

# COMMUNITY FORUMS

## PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

20TH OCTOBER, 2005

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### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

To receive a report on the September/October 2005 round of Community Forum meetings.

### Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

### Recommendation

**That the report be noted.**

### Reasons

To comply with the agreement that issues raised and discussed at Community Forums should be presented to Cabinet after each round of meetings.

### Considerations

1. A full report of the Forum meetings is set out at Appendix 1. The issues raised provide a useful indicator of local concerns for Cabinet to consider.
2. In addition to advertising in more than 30 Parish Magazines and in the local press, a colour poster was issued to all Councillors for display in their local area. However, as at previous meetings, public attendance was low, except in the Central area, where the proposed new Livestock Market was discussed. The numbers were:

Golden Valley	12
Hereford City	9
East Herefordshire	2
North Herefordshire	10
Ross-on-Wye	9
Central Herefordshire	50

3. Total attendance was 92. Of those, 35% completed feedback sheets. 10 of these had not attended a Forum before, but 9 said they would attend again. One was not sure. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was very worthwhile and 1 not worthwhile at all, 23% rated the Forum very worthwhile; 32% rated it 4, 39% rated it 3, and 6% rated it 2. No-one said it was not worthwhile at all.

### Consultees

Community Forum Chairmen; Cabinet Members and the Leader of the Council.



**COMMUNITY FORUM MEETINGS: SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005**

**AGENDA ITEMS PRESENTED AT MORE THAN ONE FORUM**

**Homelessness (Golden Valley, North Herefordshire and Ross-on-Wye)**

Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing, outlined the causes of homelessness in Herefordshire, and explained the statistics relating to those causes. The dramatic increase in domestic violence was one cause. He described the waiting list (7,740 as at March 2005), and how this figure had increased from 3,200 since October 2002. Herefordshire Council was working in partnership with other agencies, for example, Marches Housing and Herefordshire Housing, to address the problem. The average waiting time for rehousing was 17 months (2004-5), with an average of 15 houses a week becoming available for advertising. Herefordshire's Homelessness Strategy centred on prevention of homelessness, improving temporary accommodation (particularly for homeless families with children), and developing support for homeless households. In response to questions, Richard Gabb said that the priority for housing was people with no home. Assessing need would always be a subjective process. There was no government definition of affordable housing. The Council defined it as housing provided through subsidy, for example, shared equity or a discounted purchase price. The Housing Act 1996 and the Homeless Act 2002 placed statutory duties on the Council to house certain people. This may, in some cases, be temporary accommodation in the first instance. There was no "typical" homeless person. Ages ranged from 16 to 88. Planning Officers considered the reasons for any planning application, for example, annexes to house elderly relatives. However, in some cases, planning regulations may prevent such developments. Even where property had been identified for housing homeless people, it sometimes took a long time for the Housing Association to obtain the funding necessary for development.

**The Learning Disabilities Service (Hereford City, East Herefordshire and Central Herefordshire)**

Stephanie Canham, the Head of Social Care (Adults), explained that the term Learning Disabilities covered a range of conditions from very mild difficulties to very severe conditions, such as Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy and Autism (including Asperger's Syndrome), requiring a high level of support. There were around 3,400 people in Herefordshire with learning disabilities, representing a wide range of dependency, of whom 580 received support from the statutory authorities. However, a number of young people with disabilities lived with carers, normally their parents, who were over 70. The Service was working with those families to plan ahead for meeting the needs of the disabled person when the time came. This would make the change easier for them to deal with. The aim was to allow people to live as independently as possible in the community, contributing to the community through paid or voluntary work. It was important to ensure they could live safely in the community with the appropriate level of support from the statutory authorities. Schools were increasingly involved in integrating children with Special Educational Needs into mainstream schooling. It was important that all members of the community accepted and embraced disabled people to ensure a safe and supportive environment. IT was proving a great help to many people with learning disabilities in terms of improving communication, and assisting with safety precautions.

**The Highways Maintenance Plan (East Herefordshire, Ross-on-Wye and Central Herefordshire)**

The published Highways Maintenance Plan covered both urban and rural highways. The Plan was updated and published annually. Routine safety inspections of A roads were made every three months, and C roads approximately once a year. The Council was reactive as

well as proactive and responded to public reports about roads. Action was taken before a road reached too poor a condition and became very expensive to repair – it was cheaper and easier to repair roads at “threshold” condition. This meant that the worst roads did not always get priority for repair, but prevented a backlog of work. National standards for thresholds would determine priorities. Not all ditches were the Council’s responsibility. Trunk roads, such as the A49, were the responsibility of the Highways Agency. The Council was monitoring the problems at Bridge Sollers. Accident rates had reduced by 30% in the last 5 years, and imposing speed limits did not always provide a solution to accidents. All measures to reduce speed had to be appropriate to the location. Bridge heights should be expressed in both metres and imperial measures. It had been planned to impose 20mph limits outside all schools within five years, but funding issues meant this would now be done within 10 years. The factory estate at Bromyard was Council property. Although they could allow public access, this carried risks of liability in the event of an accident. In response to questions, the following points were made:

- Trunk roads were the responsibility of the Highways Agency, although clearing litter from those roads fell to the Council;
- Where urgent action was needed on a road, response would be within two hours. Non-urgent work might be included in the normal work plan;
- There was a focus on clearing gullies at least annually;
- The smoother roads in Wales reflected the higher proportion of trunk roads. They were not a safety feature and, in fact, tended to encourage faster traffic speeds;
- Landowners were required to trim hedges once every two years. However, where they represented a safety hazard, the Council would act to keep them cut;
- The Countryside Agency, which had subsidised rural transport, no longer exists, and funding was now the responsibility of Advantage West Midlands. Funding for rural transport had reduced, and the Council was working with the bus operators to try to provide the best service possible in difficult circumstances.

<b>Golden Valley,</b>	<b>Tuesday 20 September 2005</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr D Taylor (Chairman) Cllr C Mayson (Cabinet representative) Cllr P Turpin	Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing Andrew Jenkins, Senior Engineer (Traffic) Peter Evans, Area Services Manager (Transportation) Robert King, Environmental Services Manager Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>12</b>

### Agenda

- Homelessness in Herefordshire
- The Bridge Sollers to Madley Road
- Fly-tipping in the countryside

### Homelessness in Herefordshire

See main report

### The Bridge Sollers to Madley road

Andrew Jenkins, Senior Engineer (Traffic), explained that the Council's priority for the county's roads was improved accessibility. Auto and Manual surveys, undertaken by trained enumerators on behalf of the Council, had shown no substantial increase in HGV traffic using the Bridge Sollers to Madley road other than for access to farms and properties in the area. Auto surveys operated over a week, and manual surveys over 12 hours from 7.00am to 7.00pm. The proportion on HGV traffic matched that on other roads in the locality. Without robust evidence, the Council could not impose restrictions on the road. Residents were concerned about the volume of HGV traffic, the speed of traffic and the possibility of an increase in traffic trying to avoid the Belmont area when work on the Asda store commenced. Although there had been a delay in starting work, the Transportation Department was now looking at options for widening the road at suitable sites, but there was a risk that this could make the road more attractive to heavy traffic. Some residents volunteered to undertake traffic surveys to support their contention that the road was dangerous and that use by heavy traffic had increased substantially. They felt that surveys should include overnight traffic (although the auto surveys already undertaken did so). Council Officers agreed that, if local people were prepared to do surveys, the Council would look at the results of such surveys and follow them up as appropriate.

### Fly tipping in the countryside

Robert King, Environmental Service Manager, explained that the Council had a joint responsibility with the Environment Agency. The Council collected waste when a report was received about fly-tipping, and assessed whether an enquiry should be undertaken to try to identify the culprit. The Environment Agency was responsible for disposal of waste and regulating waste transporters. Fly tipping tended to be a seasonal problem, with 31 complaints in July. In the West Midlands, the cost of removing waste was £9.5K per day. Although fly tipping was an offence, it was difficult to get evidence to support prosecutions, and there were therefore few prosecutions. Rubbish tipped onto private land became the responsibility of the landowner. It was suggested that the freighter scheme could help to address the problem, as this had been highly successful in some areas. A member of the public raised the issue of bottles dumped on land locally. Robert King undertook to report this to the responsible officer. He said that any local issues could be reported to John Dowson, the officer responsible at the Council. It was noted that the waste facility at Rotherwas was excellent and had recently been modernised.

<b>Hereford City, Committee Room 1, The Shire Hall, Hereford</b>	<b>Thursday 22 September 2005</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr B Walling (Chairman) Cllr Mrs J French (Cabinet representative) Cllr P Edwards Cllr B Wilcox	Stephanie Canham, Head of Social Care for Adults Andrew Culley, Construction Manager (Highways) Bill Bloxsome, Conservation Manager Dane Broomfield, River Wye Management Team Leader (Environment Agency) Martin Mills (Environment Agency) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>9</b>

**There was a minute's silence in honour of the late Cllr George Hyde**

### **Agenda**

- The Learning Disabilities Service
- The Victoria Footbridge
- The River Wye

### **The Learning Disabilities Service**

See main report

### **The Victoria Footbridge**

Andrew Culley, Construction Manager (Highways), explained that the Victoria Bridge was one of over 700 in the County that the Council was responsible for assessing. The bridge had been built in 1898 and had been repaired over the years with various materials that differed in strength. Although the bridge itself was not at risk of collapse, severe corrosion meant that the footway was at risk. The bridge, which is Listed, would be reinstated as close to its original state as possible. Its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest meant that work was restricted to the period 15 May to 15 October. Investigation had shown that a temporary crossing would not be viable. Alternative routes would be signposted, and this was particularly important in view of the Three Choirs Festival and access to St James' School. The five month lead-in from the award of the contract to the start of the work meant that the contractor would be fully involved in all discussions and could identify and address any potential areas of difficulty well before work began. Because the project involved a Council/contractor partnership, this meant that if the project went over budget, costs would be split, with the contractor bearing an increasing share as costs increased. A 10% contingency had been built into costings. Tenders had not yet been received, and no contractor had been appointed yet.

### **The River Wye**

Dane Broomfield, River Wye Management Team Leader (Environment Agency), described the work and responsibilities of the Environment Agency and the Wye Environment Team. The Wye was one of a few rivers with a Public Right of Navigation for much of its length (Hay-on-Wye to Bigsweir Bridge). An Advisory Committee had been set up to include representatives of all those with an interest in the river, and the Wye Waterway Plan had been drawn up. There were target dates to track the progress of achieving the aims of the Plan. The main aim was to make access to the river available to all users, with access agreements between users. The policy was to work in partnership with users. One result of this would be a calendar of events to avoid clashes between different user groups. The Agency was looking at options for increasing access and egress points along the river to ease congestion. A public consultation exercise was launched in August 2005 and it was vital to the success of the project that all those with an interest put forward their views. In response to questions about the impact of public use of the river on wildlife, it was explained that a public right of access existed and that the aim was to manage that right in a way that eliminated, as far as possible, any threat to wildlife. The agency was in discussion with various organisations to address such issues, as well as problems of litter and pollution. The Code of Practice for Canoeists was being revised and reissued. It was agreed that a copy of

the Plan would be placed in the Public Library. There were no plans for dredging, but the Agency would consider the merits of any applications for dredging. The owner of the pleasure boat that was moored in the river was keen to restart his business, but was unable to do so. The boat was seaworthy, properly moored and, although unsightly, there were no grounds for forcing its removal. It was agreed that the situation would be considered and an update given at the next Forum.

### **Other issues**

Residents asked whether there were plans for dealing with unpleasant smells from the sewerage plant adjacent to the Braemar Gardens area. The responsibility was split between the Council and the Environment Agency. A Joint Monitoring Programme was planned, and the Cabinet Member responsible for Environmental issues would maintain an awareness of the matter. There were active pressure groups, including the Welsh Water Action Group, who would be aware of progress.

A £2m scheme was being prepared for the refurbishment of High Town. Specific issues could be drawn to the attention of the High Town Manager. To meet all public expectations would cost in the region of £4m - £5m. The Council had only a £2m budget and had to do as much as it could with that. The Eign Gate project was the first phase of improvements, and the High Town refurbishment would follow. Public consultation would be essential to ensure that the improvements responded to the needs and wishes of most people.

<b>East Herefordshire, The Bromyard Centre, Bromyard</b>	<b>Tuesday 27 September 2005</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr T Hunt (Chairman) Cllr RM Wilson (Cabinet representative) Cllr B Ashton Cllr P Dauncey Cllr P Harling Cllr R Mills Cllr D Rule Cllr R Stockton	Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation Steve Jay, Assistant Area Manager (North) Mark Tansley, Northern Team Leader, Planning Stephanie Canham, Head of Social Care (Adults) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>2</b>

### Agenda

- The Learning Disabilities Service
- Affordable Housing
- The Highways Maintenance Plan

### The Learning Disabilities Service

See main report

### Affordable Housing

Mark Tansley, Northern Team Leader, Planning, explained that there were three aspects to this subject – policy, strategic Housing and Planning development control. Affordable housing was defined as that provided for rent or sale at a price sustainable by local people in need of housing. This might be subsidised housing for rent or shared ownership provided by an organisation and allocated on the basis of need or low-cost market housing to help low-income households, such as first-time buyers, single people or elderly people. Market housing for sale carried potential risks that the properties would not remain affordable in perpetuity. Renting and shared ownership helped to ensure perpetuity. A Section 106 agreement could tie properties to affordability in perpetuity and identify where potential occupants should come from. Figures for the current stock of affordable housing in the Bromyard area were given. If there was inadequate take-up from the ward, housing could be offered to people from a neighbouring ward. The “gold-silver-bronze” system was based on need only, in contrast with the legal agreement cases. Questions were raised about specific cases where families had accepted housing unsuitable for their needs in desperation and had lost their homeless status as a result, which meant they could not be considered for rehousing on the basis of need. The housing situation could be worsened by seasonal workers who wished to remain in the area after the working season had ended. The Council had a responsibility to house these people in some circumstances.

### The Highways Maintenance Plan

See main report.



<b>North Herefordshire, Bridge Street Sports Centre, Leominster</b>	<b>Thursday 29 September 2005</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr J Stone (Chairman) Cllr R Stockton (Cabinet representative) Cllr Mrs J French Cllr J Hope Cllr JP Thomas	Colin Birks, Property Services Manager Christine Owen, Primary Care Trust Stephen Owen, West Street Dental practice Graham Price, Primary Care Trust Rob Hemblade, Public Rights of Way Manager Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing Services Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>10</b>

### Agenda

- The Dishley Street Dental Practice
- Mechanically propelled vehicles in the countryside
- Homelessness in Herefordshire

### The Dishley Street Dental Practice

Colin Birks, Property Services Manager, explained that the parking spaces lost to the development would be replaced by additional parking behind the Council offices, where 55 spaces would be freed up. Research had shown that the Dishley Street car park was not particularly well-used, and no designated spaces would be necessary for people using the dental practice, apart from spaces for disabled people. Christine Owen of the Primary Care Trust explained the need for a new dental practice to address the shortage of NHS provision in the county and the relatively poor dental health of children. The aim was to provide more than 33,000 NHS places across the County by August 2006. An added benefit of the development at Dishley Street would be to release space currently used by the Dental Access Centre at Leominster Community Hospital for use by the hospital. The development would help with the recruitment and retention of a dental workforce within the NHS in North Herefordshire. Access to the new practice would be, as now, via the PCT Central Waiting List. Application forms were available at the Forum. The waiting list was currently 3 – 4 months. The frequency of dental check-ups was a matter between dentist and patient, based on individual need, and guidelines for dentists advised flexibility. Fluoridisation of water was in the PCT plan, but there were other factors and agencies that influenced the decision on this. Welsh Water currently did not fluoridise water. The plans for the development might be made available at Info Shops, and the PCT would consider this.

### Mechanically propelled vehicles in the countryside

Rob Hemblade, Public Rights of Way Officer, outlined the situation relating to the use of byways by vehicles. Where it could be shown that vehicles had used a path in the past, a historical right could be claimed to use the track for modern vehicles. If routes were not opened up, the right to use them could be lost. However, in recognition of the fact that modern vehicles did not compare with the historical use of horses and carts, the Government planned to change the legislation to remove the historical use provision. A question was raised about the apparent lack of any management strategy for lanes which, it was thought, did not fall to be maintained as a public right of way, nor as part of the Highways Maintenance Plan. Unclassified roads fell within the Highways Maintenance Plan. Councils had powers to require anyone damaging a lane to meet the cost of repair, but the responsible person often could not be identified. In those circumstances, the Council could take responsibility for repair and maintenance, but was required to maintain the lanes only to bridleway standard.

**Homelessness**

See main report. A statement about the Grange was made. The Council would work with the Marches Housing Association, Shelter and the community to identify alternative properties.

<b>Ross-on-Wye, John Kyrle High School, Ross-on-Wye</b>	<b>Tuesday 4 October 2005</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr Mrs A Gray (Chairman) Cllr D Rule (Cabinet representative) Cllr Mrs M Cunningham Cllr Mrs J Davies Cllr R Lincoln Cllr G Lucas	Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation Mike Willmont, Southern Team Leader, Planning (Development Control) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>9</b>

### Agenda

- Homelessness in Herefordshire
- The Highways Maintenance Plan
- Affordable Housing

### Homelessness in Herefordshire

See main report

### The Highways Maintenance Plan

See main report

### Affordable Housing in the Ross-on-Wye area

Affordable Housing was defined as housing provided for rent or sale at a price that could be sustained by local people in housing need who were unable to access existing markets. In Herefordshire, the average house price was ten times the average income, making it difficult for many people to buy property. Policy on the provision of affordable housing was contained in the Unitary Development Plan and planning applications were considered by Development Control. There was supplementary guidance for planners relating to affordable housing. There had been a Housing Needs Survey in Ross in 2003. This showed an estimated net requirement of 190 affordable housing units. There were currently four proposed housing sites. Three of these conformed to the policy of having 35% affordable housing on developments of more than 15 units or 0.5ha. Tanyard Lane, Cawdor Gardens and Vine Tree Farm would have 53, 11 and 24 affordable units respectively. The Council had been unable to agree the provision of affordable housing at Station Street, but had received a contribution of £165,000 from the developers to make provision elsewhere. Section 106 agreements were in place at the other sites to ensure that the affordable units would remain affordable in perpetuity. At Vine Tree Farm, developers could not complete the 42 full market price units before starting the affordable units.

<b>Central Herefordshire, the Simpson Hall, Burghill</b>	<b>Thursday 6 October 2005</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr B Matthews (Chairman) Cllr C Mayson (Cabinet representative) Cllr Mrs S Robertson Cllr M Wilson	Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation Steve Burgess, Highways Department Clive Hall, Transportation Graham Dunhill, Environment Stuart Gent, Environment Dept Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>50</b>

**Agenda:**

- The Highways Maintenance Plan
- Speed Limits
- The Proposed New Livestock Market

**The Highways Maintenance Plan**

See main report

**Speed Limits**

Policies on speed limits were included in the Council's Transportation Plan. They were one feature in a range of measures to improve road safety and reduce accidents, and packages of measures were tailored to the needs of specific sites. Many of the criteria for imposing speed limits were nationally determined, and the Council worked closely with the police to ensure speed limits and other traffic calming measures were appropriate to particular stretches of road. In response to questions, it was stated that the priority was sites where there was a poor accident record, followed by areas where there was a request to consider speed limits. Enforcement was an important aspect in considering the issues. The use of speed humps was determined by reference to the type of traffic using a road, for example, buses and emergency vehicles. Cllr Robertson agreed to investigate the issue of traffic speed on the lane to the Credenhill Camp, as it was felt that there was substantial risk, especially to children, on that stretch of road.

**The Livestock Market**

The Council has a legal obligation to provide a Livestock Market. The current site was a valuable asset for the County and an alternative site for the Livestock Market had, therefore, to be found. Because public opinion was so strong on this subject, it was considered appropriate to look again at all possible sites and to conduct a thorough, open and transparent public consultation. There would be a series of about six public meetings to be held over the next six months to address all the issues and take account of all views. The first meeting would be used to determine the structure of the following meetings. There were no plans for any new abattoir as part of the Livestock Market. Councillors had looked carefully to identify any possible sites and welcomed suggestions for alternatives to the six already identified. There was a wealth of evidence available to support the need for the Livestock Market and the siting of the Market in North West Herefordshire. Although the Hospital Farm site had been initially rejected, for the sake of thoroughness, it was important to re-examine all the options, including Hospital Farm. Both legal and economic issues were involved in the consideration of the Market. Doing nothing was not an option because it was in the public interest to put the current site of the Market to better and more cost-effective use to regenerate Hereford City. Any recommendations following the consultation process would be presented to the Cabinet for decision.