

Minutes of the meeting of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 7 July 2026 at 2.00 pm

Committee members present in person and voting: **Councillors: Bruce Baker, Ed O'Driscoll (Chairperson), Rob Owens, Justine Peberdy, Richard Thomas and Diana Toynbee**

Others in attendance:

A Campbell	Interim Service Director – Strategic Communications	Herefordshire Council
R Allonby	Service Director Economy and Growth	Herefordshire Council
J Bush		Sargeants Brothers Limited
A Clarke		Newport Transport
Councillor F Cornthwaite	Vice-Chairperson of Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee	Herefordshire Council
Councillor B Durkin	Cabinet Member Roads and Regulatory Services	Herefordshire Council
J Hobbs	Corporate Director Economy and Environment	Herefordshire Council
H Merricks-Murgatroyd	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
J Preece	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
Councillor P Price	Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure	Herefordshire Council
Councillor E Swinglehurst	Cabinet Member Culture and Environment; Deputy Leader of the Council	Herefordshire Council
S Tompkins	Delivery Director - Infrastructure	Herefordshire Council
D Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Roger Phillips and Cllr Helen Heathfield.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Cllr Richard Thomas was present as the named substitute for Cllr Roger Phillips. Cllr Justine Peberdy was present as the named substitute for Cllr Helen Heathfield.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2026 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 9 - 12)

Documents containing questions received from members of the public and the responses given, plus supplementary questions and their respective responses were published as an appendix to the minutes.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from councillors.

7. YEAR OF DELIVERY - CAPITAL PROJECTS

The committee considered a report on the Year of Delivery - Capital Projects item.

The Chairperson introduced the item and explained that it provided updates on key capital projects being undertaken in 2026.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion are summarised below:

A. Hereford Western Bypass Phase One

A.1 In relation to Hereford Western Bypass Phase 1, the Chairperson noted that the committee would be scrutinising the full business case at a separate meeting later this month. It was therefore considered unnecessary to spend significant time on the bypass at this meeting, although some points of clarification were sought.

A.2 In response to a question from a committee member, officers confirmed that the full business case assessed phase one of the scheme as a standalone project.

A.3 A committee member questioned why the project was shown with a green RAG rating given the scale of the identified risks, including matters relating to cost, planning and affordability. In response, officers explained that the rating reflected continuing progress on the scheme and the existence of mitigation measures which were reported regularly to Cabinet.

B. Hereford Transport Hub

B.1 The committee then moved to consider the Hereford Transport Hub project. The Delivery Director – Infrastructure reported that the scheme was nearing completion, with opening expected in October 2026, and that construction had progressed well overall.

B.2 It was reported that the waiting area works had been completed and that public realm works were progressing well. It was explained that one design issue affecting the tie-in with the highway had caused delay during construction, but that some of this delay had been recovered and the project was forecast to complete under budget.

B.3 The Chairperson welcomed representatives of bus operators to the meeting in order to assist the committee in understanding operational issues associated with the new hub design. It was commented positively on the integration of bus, rail and

pedestrian access and on the quality of engagement by council officers, while also identifying continuing operational concerns.

B.4 The principal concern raised by operators related to the drive-in, reverse-out layout, which they considered carried safety and operational risks, particularly in a constrained space and during busy periods. Concerns were also raised about congestion, visibility in poor weather and darkness, the interaction between buses and other vehicles, and the possibility of conflict with pedestrians or cyclists despite mitigation measures.

B.5 It was advised that some issues relating to layover arrangements had been addressed and welcomed discussion around enforcement and possible additional facilities for drivers. It was also stated that operators would undertake their own risk assessments once the hub became operational and would provide feedback to the council on any further adjustments required.

B.6 In response to questions about the choice of layout, the Delivery Director - Infrastructure explained that a drive-in, drive-out arrangement had been explored but had not been considered possible through road safety audit. It was stated that the adopted design was intended to keep pedestrians out of the bus operating area and that some late changes had still been made, including adjustment to a kerb line to improve reversing movements, provision of an additional real-time passenger information board, and exploration of additional driver facilities.

B.7 During discussion of vehicle safety equipment, it was explained that reversing cameras were not a legal requirement and that older buses may rely primarily on mirrors and a reversing horn. Operators nevertheless emphasised that, while many newer vehicles had cameras, safe operation would still depend heavily on driver skill and site conditions.

B.8 A committee member asked whether the absence of electric vehicle charging points at the hub could affect future funding opportunities. The Delivery Director - Infrastructure explained that EV charging had not formed part of the original scheme because buses would not dwell long enough to charge and because there was insufficient grid capacity in that part of the city, but it was added that this would need to be kept under review in future.

B.9 During the discussion, it was suggested that the introduction of the new hub may require marshalling or similar operational support during the early period of use in order to reduce the risk of accidents and help users adapt to the layout.

C. Ross Enterprise Park

C.1 The committee then considered Ross Enterprise Park. The Service Director Economy and Growth reported that works were underway on site to open up the first phase of development, including junction works, access infrastructure and flood alleviation measures, with development-ready plots to be created for onward sale.

C.2 It was noted that business interest in the first phase was strong, with more interested parties than plots currently available, and that discussions were ongoing with a number of potential occupiers. It was advised that this level of interest had led to work being undertaken on the possible acceleration of the second phase of development.

C.3 It was explained that the second phase would involve further development land and that work was underway on a capital programme request to enable this to come forward through the next budget-setting process. It was noted that the intention was

to consider whether receipts from the first phase could be reinvested to unlock the second phase.

C.4 In response to a question about plot size and selection of occupiers, it was stated that the site could be subdivided and that decisions would be guided by the county's economic strategy and by criteria focused on growth sectors, employment quality and salary levels. It was explained that the Herefordshire Business Growth Board would be consulted as part of the selection process.

C.5 A committee member questioned whether the scheme gave sufficient opportunity for smaller local businesses to expand. In response, the Service Director Economy and Growth explained that the scheme was intended not only to support growth but also to target higher-value sectors and improve productivity and wage levels in the county, although the possibility of smaller units and workshop or incubation space remained under consideration.

C.6 Concern was raised that some local residents had not been receiving timely updates on the project. This was acknowledged and it was confirmed that a further letter was being prepared to update residents, including on issues raised locally.

D. Hereford Museum and Art Gallery

D.1 The committee then moved to the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery project, which was identified as one of the red RAG-rated projects in the report. The Service Director Economy and Growth explained that the scheme was intended to create a renewed museum and gallery offer in the city centre and to support wider regeneration and cultural objectives.

D.2 It was explained that the original scheme had included an additional top floor with a café and viewing area, but that detailed cost work had identified a much larger funding gap than had previously been understood. It was stated that earlier estimates had significantly understated the scale of the cost pressure and that the council was engaging with those who had previously advised on the project. It was further explained that phasing of certain elements was now being considered, including some smaller rooms and a lift in the lobby area.

D.3 In response to a question about the Stronger Towns funding, the Service Director Economy and Growth explained that the funding was contractually committed and linked to specified outputs, including visitor numbers and education outcomes. It was stated that the revised scheme was still expected to meet those outputs and that the funding was required to be spent by the end of March 2028.

D.4 Concern was raised about communications relating to the project, including the timing of public updates after the funding gap had been identified. A committee member argued that more open communication would help protect public confidence and support future funding bids.

D.5 In response, the Service Director Economy and Growth explained that they had chosen not to publicise the problem immediately when first identified because work was ongoing with current funders to develop a credible way forward. It was stated that the intention had been to communicate once a workable solution had been identified rather than create avoidable alarm.

D.6 During discussion of the cost escalation, it was questioned how such a significant increase could have arisen. The Chairperson also questioned whether budgets were subject to regular review, given that other projects were also increasing in cost. In response, the Corporate Director Economy and Environment

acknowledged the seriousness of the issue, while noting that the increases had occurred in significant steps rather than gradually, and referred to wider inflationary pressures, including the conflict in Ukraine, affecting construction costs.

D.7 In response to a question about the consequences of an unsuccessful Arts Council bid, the Service Director and Economy and Growth stated that other grant opportunities were also being explored. It was reported that the remaining funding gap is around £3.5 million and that redesign work was continuing so that time would not be lost while funding solutions were explored.

D.8 In response to a question about equality impacts and accessibility, it was stated that an equality impact assessment would form part of the redesign process. It was confirmed that lift access would still be provided throughout the building, and that accessibility to all floors would remain part of the intention.

D.9 In relation to governance, it was noted that the relevant service teams had been engaged in the projects and that recruitment to replace the outgoing project lead was underway.

D.10 The Cabinet Member Culture and Environment emphasised that, although the loss of some features was regrettable, the key priority was to secure the core museum and art gallery outcome and the long-term future of the building.

E. Shirehall

E.1 The committee then considered Shirehall. The Corporate Director Economy and Environment explained that, following review of construction costs, they had sought to develop a scheme based on what could realistically be delivered within budget rather than continue with a design-led approach that had become unaffordable.

E.2 It was reported that revised work indicated that the building could be stabilised and made watertight, structurally sound, serviceable and compliant for around £8 million.

E.3 The Corporate Director Economy and Environment explained that the assembly room's size and configuration had driven exceptional construction costs, particularly because of the need for heating, ventilation and air conditioning works at roof level. As a result, alternative library arrangements in courtroom two and associated rooms were now being explored, while retaining the assembly room as a large flexible civic and cultural space.

E.4 It was noted that external cultural partners had expressed enthusiasm about the possible use of the assembly room and other large spaces for activities that existing venues could not always accommodate.

E.5 The Chairperson referred to earlier scrutiny of the decision to move the library from Maylord Orchards to Shirehall and recalled previous committee concerns that the Shirehall costings had been desk-based and that Maylord Orchards should be retained as a fallback option until full costings of Shirehall were known.

E.6 In response, the Cabinet Member Culture and Environment stated that Shirehall remained the preferred location for the library, arguing that it was one of the county's finest civic buildings and that there is a responsibility to restore and reuse the building.

E.7 Concern was raised about disabled access in the revised layout. The Corporate Director Economy and Environment responded that compliance with accessibility

requirements would need to be designed into the scheme and that the council could not lawfully bring forward a public building without meeting those standards.

E.8 The Service Director Economy and Growth explained that governance arrangements exist through cabinet member decisions, records of officer decisions, the capital programme and delegated budget allocations. It was stated that these could be provided to the committee if required, including the relevant decision routes for both the museum and Shirehall projects.

E.9 In response to a question about what lessons should be learned from the project, it was suggested that the council needed to re-establish stronger quantity surveying and cost-planning discipline so that budgets were more robustly defined and controlled from an earlier stage.

E.10 Concern was also expressed that the revised library proposal for Shirehall might represent a reduced offer compared with what had previously been presented. The Corporate Director Economy and Growth responded that the intention remained to spend the same Stronger Towns allocation on the library installation and to achieve a high-quality outcome, albeit in a different configuration.

E.11 In response to a question about the attitude of the Stronger Towns Board, the Corporate Director Economy and Environment stated that confidence had needed to be reestablished in the council's ability to deliver the projects but that engagement with the board had been progressing positively. It was noted that presentations were expected in September to show how the designs and delivery arrangements were developing.

F. Holme Lacy Road

F.1 The committee then lastly considered the Holme Lacy Road project. The Delivery Director - Infrastructure described it as an important levelling up funded scheme intended to improve links between the Rotherwas employment site to the city centre, improve safety and active travel provision with cycle facilities, resurface the road and redesign of one of the roundabouts where incidents had occurred.

F.2 It was added that the project had been challenging because Holme Lacy Road was a traffic-sensitive route carrying significant volumes of traffic. It was reported that early difficulties had included an unexpected water main and the need to rethink the original traffic management approach to avoid disruption.

F.3 It was explained that the revised approach had delayed completion into the following year, but that the scheme was over 40 percent complete and was progressing in phased sections intended to reduce congestion impacts.

F.4 In response to a question about key risks and issues, the Delivery Director - Infrastructure identified traffic management concerns and public reaction to visible design changes on the ground, particularly at the railway bridge and in sections where road widths were being altered to make space for active travel measures.

F.5 In response to a question about whether residents had been kept informed, the Delivery Director - Infrastructure stated that residents had been kept informed through regular stakeholder updates and dedicated web pages that contains information about the scheme.

F.6 In response to a question about public understanding of the project, the Delivery Director – Infrastructure added that further communication was planned, including publication of a microsimulation video showing how traffic was intended to flow

through the route and indicating that journey times were not expected to worsen despite additional traffic signals. It was acknowledged that continual engagement is important to keep people informed.

F.7 In response to a question about cycle provision on Commercial Road, the Delivery Director – Infrastructure advised that the Commercial Road scheme in development includes cycle provision along the length of the road. It was explained that the scheme had been delayed for two reasons: first, to avoid undertaking it at the same time as the Holme Lacy Road scheme and placing additional pressure on the network, meaning it had been pushed back to 2027; and second, to allow consideration of the outcome of city centre parking proposals, as Commercial Road would be important both for any additional parking provision and for integration with the Aylestone Hill scheme.

F.8 The Delivery Director – Infrastructure added that in relation to levelling up funding, there are a number of levelling up projects that are being delivered as part of a programme and wherever savings are made on one project, that money will be redirected to support the delivery of other projects.

F.9 In response to scepticism about the likely benefits of the scheme, the Delivery Director – Infrastructure stated that the road would be narrowed only where it was already constrained and only to the extent necessary to provide a single cycle lane. It was added that traffic on Holme Lacy Road was expected to reduce following completion of the bypass, with the route intended to serve more as a residential road with improved connectivity between Rotherwas and the city centre, rather than as a rat run. It was further clarified that the road would remain at a standard width for vehicles to pass and would not be reduced to a single lane.

F.10 The Cabinet Member Transport and Infrastructure noted that the Holme Lacy Road scheme would deliver the active travel measures needed in Hereford and improve the route's function as an active travel corridor, rather than focus primarily on access to the A49. It was added that savings from projects such as Holme Lacy Road would help support the delivery of subsequent schemes, including Commercial Road.

Resolved

- 1. That the executive reviews the council's current arrangements for developing cost estimates for major capital projects before projects proceed to approval stages.**
- 2. That the council explores the provision of a marshal to manage bus manoeuvres in the transport hub.**
- 3. That the council consider an incubation hub as part of the development of phase 2 of Ross Business Park.**
- 4. That the council provide more regular public updates on the progress on the revised developments of Shire Hall and the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery.**

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2026-7

The committee considered the draft work programme. It was agreed that consideration of the item be deferred to the next meeting of the committee.

9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Monday 20 July 2026, 10:00 am.

The meeting ended at 4.46 pm

Chairperson