

HEREFORDSHIRE MARKET TOWNS FORUM

You are invited to attend the Meeting of the Market Towns Forum to be held on Wednesday 26th July 2017 commencing at 7:00pm at the HALC Offices, Berrows Building, Bath Street, Hereford.

AGENDA

1. **WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

2. **MINUTES**

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th May 2017 (attached).

3. **MATTERS ARISING**

4. **HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Claire Ward, Solicitor to the Council, has been invited to attend the meeting to discuss issues relating to the revised Code of Conduct.

5. **TOWN MATTERS**

- (a) **Town Centre Development Manager** – Following the completion of Ledbury's Town Plan, recommendations emerged including the possible appointment of a Town Centre Development Manager (TCDM). Ledbury wishes to enquire whether other market towns would like to share a TCDM. For discussion.
- (b) **Herefordshire Council Budget Consultation** – Leominster Town Council is keen to understand the priorities of its fellow market towns and what they would wish to see Herefordshire Council priorities. The following has been pasted from the HC website:

The council budget ensures that corporate and service plans are developed in the context of available resources and that those resources are allocated in line with corporate priorities set out in the Corporate Plan. Herefordshire's key priority areas are to:

- Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life
- Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives and
- Invest in projects to improve roads, create jobs and build more homes

Herefordshire Council is funded by a combination of grants from Government, local Council Tax, local business rates and charges for some council services. This year we will spend £354 million providing services to residents and businesses in Herefordshire. Your Council Tax contributes to just under a quarter of this budget - around £93 million. The remaining £261 million is funded by business rates, Government grants and charging for some services. Among the services provided by the council, your Council Tax contributes to:

- Adult social care
- Children and young people's services
- Waste collection and disposal

- Cultural and community services
- Highways and transportation
- Planning

Leominster Town Council would like to see the following considered:

- The continuation of financial support for the Enhanced Lengthsman Scheme;
- The continuation of financial support for the P3 scheme;
- Increased expenditure on highway network improvements with greater clarity and consultation with local parish and town councils on priorities;
- Town centre/public realm improvements in market towns;
- Additional investment in public transport especially in rural areas where an economic case can be made;
- Improved waste collection and litter bin emptying to improve cleanliness and care of the county for both residents and visitors;
- Options to work hand in hand with town and parish councils to help deliver open spaces maintenance, litter bin emptying and other quality of life services on behalf of local residents;
- The option for town and parish councils to act as contractors to HC, to receive payment to help deliver services contracted to town and parish councils.

6. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETINGS

7. CONFIDENTIAL SESSION

This item is reserved for items of a confidential nature which members wish to raise, if necessary. This session will only be minuted if members wish.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 27th September 2017 at Berrows Building at 7.00pm.

HEREFORDSHIRE MARKET TOWNS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting held on 24th May 2017 at 7 pm in the HLAC Offices, in the Berrows Building, Hereford

Members stood in silence at the start of the meeting in memory of those killed in the recent terrorist outrage in Manchester.

Present : Cllr Felicity Norman (Leominster), Cllrs Roger Page and Alison Dodds (Bromyard and Winslow) with Barry Swinford (Acting Clerk Bromyard and Winslow), Cllr Charles Nichols and Brian Wilcox (Hereford) with Steve Kerry (Clerk Hereford and minutes)

In attendance : Councillor Patricia Morgan, Deputy Leader of Herefordshire Council

Apologies for absence: were noted from Cllrs Angela and Roger Pendleton (Leominster) and from Paul Russell (Clerk to Leominster and the MTF). Steve Kerry was thanked for standing in for Paul Russell to clerk this meeting.

Election of Chairman: Brian Wilcox nominated, Roger Page seconded and it was unanimously resolved that Felicity Norman continue to serve as Chairman of the Forum.

Welcome: members introduced themselves and noted that members from Ross, Kington and Ledbury would hopefully be joining us at future meetings.

Minutes : The minutes of the meeting of 29th March were approved with the correction of the date of the next meeting which should have been 24th May 2017. There were no matters arising.

Herefordshire Council: Steve Kerry reported that Cllr Johnson had confirmed he was urgently required at a parish council meeting in his ward and Cllr Patricia Morgan, Deputy Leader of Herefordshire Council, would be attending in his place. The Chairman thanked Patricia Morgan of stepping in at short notice.

Discussion began with Roger Page raising issues connected to S106 and possible under-resourcing of the officer designated to deliver this programme. The issue was also raised of how town councils can influence the selection of projects for s106 funding which is a matter of great local importance, and upon which members often feel excluded by planning officers and developers. Delays in responding to correspondence were noted, some of three months. Patricia Morgan responded that the Council is reviewing the operation of planning to make sure it is working as well as it should be, and said two questions need to be looked at, is the s106 policy wrong or is the policy correct but not being operated properly. If it was the latter it might well be a resource issue as all agreed the s.106 officer was a competent person with a very heavy workload. The discussion continued with a request for the parish councils to be involved from the start in a three cornered conversation with developers and Herefordshire planners, not simply formally consulted at the end of a process when an application is made for consent. It was noted that there is a shared experience of developers agreeing to both planning conditions and s206 elements and then incrementally going back over these and retracting their agreement, arguing that if conditions are not relaxed the development will become non-viable. Patricia Morgan affirmed that in planning the applicant is the customer and there should be a consistent level of service, but that once agreements are made it should be difficult to withdraw from them and officers must be prepared to stand firm under pressure to allow such retractions.

It was noted that some developers do work very positively with the local councils and Felicity Norman testified to an example of this in Leominster. Roger Page noted that development had

finally started on a key site in Bromyard, after eight years, within the core strategy as modified by Bromyard and Winslow Council after the original proposals from Herefordshire Council flew in the face of local views and the practical possibilities of various sites.

At this point it was noted that the previous MTF meeting had sent a lot of time on s106 agreements and that at the last meeting it was suggested that the whole Herefordshire Council might struggle to remain a viable unit of local government and that it would be good to hear Patricia Morgan's views on that. She stated that Herefordshire had been through a very difficult financial period, but that a lot of cuts had been made and that when she and the Leader had attended a meeting reviewing medium term financial strategies among councils in the West Midlands they had both felt that Herefordshire is in a better position than most, with a clear plan and a realistic idea of what it can achieve. There are, and always will be, major risks around adult social care especially if serious reductions in immigration lead to more severe labour shortages than are already apparent in key areas. The Council commission domiciliary care and many providers are struggling with the rates that the Council can afford and some are leaving the market. Herefordshire has a lot of small and not very profitable care homes. When the Council tried to re-commission domiciliary care there were no bids and therefore re-enablement is coming back in house, at least as far as provision by Hoople.

Charles Nicholls asked the wider concern of 2019 when there is no redistribution of NNDR, virtually no rate support grant and Herefordshire still has a huge burden of historic debt as well as its ongoing costs and liabilities affected the Council's viability. Whilst Patricia Morgan felt increased co-operation with neighbours on joint projects (such as with Worcestershire on waste disposal) was part of the answer she did not feel that the abolition or merger of Herefordshire Council into a neighbouring body was likely, if only because all the neighbouring councils had a similar, or worse, financial situation.

Felicity Norman raised the issue of reliance on volunteers and the clear evidence that many volunteers, predominantly elderly, were approaching exhaustion, as were many parish councillors. Herefordshire Carers Support have had funding cut at a time when they are desperately needed. Patricia Morgan pointed out that HCS had some 5,000 carers on their books out of some 30,000 across the county so channeling all the funding for carers through them wasn't correct. She had approved the cut in support for that service on that basis. Gary Swinford noted that due to cuts in voluntary support Bromyard Library one day last week had no librarian, no advice worker and no one who knew how to operate the book issuing system.

Charles Nicholls asked for a resume of the results of these points being raised to be reported back to the Forum. Patricia Morgan said this would be hard given the range of issues raised but the points would be communicated, especially those relevant to the current review within Herefordshire Council of planning processes.

Updates and Information: Charles Nicholls reported that following his mayoral year in Hereford that he is setting up a local charity to support carers, especially young carers, for people with dementia.

Steve Kerry reported that Hereford has gained the Purple Flag accreditation for its night time economy reflecting the joined up working of licensing and taxi control, street pastors, the police, premises security, CCTV, radio link and Nigh Shift in Commercial Road. Other members noted that many of their young people see Hereford as the place to go for night life in the county. Roger Page reported that 76 new homes are being built on the Porthouse Farm site, in the right place, after strenuous representations by the town council to correct the core strategy. A much larger application for 500 new homes in line with the strategy is expected from Bovis and is likely to be passed. He also briefed member on a recent Appeal Court judgement (Lindbloom) that

asserts that where a housing land supply has not been found to deliver a core strategy then the other policies of the planning authority become defunct, BUT crucially it is up to the decision maker (i.e. Herefordshire's Planning Officers and Committee) to determine how much weight to give to defunct policies.

Felicity Norman, following the earlier discussion about dependence on volunteers, reported a time bank initiative which is working well, rewarding volunteers for their time with concessions to events etc. The town is now officially dementia friendly after many shop staff and others have received training in understanding the needs of people with the condition. Felicity also reported that the new Mayor of Leominster has adopted the Peter and Janice McCaull Trust as his charity, and that despite the core strategy unwanted piecemeal development of smaller sites was still happening rather than a properly planned and strategic approach aligning infrastructure to development.

Items for future meeting: It was noted that Claire Ward was invited to talk about the Code of Conduct and this was extended to include the Constitution of Herefordshire Council. Members were asked to send question before the meeting to Paul Russell at Leominster so Claire would be fully prepared.

Confidential session: nothing noted

Date of Next Meeting: 7 pm, 26th July 2017 at the HALC offices