in the council's direct ownership, we have incurred costs of £12,172.26 and are looking at the potential to seek planning approval prior to possible disposal.

The two closed toilets are also being reviewed for potential marketing and sale.

PQ 4	Mrs Protherough, Hereford	Herefordshire Council says that a 30minute free parking for "pop to shop" will help the local economy, whilst increasing car parking fees for visitors looking to make longer visits to Hereford & the market towns. What is the impact assessment that shows free car parking increases spending in the local economy and reduces congestion in the City centre, as opposed to offering free bus travel or investing in pay on departure systems for Council car parks?	Cabinet member roads and regulatory services
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Response:

The Pop and Shop initiative is the implementation of a manifesto promise from the current administration. A free parking period in council car parks was requested by a variety of residents and businesses, and this is what is being implemented, and has been extended to on street parking in Hereford. An impact assessment has not been carried out – while a free parking period can be one contribution to supporting the local economy, there are many other measures that are relevant including enhancing the customer experience and public realm, strengthening the nighttime economy, events, culture and many other elements. In addition, it should be appreciated that there has been no increase in car parking charges since 2023. The parking strategy is currently being updated and will be consulted on later this year, park and choose (connecting car parks to other forms of transport) and the payment systems for car parks will be considered in the strategy.

Supplementary Question: It is disappointing that this administration has done no impact assessment on the 30minute free parking, “pop to shop” initiative vs other possible measures to support the local economy. In this same budget the council is looking to spend over £45million on a road they claim will reduce congestion in the centre of Hereford, where the major cause is motorists driving short distances in and out of the City. How much will the 30 minute free parking increase frequent, short car trips in and out of Hereford, increasing city congestion vs offering free bus travel or extending student bus passes to include free weekend and evening use?

Response:

A written response would be provided.

Written response provided on 26 February:

The Pop and Shop initiative is only one small contribution to supporting the local economy. There are a wide range of different initiatives to support the local economy. These include; Merton Meadow Regeneration and Flood Alleviations scheme. Hereford Transport Hub, developments such as Holme Lacy Road, forthcoming improvements to bus stops and increasing the number of Real Time Information (RTI) screens at bus stops and interchanges.. The Council offers a range of business support services through Herefordshire Growth Hub. The Council has created the Hereford Enterprise Zone to support the creation of over 1,000 jobs and is currently breaking ground in Ross on Wye, which will create further jobs and inward investment. The Council has issued over £4m in business grants, via UKSPF to support Herefordshire businesses. The forthcoming Local Cycling Walking and Wheeling Investment Plan will start to map out locations for developing further alternative travel choices. We have already implemented a concessionary bus fare scheme for older people They can access free bus travel across the county. However, we have extended the concessionary fare scheme to include travel before 9:30am, which is the minimum government guidance for when concessionary travel can start. So, on almost all services people with a concessionary bus pass can travel before 9:30am providing better access to services, shops and healthcare. Furthermore, there is also a disabled person's bus pass available to Herefordshire residents with a permanent disability or with a disability that is expected to last at least one year. Additionally, if a disabled person is unable to travel on a bus without the assistance of another person because of a disability, they can

apply for a companion pass. Any Herefordshire resident who qualifies for a disabled person's bus pass on the grounds of disability, and because of that disability is unable to travel on a bus without the assistance of another person, can apply for a companion pass. The companion pass provides free travel on journeys that start in Herefordshire.

PQ 5	Mr Newman, Hereford	<p>The Cabinet member has said that this Council is committed to see a full bypass realised. This is apparently the reason that benefits of the full Western bypass are included in the Outline Business Case for the Hereford Southern Link Road, whilst not including the full capital cost of this much bigger road scheme.</p> <p>As councillors are being asked to approve capital spending just on the Southern Link Road, what are the direct and quantifiable benefits that will be delivered by spending over £45million on this scheme as a standalone road project?"</p>	Cabinet member transport and infrastructure
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Response: Council is being asked to approve putting the capital funding into the budget, Cabinet will still need to make the final decision to approve spending once it has fully considered the value for money business case which will be published ahead of the decision to award the construction contract in July 2026.

Supplementary Question: I am sorry the answer must relate to a different question. When the benefits of the full Western Relief Road are excluded from the Outline Business case for the Hereford Southern Link Road, what are the direct and quantifiable benefits that will be delivered by spending over £45million on the Southern Link Road scheme as a standalone road project?

Response: Phase One of the Western Bypass will deliver a number of transportation, economic, social and environmental benefits which are driving a positive Benefit Cost Ratio. These will be outlined in detail within the business case which will be published in due course.