



March 2024

A message from the Leader

During February and March consultation has been continuing with a wide number of stakeholders as we seek to develop our longer term plans, through a new Council Plan for Herefordshire. Under our current timetable we will be presenting the plan to Cabinet in April and onward for agreement at full Council in May. The plan will run from 2024 to 2028.



There have been some significant environmental developments over recent months. Cabinet agreed a new phosphate strategy. This strategy paves the way for a range of new initiatives that aim to help us to reduce phosphate levels in our soils and waterways. On 8 March, Council also agreed our Minerals and Waste Local plan. This plan promotes appropriate development to meet the recognised market needs for both minerals and waste, whilst ensuring that detrimental impacts are minimised and opportunities for betterment are optimised.

By ensuring that we consider the environment as central to sustainable development in the county we can begin to focus on our growth plans. T

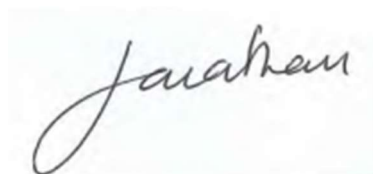
Finally, as I am sure many of you will have seen, Hereford city centre is currently undergoing a very welcome transformation with eight new public artworks on our city streets. These artworks are starting to appear on gable ends of prominent buildings, in underpasses, in passageways, and above shops throughout February and March 2024. The commissioned artists range from international and regional level to new Herefordshire talent.

Some of the artworks will continue to emerge over the coming weeks so look out for the artists as they work across the city. I am sure you will all agree with me, they create a very welcoming and impressive addition to the way our city looks and feels. I am certain it will be a real draw for many residents and visitors alike

As always, you can contact me by emailing

Jonathan.Lester@herefordshire.gov.uk

Best wishes,



Jonathan Lester
Leader of the Council

Setting out our Strategic Priorities - the Council Plan 2024 to 2028 Click to edit this heading.

After Council agreed the budget in February our priorities are now returning to finalising the Council Plan. This is the key strategic document for the council that outlines our ambitions and objectives over the next four years. So far, we have themed the

Plan around prioritising:

- **People** - Encourage and enable all residents to live well, thrive and have the best start in life.
- **Place** - Protect and enhance our environment through innovation and best practice and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live.
- **Growth** – Support sustainable growth across the County to develop the economy through inward investment, creation of jobs, additional housing and support businesses.
- **Transformation** – Transform Herefordshire Council to become a well-run organisation that is sustainable for the future



Thank you to those of you who have offered your views and ideas. They help us to identify and unlock the huge potential of our County. We are currently reviewing the responses we have received. There will then be further opportunity for people to feedback on the draft Plan in March. Thank you for your continuing involvement and influence - it is hugely valued.

Ofsted Monitoring Visit

During March, the Council hosted our fourth Ofsted Monitoring Visit which focussed on care leavers and older children in our care. The formal report on this most recent visit was published on 27 March. You can read a full copy of the Ofsted letter [here](#).

Initial feedback received identifies areas of continuing improvement as well as ongoing areas where we need to step up the pace of progress.

After two and a half years as corporate director for children and young people services, Darryl Freeman will be leaving with immediate effect. I thank Darryl for his efforts and professionalism during what has been an extremely challenging time. He is leaving children's services in Herefordshire in a better place than when he started.

While it is important to be able to recognise success where it is observed our attention has to be maintaining focus on the areas where improvements are still required. It still remains the case that some of the services that we provide requires further improvement and at a faster pace. This will be a major focus in the coming months ahead. You can view our progress on the improvement plan on all of the areas of action that require improvements on the council's website.

Big Economic Plan



As part of the Big Economic Plan representatives from across the public, private and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors have come together to establish the Herefordshire Economy and Place Board to deliver the long term transformative change in our county need. At our most recent meeting discussions have focussed on maximising Government investment and reviewing priorities and progress. Discussions also centred on putting in place appropriate delivery mechanisms, following the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership functions, for individual major projects and developments.

Herefordshire County Destination Business Improvement District

I recently attended a meeting of the Board of Herefordshire County Destination Business Improvement District, the county-wide organisation, set up to support and development tourism and the local visitor economy across Herefordshire.



We received updates on their exciting marketing plans, including promoting Herefordshire's Dark Skies, as well as plans for a Spring Tourism Conference and the establishment of the Visit Herefordshire Tourism Awards. They also reported that they were about to submit an application to VisitEngland to establish the [Herefordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership](#), which will bring together partners from across the private, public and voluntary sectors.

If approved, this will act as the County interface with [VisitEngland](#) and government and national agencies, in relation to the development of tourism and the visitor economy. In order to underpin the councils support for this work I have sent a letter of support for this application).

Phosphate Mitigation Strategy - Luston, leading the way



On 29 February Cabinet agreed the Phosphate Mitigation Strategy. In addition to Constructed Integrated Wetlands, exploratory work has been undertaken with a number of schools which would see old septic tanks decommissioned and replaced with a modern Package Treatment Plant. This would reduce phosphate levels and as with the Wetland Programme, release phosphate credits. Design and

Delivery of up to two further Wetland sites and the replacement of further schools Septic Tanks with package treatment plants alongside the Council's Nutrient Trading Phosphate Mitigation Scheme will deliver a minimum of 3,471 homes.

At present, the Local Plan identifies a housing need of circa 4,000 new homes in the Lugg sub-catchment and now proposes a three Phase Nutrient Mitigation Scheme to deliver nearly all of that need. Luston is the first such site in the

world and will enable around 1,112 homes to be built whilst maintaining nutrient neutrality.

To ensure legal obligations to achieve scientific certainty beyond reasonable doubt it has been prudent to take a conservative view of the amount of phosphate mitigation that will be produced from each site. Once sites are established and being monitored it may become evident that they are performing above expectations. Should that be the case then there is a potential for a further credits enabling 416 homes which nearly closes the gap with the proposed development in the local plan.

I will look to report further on these exciting new development as they progress.

Herefordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan - planning policies relating to minerals and waste



On 8 March Council agreed the Minerals and Waste Local Plan. This new policy framework outlines the council's preferred strategy for meeting Herefordshire's minerals and waste needs up to the year 2041. It establishes targets and planning policies relating to minerals and waste activities and associated development in Herefordshire.

It has been produced taking account of the National Planning Policy Framework, up to date evidence base studies, collaborative working with statutory undertakers and ensuring close cooperation with neighbouring local authorities on cross-boundary issues.

The plan was also vigorously tested at an independent examination chaired by a Planning Inspector appointed by the Planning Inspectorate, and once adopted, the policy will be an element of the Herefordshire Local Plan.

The plan has been prepared with due regard for all relevant local plans and strategies, most notably the priorities of the Council Plan; it reflects the council's commitment to protecting and enhancing the environment and supporting the local economy by building on the county's strengths and resources. It promotes appropriate development to meet the recognised market needs for both minerals and waste, whilst ensuring that detrimental impacts are minimised and opportunities for betterment are optimised.

This brings forward policies that will help identify sites for future minerals extraction which are necessary over the plan period (to 2041). It also encourages the use of secondary and recycled materials in preference to the extraction of primary materials. It will see an increase in the amount of waste re-

used, recycled or used to recover energy and a decrease in the amount of waste disposed to landfill and help to prevent pollution.

Establishing the cross-party housing working group

Members will recall that at full Council on 8 December 2023, Council agreed to request the cabinet develop a programme to deliver an ambitious number of units of social housing (*including market-rent lifetime tenancies' affordable home ownership and market sale properties*). The proposal was to fund this through the prudent use of borrowing, capital receipts and the management of council assets in time for this to be agreed by Council as part of next year's capital programme.



In order to progress this motion, Cabinet is seeking to establish a cross-party housing working group to oversee the development of the strategy and associated delivery programme. We are currently agreeing the scope of this work to include:

- Developing the Affordable Housing Strategy for Herefordshire and the associated five-year delivery programme.
- Engaging with housing registered providers and housing developers operating in Herefordshire to secure commitment to the strategy and programme of works.
- Reviewing and advising Cabinet on best practice in relation to affordable housing, particularly in a rural context.
- Advising on current land ownership and opportunities to acquire land to deliver against identified priorities, and
- Reviewing and considering the implications for the Council of changes in national housing policy or legislation

It is our intention that the Housing Working Group will be an advisory board to Cabinet and will be chaired by the Cabinet Member – Economy and Growth with cross party input. It is expected that the Working Group will meet monthly. It is also our intention that the working group will consider the outputs from the request for the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee review of good practice in local authority housing delivery. Their recommendations are anticipated to feed directly into Cabinet by June 2024.

In the meantime, the Chief Executive has already met with the Chief Executives of the main Registered Providers operating in the county and will be hosting a follow up meeting with them in early April.

New Road Strategy for Herefordshire



Herefordshire Council's Cabinet (Thursday 28 March) will discuss a new road strategy for Hereford, including the recommendation to prioritise the progress of the development of a bypass to the west of Hereford. As outlined in the Core Strategy and emerging draft Local Plan, the county needs to develop the infrastructure needed to:

- Support growth in the county - There is a requirement to develop around 16,100 new homes in the county by 2041, with many of these being planned for Hereford. Delivering all these new homes is not possible without strengthening our local infrastructure. Reducing congestion and improving journey times will be a boost to local businesses and improve residents' access to work, education, training and services.
- Improve transport connections and strengthen the resilience of the network – Vehicles travelling north to south through the county mostly go through Hereford to cross the river. Creating another road bridge across the River Wye will reduce reliance on Greyfriars Bridge and the A49 through the city, improving journey times and improving resilience of the network.
- Promote better health and wellbeing for our residents – reducing the volume of traffic on roads in the City creates the opportunity to deliver improvements to walking, cycling and public space in the city.
- Improve local air quality and public places – reducing congestion will help improve air quality in the City making it a cleaner more attractive place to visit and spend time.

The decision we're taking at our Cabinet meeting at 2.30pm on 28 March is an important one for the future of our City and our county. It's vital we build the infrastructure to support much needed housing development and economic growth, as set out in our Local Plan. You can watch the meeting via [this link](#)

Local Transport Fund – local infrastructure improvement

I was very pleased that the government has recognised that councils should have more control over investment in local infrastructure. Herefordshire will benefit from just over £101M worth of funding. More details about the scheme will be published in due course, but we are excited about the changes that this could deliver locally.

Cllr Philip Price and I met with Guy Opperman, the Minister for Roads and Local Transport at the Department for Transport. He has confirmed that his department is keen to work with us to help deliver the right road strategy for Hereford.



We also continue to look to our regional transport infrastructure colleagues - Midland Connect - to present our growth plans and our priority areas for infrastructure. I had a further meeting with Sir John Peace, Chairman of Midlands Connect where I sought press home Herefordshire's case as a credible partner for investment.

Development Work at Model farm, Ross-on-Wye



£8million funding commitment by Herefordshire Council for the first phase of development at Model Farm. This significant investment will enable development to start on the employment land this year, establishing all the necessary infrastructure for the whole site including utility supply, road access and required changes adjoining the A40.

Model Farm forms part of the Ross Town investment plan, which has been a driver of the need for this investment. When the first phase of work is complete the site will provide the opportunity for the private development of a mix of office and industrial space across four acres initially. This will then act as a catalyst for future phases of development across the remainder of the site.

Transfer of the Local Enterprise Partnership's Functions

As I reported at the end of last year, the Government announced that they would no longer fund Local Enterprise Partnerships. From April 2024, government will support local authorities to take on Local Enterprise Partnership functions. Namely, business representation, strategic economic planning, and responsibility for the delivery of government programmes where directed.



Herefordshire Council will play the lead role for the Marches Joint Committee with Shropshire and Telford and the Wrekin Councils to oversee this transition. Our first meeting was on 7 March where we collectively agreed the transfer agreement. This sets out the legal framework for the transfer of functions, current schemes, staffing, pension obligations, existing grant funding contracts, and publicly funded assets to the Local Authorities.

The Joint Committee comprises 3 members; the Leader or nominated lead portfolio holder from each local authority's. The Marches Joint Committee will have delegated powers within the respective budgetary and policy frameworks set by each of the constituent Councils.

Shropshire Council remains as the accountable body for all legacy arrangements. This includes the transfer of both benefits and obligations. The transfer will be completed by 12 March 2024. This will bring to a close the current government funded activity for the Marches Growth Hub in March (2024) and the Marches Career Hub in August 2024. The government has confirmed an allocation of up to £240,000 to accountable bodies, such as Shropshire Council, in 2024/25 to meet the on-going costs of Local Enterprise Partnership transition.

Update on our new waste collection contract.



I am pleased to announce the award of the Recyclables and Waste Collection Contract to FCC Environment following the conclusion of a thorough and robust procurement process.

This new contract represents continuity of service for residents, and the new arrangements also include a number of innovations, enhancements and inherent flexibility to respond to anticipated changes over the term of the contract. Key to this will be the permanent deployment of two fully electric collection vehicles in the fleet primarily to serve Hereford City Centre, which is a step towards the Council and FCC's Net Zero goals.

The new Recyclables and Waste collection service will be key to helping us to minimise waste and increase reuse, repair and recycling. It will also provide a

significant contribution to our investment in low carbon projects, and strengthen our stewardship of Herefordshire's natural resources.

FCC is our current collection provider and bring with them a wealth of experience and knowledge of completing household and business waste collections across Herefordshire. We are pleased to continue working with them, and we are confident that our partnership will deliver the stated environmental benefits while continuing to provide an excellent service for county residents

Free activities for eligible children over the Easter break

Herefordshire Council's school holidays Easter programme is open for activity bookings from Monday 4 March. Parents of children (from reception to year 11) who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals can now book up to 16 hours of free Easter activities for their child. Eligible children will be able to try out new and exciting activities, from trampolining to horse riding, cheerleading, circus school, parkour and lots more!



Children will also be offered a tasty nutritious meal at every session. Eligible families can book their places through the holiday activities page on the Talk Community website: www.talkcommunitydirectory.org/holidayactivities

The Council's latest upcoming key decisions are available on our [Forward Plan](#)

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