

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

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1.	Huw Sherlock, Hereford	<p><i>'The LA Capital Finance and Accounting Regs 2003 require assessment of capital projects to be shown to be affordable over a 3-year rolling period according to strict borrowing guidelines for financing capital works set by CIPFA ("the Prudential Code").</i></p> <p><i>If the cost overruns aren't within the existing contingency allowance for the project, and so could cause overshoot of the (statutorily mandated) 'prudential indicators' (that control allowed debt/capital expenditure) the officers are required to look again at the project finance.'</i></p> <p><i>Therefore, in relation to the 40 plus million of borrowing to fund the western bypass (phase 1): Are the projected overruns within contingency - if the answer is no, then how can it be shown to be consistent with adherence to the prudential code and 'sustainable' according to the Capital Strategy?</i></p> <p><i>If it is, then it remains an argument over the cost benefits, but if it isn't, will it be stopped or delayed for refinancing?</i></p>	Councillor Stoddart
<p>Response: Current forecasts for the delivery of Phase One of the bypass are within budget. The budget includes contingency to manage the risk of potential increases in costs during construction.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: None</p>			
<p>Supplementary Response:</p>			
PQ 2.	Amanda Martin, Hereford	<p><i>"Does a full business case exist for Phase 1 of the Western Bypass formerly known as the Southern Link Road?</i></p> <p><i>If it does, how was it produced without validated traffic modelling data?</i></p> <p><i>If it does not, why did the Leader advise the Secretary of State for Transport in a letter of 1st October 2025 that Phase 1 has a "robust business case with a strong cost-benefit ratio"?"</i></p>	Councillor Price

Response: A case for investment document is in the final stages of completion and will be published by the end of March. We were able to advise the Secretary of State in our letter of the 1 st of October based on initial findings. As the case for investment document has developed and the Full Business Case develops further, these statements are being validated. The Full Business Case will be published in July.			
Supplementary Question: The request for funding sent by the Leader to the Secretary of State for Transport on 1 st October 2025 explicitly referred to the Southern Link Road as having a “robust business case”. However, government guidance provides that, in order for the business case to be regarded as “robust”, the transport appraisal used to inform it must include validated traffic data; failure to observe this requirement renders it inadequate for funding purposes and exposes it to legal challenge. Therefore there was no robust business case at the time and the Leader’s information to the Secretary of State was incorrect. Is it accepted that the Leader’s attempt to obtain DfT funding relied on misleading information and that this was a serious lapse likely to cast doubt on his integrity and that of other pro-road members within the Administration?			
Supplementary Response: In reply to your question, is it accepted that the Leader attempted to obtain DfT funding relied on misleading information? The answer is no. Thank you.			
PQ 3.	Paul Newman, Hereford	The updated Outline Business Case for the Southern Link Road claims benefits for the road between the A49 and A465 that “By removing unnecessary through traffic from the city centre local retail, leisure and hospitality businesses will be better placed to welcome visitors to the city”. With the City Centre located to the north of the River Wye and this road over a mile to the South of the Wye, what “unnecessary through traffic” will the Southern Link Road remove from the City please explain the evidence to support this answer?	Councillor Price
Response: The Outline Business Case refers to the benefits the whole western bypass and Phase One is an enabler to its delivery. Phase One will specifically remove traffic from Belmont Road, Walnut Tree Ave and Holme Lacy Road improving congestion and safety on these City Centre routes.			

Supplementary Question:

The Capital Budget is requesting councillors to approve capital funding for a road between the A49 and the A465 and not for the whole Western Bypass scheme.

Why is the Outline Business Case for the Southern Link Road claiming benefits that relate to a much bigger road project for which capital approval is not being sought?"

Supplementary Response:

Phase One is an enabler for the wider bypass. It clearly demonstrates the Council's commitment to see the full bypass realised and sets the baseline for future discussions with government and developers on how to fund and realise the full bypass.

PQ 4.	Susie Laan, Hereford	<p>Wye Valley NHS Trust declared an Internal Critical Incident this week, due to running at extremely high levels of bed occupancy. Many people retire to the County from the South East, increasing the proportion of older people living in Herefordshire.</p> <p>With this administration looking to significantly grow the population of Herefordshire, what assistance and infrastructure is this Council providing, in particular through its Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy to address what will become a growing problem and to ensure that these Critical incidents will not happen in the future?</p>	Cllr Swinglehurst
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Response:

Thank you for your question. The council works closely with Wye Valley NHS Trust to support discharges from hospital on a day-to-day basis and has supported them through the recent critical incident.

In terms of your wider question, through their revised National Planning Policy Framework (launched at the end of 2024) the government set the county a mandatory housing growth target of over 27,000 new homes. However this will be a managed and phased development of new housing and associated wider services and infrastructure over the next 2 decades. We recognise that, as a result of this direction, there will be a significant increase in the county's population and impact on public services. Through the development of the Local Plan, which defines planning policy including the location of land allocated for these new homes, we are and will continue to work with partners to fully understand the likely impact and define the increase in capacity of public services and infrastructure required to meet the future needs of the county. The development of the Local Plan is also subject to extensive public consultation and an independent examination in public to ensure it is viable before it can be adopted and implemented.

Supplementary Question: None			
Supplementary Response:			
PQ 5.	Hayden Osborne Brooks, Hereford	<p><i>Herefordshire Council traffic modelling reports in the past have shown that the school run can increase peak time congestion in Hereford by over 50%, especially in the North East quadrant of Hereford and on Aylestone Hill in particular.</i></p> <p><i>This is due to students and children accessing education and training, by private motor car. What is the impact of the 2026/27 Budget changes on enabling the young people of Herefordshire to safely access education, training and jobs by means other than by private car and how will these changes help reduce City congestion arising from the school run?"</i></p>	Councillor Price
Response: There is no impact from the changes in the budget on the ability of young people to access education, training and jobs by sustainable modes of transport. Herefordshire Council base budget for subsidising contract routes with bus operators is over £1.1million. This year we will be adding an extra £751,000 from BSIP and S106 funding. The Council is also currently delivering the Transport Hub at Hereford station which will enable better connectivity between bus and rail services, as well as subsidises the Beryl bike scheme, enabling cheap and easy access to bicycles across Hereford city. The Council is also investing in the delivery of School Streets which encourages parents to consider walking and cycling children to school. The Council encourages the use of sustainable transport modes and it is for resident to determine and chose how to they wish to travel.			
Supplementary Question: None			
Supplementary Response:			
PQ 6.	Mrs Morawiecka, Hereford	The Capital Programme Position January 2025/26 shows that by the end of this financial year the Council will have spent £2.456million on the Hereford Southern Link Road.	Councillor Price

		What is the breakdown of this expenditure and what is the Value for Money achieved?	
<p>Response: The figure quoted relates to spending across two financial years. There are three main areas of expenditure. 1 – Land purchase: The Council taking control of the land for the project to be progressed. This includes land agent and survey fees as well as land valuations. 2 – Professional Services fees: The Council has incurred costs to get the project back to a stage that it can be delivered. This includes everything from professional advice to ensure the specification for the road is compliant with required standards as well as affecting the interfaces with Network Rail and National Highways, utility surveys, updating ecology surveys, producing business cases, tender documentation and reviewing tender submissions. 3 – Internal resources: A project of this nature requires internal resources and the project costs reflects the input of staff from across the Council.</p> <p>Projects of this nature require early investment in planning and preparation to ensure costs at construction phases are understood, controlled and value for money is achieved through the delivery.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question: Thank you for the answer. But sadly, neither the actual financial split nor the value for money achieved on this £2.456m expenditure was provided. In the 2026/27 capital investment budget and capital strategy update report, para 16 says inclusion in the capital program is not approval to proceed. Each project will be subject to its own governance. A full business case will be presented for approval to cabinet where required and compliance with the council’s contract procedure rules as applicable. With no full business case or other evidence available what information did the cabinet have to approve spending £2.456m to date on the Southern Link Road? And with a capital programme showing expenditure on this scheme of £13.5m in 2026/27, what information is available for councillors to decide that this expenditure is value for money and should be included in the capital programme.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Response: <u>Answer in meeting:</u> There are several items in that. I will give you a written answer to address all the points in your question.</p> <p><u>Written answer provided:</u> Council agreed £10.3m of Capital Investment Budget to develop Phase One and spend against this was authorised by Cabinet on 28th March 2024. The £2.456m is the spend against the £10.3m budget to develop the Full Business Case, make land purchases and progress the design and tendering of the scheme.</p>			
PQ 7.	P J McGivern, Hereford	<i>Can you please explain, in very simple terms, how borrowing vast, unquantifiable -, because we all know project cost always escalate from day 1- amounts of money to build a Bypass can in anyway be seen as wise?</i>	Councillor Price

Response:			
The Council has put in place a project team, governance processes and a risk-based contingency that will control costs within the available budget envelope. The delivery of a bypass is essential to the future growth and prosperity of Herefordshire and given that it is the wisest course of action.			
Supplementary Question:			
None			
Supplementary Response:			
PQ 8.	Jeremy Milln, Hereford	<i>I note that Herefordshire Council plans to capitalise the costs of legal and finance staff in relation to capital projects, hence removing £225,000 from the Revenue Budget for 2026/27 and yet the Net Budget for the Strategic Finance staff has increased by over 9.5% from 2025/26. Why have the Strategic Finance costs risen by so much despite these notional “savings” and in respect of the Library and Museum and other capital projects that are funded by grants, what will be the effect on funding by capitalisation of these costs against grant claims for capital projects lagging behind their original completion dates?</i>	Councillor Stoddart
Response:			
The increase in the Strategic Finance budget in 2026/27 represents increases in the council's insurance premiums for 2026/27 of £539k and a £180k increase in banking fees as a result of increased volume in online transactions in 2026/27.			
Capitalisation of eligible staff costs in legal and finance teams will be within individual project budgets and grant conditions where applicable.			
Supplementary Question:			
None			
Supplementary Response:			

PQ 9.	Jim Hardy, Hereford	How can Cabinet recommend to Council for approval a capital investment budget which includes some £40 million pounds for the first phase of a 'bypass' when the latest traffic modelling and a Full Business Case have not been published? Would Council not be acting at best recklessly, and at worst illegally, to approve such a 'pig in a poke'?	Councillor Price
Response: A case for investment document is in the final stages of completion and will be published by the end of March. The Full Business Case will be published in July ahead of the Cabinet making the final decision on the investment in Phase One. This authority is being responsible in planning and investing in the future growth and prosperity of the County.			
Supplementary Question: None			
Supplementary Response:			