Summary of results – phase 2 of the public consultation of Herefordshire Council's budget.

Background and Introduction

Impact Consultancy and Research and Max Bassett Research were jointly commissioned to consult with residents of Herefordshire about the draft priorities for the County for the next four years as part of the Council's Corporate Plan development. The consultation was spilt into two phases; the first looking at wider public priorities and the second, contained in this report, looked at more detailed options for allocating budget against preferred activities under themes. Six Market Towns were visited, and token boxes were used for 10 priority themes. Participants were given three tokens to vote for their priorities, and were followed up with either more detailed questions which replicated the online formal consultation run by Herefordshire Council or a conversation about why it was a priority and what should Herefordshire Council be doing?

The following are the results from visiting the six market town locations:

- Bromyard Village Hall (21/11/19)
- Leominster Corn Square (22/11/19)
- Hereford High Town (23/11/19)
- Ledbury Under the Market House (26/11/19)
- Ross-on-Wye Library (28/11/19)
- Kington (29/11/19)

Similar to the phase one consultation and was again very well received. The focus was more on the quality of engagement and conversation rather than numbers of consultees.

Across these six locations approximately 137 people were spoken to (five of which were younger people, aged 30 or under). All completed the token exercise and were asked to vote with three tokens for their top three priorities where they felt Herefordshire Council should focus their discretionary spend.

It should be noted that the vast majority of people who participated in this phase of the consultation were older which may reflect the location and time of day that the pop-ups were undertaken. No targeted consultation was undertaken with other demographic groups as part of phase two.

Priority	Number of tokens
Affordable housing (publicly owned)	75
Maintenance of highways and public space	72
Care homes and accommodation for vulnerable people (children, young people and adults)	72
Public transport	59
Planning and investment to address the climate emergency	56
Tourism	24
Development of community super hubs	19
Continuing to maintain publicly owned land and buildings	15
Core Strategy review	15
Digital and better use of technology	3
Total	410
Number of people	**137**

These results are largely consistent with the first phase of consultations, with the exception that planning to address the climate emergency was less important, however this may reflect the demographic of the majority of the consultees.

After participants had 'voted' they were asked for more detail about why they had voted that way and what they would like to see Herefordshire Council do in relation to that area. In addition, five out of the ten themes the same questions were asked as those in the formal online consultation, results for those are shown below.

Community Super Hubs

Do you think Herefordshire would benefit from developing these hubs?	
Yes	11
No	0
No opinion	0

If yes, which types of services, activities and support do you feel would be beneficial to be part of a community super hub near you?

Health and social care services	9
Children's centres	8
Library services	6
Small business space (office space, business start-up space)	5
Skills and learning space	10
Wellbeing help, advice and activities	10
Electric car charging points	5
Active travel hub (e.g. Beryl bikes)	4
Cultural services (e.g. arts, museums)	3
Other (please indicate below)	3

Getting people into community environment, provide training on IT and the Internet
To learn technology
Bank presence to help to learn how to use a bank e.g. independence life skills
Access to council services, trained number of staff on all subjects, difficulty discussing private matters in a public place

Where do you think community super hubs would be best located?

Hereford City	3
Market Towns	6
Larger Villages	2
Rural areas	0
No opinion	0
Other	1
Floating e.g. Visiting larger villages monthly	

Messages:

Very mixed views about these hubs, no strong sense of how they could be used or what services could be provided. However, there was support for making services easier to access.

Community assets

How do you think Herefordshire Council should make the best use of publicly owned land and buildings?

Retain them and manage them on behalf of everyone in the county	6
Transfer them to into community hands to develop and maintain at the local level (e.g. transfer to town/parish councils)	6
Sell them and use this money to re-invest in developing new assets (e.g. publicly owned housing)	1
No opinion	0

Comments

Sold off the farms - why not let people farm on them and pay rent
Retain or transfer - depending on what it is
Invite people in and make money
Kington - only transfer them if they are transferred in good condition and the resources to maintain them are provided x 3

Affordable Housing

Do you think Herefordshire Council should invest money in developing additional affordable housing stock and retaining it in public ownership?

Yes	36
No	1
No opinion	2

£100 million of investment would deliver around 1,000 additional homes. What sort of scale of investment should we consider making?

£100 million is about right	12
£100 million is not enough	15
£100 million is too much	2
No opinion	6

What do you think the priorities should be in terms of housing?

	Very important	Important	Less Important
Homes for older people – built in clusters to enable support needs to be met	17	9	8
Starter homes (one- and two-bedroom properties) to enable people to get onto the housing ladder or to make renting more affordable	31	6	0
Re-developing existing properties and bringing empty properties back into use	32	3	4
Building new public owned housing (Council houses) with shared ownership schemes	15	6	16

Some of the themes coming through the comments were about:

- Not necessarily grouping older people's homes together, as this can lead to isolation, and they may want to choose where they live. There was strong support for more mixed housing schemes.
- Starter homes – there was support for making renting more affordable
- Less support for shared ownership schemes
- There were comments about the design of houses, estates and the infrastructure to go with it. Innovative design and quality of the design particularly in relation to the green agenda e.g. insulation, solar panels.

Highways and public spaces

Which of the following public realm services do you feel should be the priority?

Type of service	Number of ticks
Maintenance of existing roads, including pothole and bridge maintenance	38
Improvements to existing roads, including re-surfacing, speed reduction and safety schemes	22
Managing water on the road network, such as gully emptying and maintaining drainage	21
Street cleansing, including litter and fly-tipping	17
Maintenance of walkways / cycleways	14
Maintenance of parks, open spaces, landscaping and trees, including playgrounds, crematoriums, grass and verge cutting	8
Winter maintenance, including gritting	8
Street lighting and traffic signal maintenance and improvements	4
Public Rights of Way management and maintenance	2

Would you support closer community involvement in setting the BBLP annual plan, involving parish councils or neighbourhood development partnerships?

Yes	15
No	0
No opinion	0

Some of the themes coming through the comments about highways were about:

- Quality of roads and pavements were a high priority in Leominster
- A bypass and the levels of traffic congestion were high priorities in Hereford
- Potholes were raised as a primary concern across the county
- Street sweeping needs to happen more
- Management of water on the road network
- Contractors needs to be more accountable and their work needs to be monitored more closely

Public transport

Are you currently a regular user of public transport? (at least once a week)

Yes	10
No	21

If no, why? (tick all that apply)

Reason	Number of ticks
Timetables do not match my needs	10
Lack of availability of public transport in my local area	8
Too expensive	5
Too unreliable	5
Lack of late-night availability	5
Poor connectivity for onward journeys	4
Takes too long	1
Too crowded	1
Not safe	1
Cannot transport shopping/bags/luggage easily	0

Some of the themes coming through the comments about public transport were about:

- If they can drive, walk or cycle people often choose to do that.
- Some of the timetabling is unclear and service not provided at suitable times
- However people still feel that public transport is very much needed as there are those that rely on it.
- Better integrated public transport, specifically able to choose whether to catch a bus, cycle or walk or a combination.
- Strong views that public transport would not be an option in rural areas.

Care homes

- This was felt to be a priority for both young people and older people. People also highlighted the need for care homes for people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health issues.
- Quality of the service is key, cost is too expensive and there was a lack of availability of services.
- Not necessary that Herefordshire Council should own their own care accommodation, but they should have better oversight/control of existing provision.
- Services that enabled vulnerable people to stay in their own homes and remain independent were also highlighted.

Tourism
- Tourist information offices need to be invested in, offices have been closed.
- The look of the town., e.g. litter, graffiti, state of the pavements
- Not done enough to promote the county and its offerings
- In Hereford City, concern about the shops. There were a few views that we wanted to maintain the shops they had.

Core strategy review
- Very low choice overall, it is felt that people did not fully understand the implications of this.
- If consultation was going to be done that it is comprehensive and is done well.
- Although some felt it was essential if radical change is to happen in the county, specifically climate change and transport.

Digital and better use of technology

- Overall support for this issue was low. A lot of people who we consulted with were elderly so that may reflect the view the people would like face to face services rather than use of services over the internet.
- Broadband and Fastershire were mentioned and people felt that access to adequate broadband needed to be improved and consistent across the county
- In the short amount of time people spent talking with us and thinking about all the ten options, we don't feel that people considered this priority much compared to the other priorities or recognise its scope and potential therefore did not vote for it during this consultation.

Climate emergency
- There was a clear steer that Herefordshire Council needs to show leadership on this agenda and reflect the climate emergency in their policies and action e.g. building energy efficient housing, having a green public transport plan
- Where they don't have direct influence they need to lobby and educate.
- A number of local partnerships / organisations were mentioned specifically in relation to accessing specialist knowledge to help plan and advise on this agenda
- People specifically mentioned initiatives linked to renewable energy, use of electric vehicles, flood prevention (including tree planting schemes to mitigate flooding)

Other

There were a number of comments about there being better contract management including managing overspends, better scrutiny and consequences for not meeting goals.

In summary what we heard from members of the public during both phases of the corporate plan budget consultation was firstly that they very much appreciated being asked and also the hope that it makes a difference and is listened to. Maintenance of roads and addressing the climate emergency were the top two priorities that came out highest in the first phase when looking at broad themes. During the second phase when there were more detailed options put forward for discussion the top three areas the public wanted to see investment in were Affordable housing (publicly owned), Maintenance of highways and public space and Care homes and accommodation for vulnerable people (children, young people and adults).

Affordable housing was felt to be important, particularly starter homes or making renting more affordable, and also bringing empty properties back into use. Maintenance of highways was again very high, potholes in general, and then more specifically pavement and road conditions were a priority in Leominster, and traffic congestion and a bypass/second river bridge in Hereford. Care homes were seen as important with many residents reporting *"better vote for care homes as I may need one soon"* which reflected the demographic who more readily engaged with the consultation. However there were strong views that care homes for vulnerable adults and children were just as important, including those for physical and learning disabilities and mental health.

Public transport and addressing the climate emergency were the next highest issues. There were many who felt public transport was important for those who rely on it but didn't use it themselves, often as they chose other means of travel such as car, cycle or walking. A number commented that it was not available at the right times, particularly in the rural areas, but a joined up sustainable integrated public transport system would be welcome *"Public transport can be amazing e.g. London, therefore should be scope to make it better".*

Addressing the climate emergency was very much supported and many felt Herefordshire Council should have a strong role in leading on this and challenging/supporting others to do so also. Some very real practical things Herefordshire Council could do easily were around renewable energy such as solar panels on all of its own buildings, new builds/developments meeting zero carbon targets, and the role of public transport and electric vehicles. Others include recycling and tree planting. One resident felt the plans to tackle the climate emergency *"should be ambitious but achievable with ambition".*

The priority for tourism was really about making sure information is available, promoting what Herefordshire has to offer and supporting the shops in the high streets. *"Lots of people visit and travel through Herefordshire and bring money in, we need to provide leisure activities and access to them. They need to know about it - more information. Stop closing Tourist Information offices. Shops in Bromyard are struggling, visitors would use them."*

There were a couple of priorities where members of the public did not fully understand or appreciate such as comparing better use of digital technology and the core strategy review to the very 'real' issues such as roads and care homes.