

Priority testing for Herefordshire Council's Corporate Plan – Results and Key Messages

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. It was agreed that priorities to be consulted on were:

- Maintenance of roads and public spaces
- Protect and enhance our environment
- Start building new affordable council housing
- More travel choices e.g. cycling, buses, community transport
- Invest in job creation skills and training
- Help people to help themselves e.g. advice, support, community projects

In addition to these six 'headline' priorities the consultation focused on the sub priorities agreed by the Cabinet under the themes of 'Community, Economy and Environment'.

Views on the headline priorities were collected via 6 'voting boxes'. Each participant was given 10 tokens to place in the 6 boxes according to their personal views and priorities. For those interested in commenting on the sub-priorities a 'sticky dot' exercise was used which encouraged people to place a green sticky dot against those sub priorities with which they strongly agreed and a red sticky dot against those with which they strongly disagreed. Participants were also encouraged to leave comments or indicate 'missing' priorities on a comments sheet.

The consultation was toured around the county via 'pop-up' events which took place in the following locations:

- Belmont Tesco (21/10/19)
- Our Lady's Church (20/10/19)
- Friday's prayers at Kindle Centre (18/10/19)
- Echo (Leominster) (18/10/19)
- Bromyard Farmers Market at the Town Hall (17/10/19)
- High Town (12/10/19)
- Kington (11/10/19)
- Livestock Market (10/12/19)
- Hereford Sixth form College (7/10/19)
- Gypsy and Romany Travelling families (7/10/19)
- Leominster (4/10/19)
- Shypp (Leominster) (3/10/19)
- Ross Library (3/10/19)
- Blueschool House (2/10/19)
- Ledbury Town (1/10/19)
- Blueschool House (30/9/19)
- Herefordshire Federation of Young Farmers – Ploughing Match (29/9/19)
- Members Briefing (27/9/19)
- Hereford High Town Market (26/9/19)
- Parish Council Summit (20/9/19)

1,056 people participated in the consultation through their engagement in these events.

Alongside the pop-up events the same exercise was replicated online and accessed via the Herefordshire Council website, in which an additional **358** residents responded.

A total of **1,414** people were engaged in the consultation process. A key element of the consultation was the engagement of the seldom heard who are traditionally less likely to participate in public consultation exercises. In order to address this the consultation engaged with:

- Young people on the edge of care who are supported through SHYPP housing
- Adults with learning disabilities through an Echo meeting
- Gypsy and Roma travelling families
- A small number of people who identified themselves as homeless

Hereford Sixth Form College and a Young Farmers event were visited to ensure the views of young people were represented and as part of the market town events young people were given red tokens to enable their views to be differentiated. Views from ethnic minority communities were gathered by attending Friday Prayers for the Muslim community at the Kindle Centre and attending Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Catholic Church specifically to speak to Eastern European residents, with the use of translated material on the token boxes.

Number of adults spoken to at events	766
Numbers of Young people at events	271
Numbers who have completed the survey	358
Numbers from detailed discussions with seldom heard groups	18
Total consulted to date	1,414

The public consultation was very well received both in terms of the use of ‘pop-up’ stands in high footfall areas and the use of the voting boxes. Many positive comments were received from consultees about how good it was to see Herefordshire Council out seeking the views of residents and to have the opportunity to talk to Council staff and Councillors face-to-face. Whilst demographic data was not collected at the stands the perception was that the ‘market stand’ approach attracted a wide demographic and engaged a bigger pool of ‘non-traditional’ consultees than a public consultation event would have attracted.

Survey Monkey participants were asked to self-select any of the protected characteristics/ areas of interest to which they belonged. The results of which are shown below:

Area of interest	Number of respondents
Live in a rural area	218
Below 30 years old	26
Above retirement age	90
Own your own business	61
From an ethnic minority background	10
Have a disability/long term health condition	46
Care for someone with a disability/long term health condition (including old age)	50
Are/or live with a member of the armed forces or a veteran	21
Answered	283

Summary of the Six Priorities

In order to gather people's views on the six proposed priorities each participant was given 10 tokens to allocate across the six ballot boxes. Participants were asked to allocate all 10 tokens according to their own personal priorities. The same exercise could not be replicated exactly on the online version of the consultation therefore participants were asked to rank each of these priorities.

Tokens at public events	Total
Maintenance of roads and public spaces	2,574
Protect and enhance our environment	2,161
Start building new affordable council housing	1,668
More travel choices e.g. cycling, buses, community transport	1,448
Invest in job creation skills and training	1,367
Help people to help themselves e.g. advice, support, community projects	1,158

Survey Monkey ranked score	Total
Protect and enhance our environment	1,343
Maintenance of roads and public spaces	1,253
Invest in job creation skills and training	1,215
More travel choices e.g. cycling, buses, community transport	1,213
Help people to help themselves e.g. advice, support, community projects	1,067
Start building new affordable council housing	1,015

Combined results from the tokens and survey monkey

Maintenance of roads and public spaces	3,827
Protect and enhance our environment	3,504
Start building new affordable council housing	2,683
More travel choices e.g. cycling, buses, community transport	2,661
Invest in job creation skills and training	2,582
Help people to help themselves e.g. advice, support, community projects	2,225

Out of the six draft priorities:

- Maintenance of roads and public spaces came out highest in terms of votes.
- Protect and enhance our environment was the 2nd most popular priority (N.b. this priority received 500 votes from the Sixth Form College).
- The 3rd highest priority, 'Build our own sustainable council houses', is over 800 votes behind the 2nd ranked priority.
- 'Help people to help themselves' was the lowest priority, with over 350 votes behind the next priority.

The top 3 priorities for young people are consistent with the top 3 priorities of the consultation as a whole i.e.; environment, roads and housing. However 'Protect and Enhance your Environment is seen as the top priority for young people, particularly young people from the 6th Form College and other young people that participated in the pop up events.

Strong views about the sub-priorities

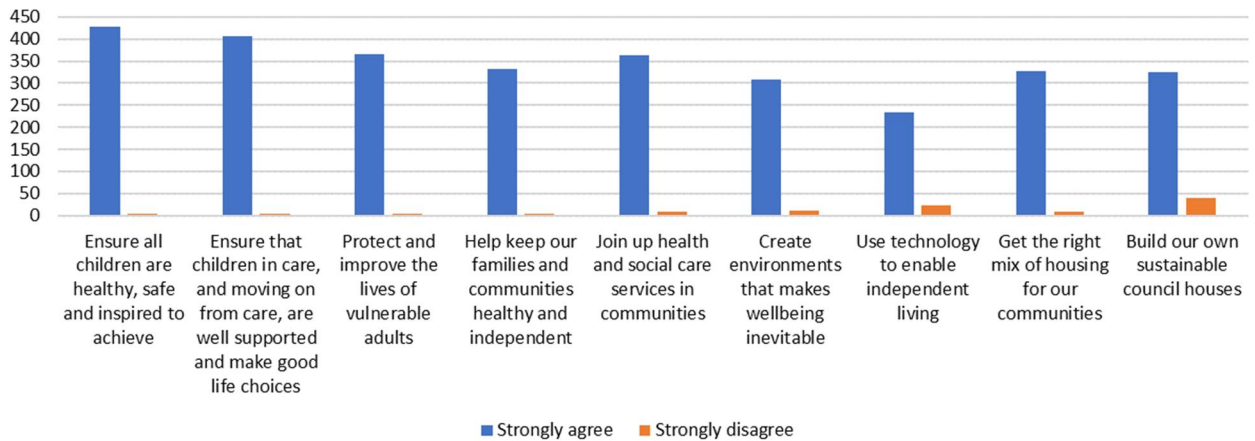
Participants were asked to stick green dots against any of the priorities that they strongly agreed with and red dots against the sub-priorities they strongly disagreed with. Participants completing the online survey were also asked to do a similar exercise. A summary of the face to face consultation exercise and the online survey is shown below for the sub-priorities for each of the three themes.

Community - Build communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together		
	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Ensure all children are healthy, safe and inspired to achieve	427	4
Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices	407	3
Protect and improve the lives of vulnerable adults	366	3
Help keep our families and communities healthy and independent	332	5
Join up health and social care services in communities	364	9
Create environments that makes wellbeing inevitable	308	11
Use technology to enable independent living	234	24
Get the right mix of housing for our communities	328	9
Build our own sustainable council houses	326	39

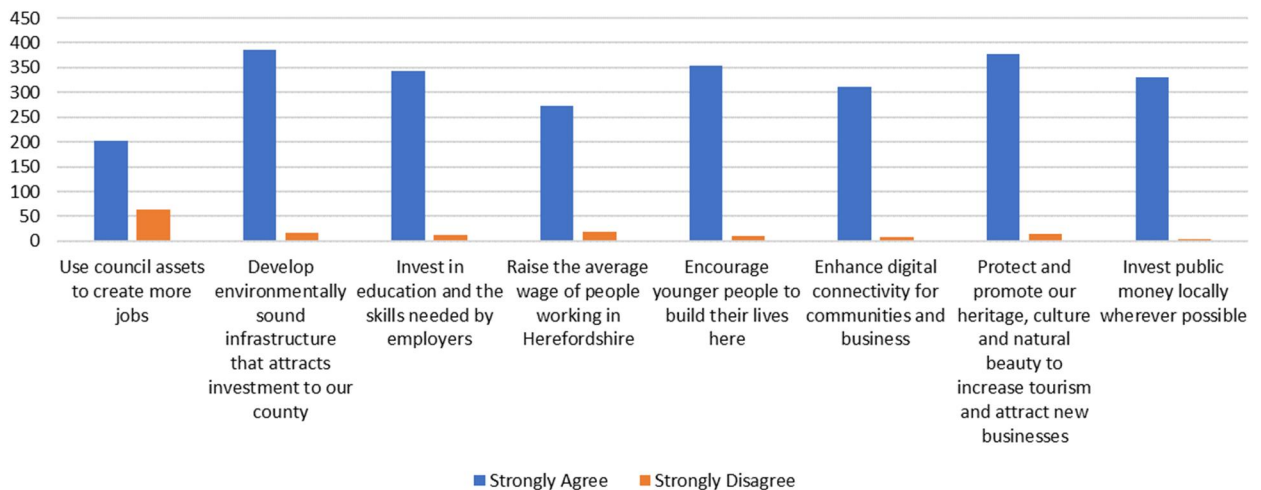
Economy - Support an economy which builds on the county's strengths and resources		
	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Use council assets to create more jobs	202	64
Develop environmentally sound infrastructure that attracts investment to our county	386	16
Invest in education and the skills needed by employers	343	12
Raise the average wage of people working in Herefordshire	272	19
Encourage younger people to build their lives here	353	11
Enhance digital connectivity for communities and business	311	8
Protect and promote our heritage, culture and natural beauty to increase tourism and attract new businesses	378	15
Invest public money locally wherever possible	331	3

Environment - Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live		
	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
Understand our carbon footprint and act to reduce it	349	23
Lead our transition to a low carbon economy	326	32
Improve and extend travel options throughout the county	394	14
Ensure the best use of the county's natural resources	336	11
Reduce waste and increase reuse, repair and recycling	426	6
Protect the county's biodiversity, value nature and uphold environmental standards	377	14
Address the climate emergency and support behaviour change of residents and businesses	368	31

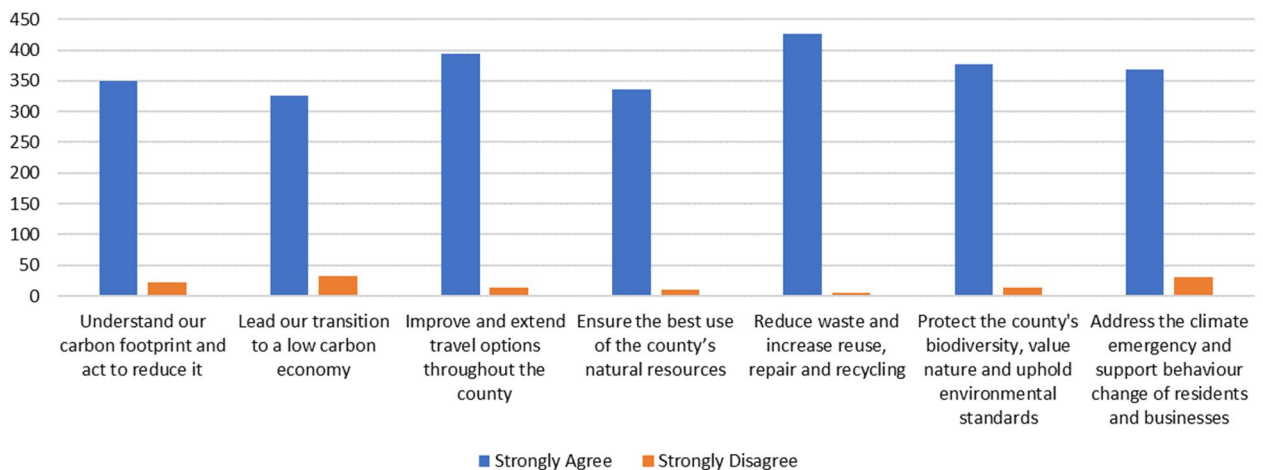
Community - Build communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together



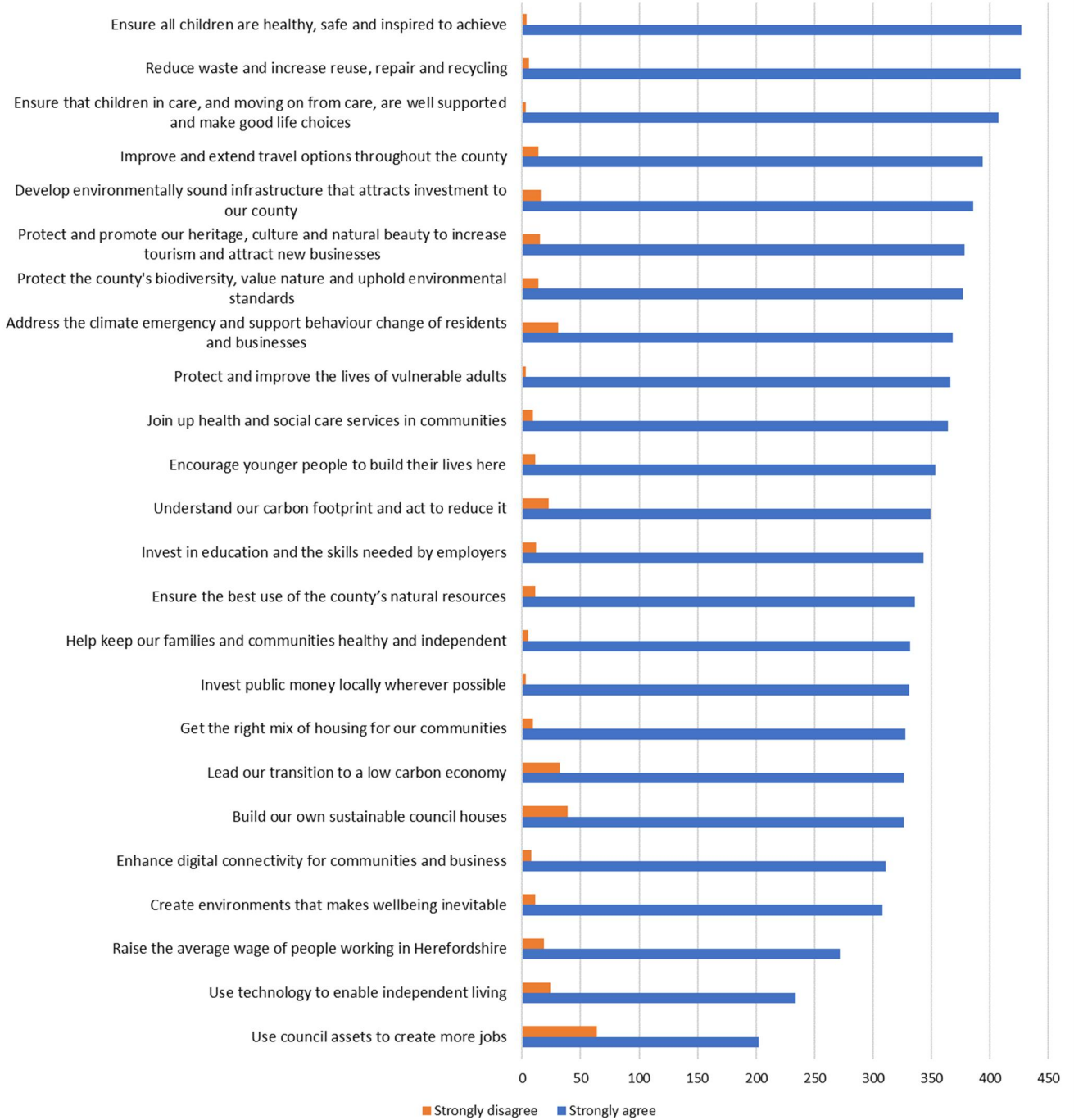
Economy - Support an economy which builds on the county's strengths and resources



Environment - Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live



Sub-priorities of HC Coporate Plan



Across the three themes the sub-priorities people strongly **agreed** with were: -

- Ensure all children are healthy, safe and inspired to achieve (Communities) -
- Reduce waste and increase reuse, repair and recycling (Environment) -
- Ensure that children in care, and moving on from care, are well supported and make good life choices (Communities)
- Improve and extend travel options throughout the county (Environment)
- Develop environmentally sound infrastructure that attracts investment to our county (Economy)
- Protect and promote our heritage, culture and natural beauty to increase tourism and attract new businesses (Economy)

Whilst there were some sub-priorities people strongly disagreed with, the numbers doing this were much lower than those in agreement. The sub-priorities that people most disagreed with were: -

- Use council assets to create more jobs (Economy) -
- Build our own sustainable council houses (Communities) -
- Lead our transition to a low carbon economy (Environment) -
- Address the climate emergency and support behaviour change of residents and businesses - (Environment)
- Use technology to enable independent living (Communities)
- Understand our carbon footprint and act to reduce it (Environment)
- Raise the average wage of people working in Herefordshire (Economy)

Overview of Comments relating to the 6 ‘token’ boxes

A common response from people completing the voting box exercise was that they felt that all of the six proposed priorities were important and that they couldn’t choose between them. However, there was also an awareness and acknowledgement from many people that there are insufficient resources to fully support all of these priorities.

START BUILDING AFFORDABLE COUNCIL HOUSING

- The need for affordable housing in general was strongly supported. However, our perception is that the subtlety of “start building our own council housing” was missed by many people.
- This is further evidenced by the lower ranking of this priority on survey monkey – where people had time to read and think about the meaning of the phrase.
- The view was expressed by some that it didn’t matter *who* owned or provided the affordable housing as long as it was available and there was a good mix of types of housing for different needs and that it was a decent standard. It is also worth noting that ‘accommodation’ need may be different to ‘housing’ need i.e. some may want appropriate accommodation as opposed to appropriate housing.
- There was concern about the financial implications of the Council building and owning housing stock -especially after resources have been spent in the past in transferring housing stock.
- There were suggestions for making use of empty properties before building new.
- There may also be concerns about the impact this may have on other providers of affordable housing, i.e. would this mean reduced contracts therefore a knock-on effect on standards or services offered for those already in affordable social housing.

- Another concern in general about new houses being built was that there was sufficient infrastructure to support them such as doctors, dentists, schools, parking. This was of particular concern in Ledbury.

MORE TRAVEL CHOICES

- People were concerned about the location of the proposed bypass; in that it was in the wrong location and didn't provide enough of a 'bypass'.
- There were also many comments made relating to cycling, buses and electric vehicles. For example the need for more cycle lanes and also specific suggestions for specific bus routes. The need for more travel choices was a high priority particularly with the Sixth Form College students.
- For residents living in very rural areas, more travel choices did not feature very highly as there was very limited travel choices currently other than a car and they felt it would be unreasonable to expect a decent service in these areas.

PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR ENVIRONMENT

- This priority was of particular importance to the young people at the Sixth Form College and younger voters more generally.
- Issues relating to the impact of planning were raised e.g. standards of homes built and where they should be built.
- There were comments in support of developing alternative technologies e.g. solar and wind power.
- There were eight people who requested more tree planting and four made comments about the maintenance of verges.

HELP PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

- This priority received mixed reviews. However we don't feel that the full scope of this was fully understood by many voters.
- Some people felt too much support was already offered therefore people need to help themselves more (nanny state view).
- Others were concerned that this meant a reduction in existing support / advisory services.
- The priority may be better understood if the wording was changed to 'supporting people to help themselves'.
- The need to support youth clubs and support for young people generally was often noted in relation to this priority.
- A number of comments were received in relation to mental health services and them being needed or improved. Some of these were around isolation, pathways for adults with autism and ADHD, mental health support for young people, support for those who are vulnerable e.g. people who are homeless, domestic abuse and violence victims, those with substance misuse addictions and those with learning disabilities.

USE COUNCIL ASSETS TO CREATE MORE JOBS

- This sub-priority was by far the one that was the most misunderstood.
- There was large support for job and skills creation but people did not understand what 'use council assets' meant.
- Whilst people felt that jobs were important there was concern about whether this was a role for the council and how the council would go about increasing wages in the county.

MAINTENANCE OF ROADS AND PUBLIC SPACES

- This priority ideally needs splitting out – the majority of people commented on the roads and potholes, as well as pavements as opposed to green spaces.
- Roads were by far the highest concern in Leominster – particularly for pedestrians for trip hazards on the cobblestones, being splashed by water on the narrow roads in the town centre and potholes in general.

Overview of Comments from the ‘sticky dot’ exercise

There is concern about the impact Herefordshire Council could and should have on some of these priorities i.e. if its purpose is to provide services. Particular examples of this are being able to create more jobs, addressing the climate emergency and about raising wage levels in Herefordshire, this was generally commented on and reflected in the red dots to strongly disagree. Linked to this there was also the view expressed at the Parish Summit that Parish Councils would like to be more involved in the planning of local services.

COMMUNITY

- There was concern about the infrastructure not being in place to support new housing developments, specifically sewerage, schools, doctors and dentists. This was particularly a concern for some market towns such as Ledbury and Ross on Wye.
- The sub-priority *Create an environment where wellbeing is inevitable* was not understood well. “What do you mean by create an environment where wellbeing is inevitable?” was often asked.
- There was a concern that the sub-priority *Use digital technology to enable independent living*, would lead to a reduction in face to face services

ECONOMY

- There was particular support for investment in Environmental opportunities and impact.
- Where people most felt support for business was needed was in relation to SME’s.
- A number of comments were received about reducing business rates and reducing the number of empty shops.

ENVIRONMENT

- Recycling was consistently supported.
- There were some who didn’t support climate change action either because they did not feel that there is a climate emergency or that it was not the role of the council, they should be focusing on services to the community. However, there was strong support overall for protecting and promoting the environment – especially from younger people.
- Some people felt that the sub-priorities were duplicated.
- May need to check wording of ‘best use of county’s natural resources’ – what do you mean by best and who determines that.

Overview of comments from 'seldom heard' groups

- The discussion groups with seldom heard groups such as young people living at SHYPP and Gypsy and Romany travellers didn't have a lot to say about these priorities. Their focus was on the day to day quality of life issues, such as standards of accommodation, financial stability and being treated as equals. Until those basics were met they felt it was difficult to comment on issues that were perceived to be at the periphery.
- Young people at the Sixth Form College were very engaged. Environment was a high priority, with just under 500 votes. The next highest vote was over 250 behind which was for maintenance of roads and open spaces.
- The Echo focus group highlighted the value of Council supported services that provide people with practical support such as completing forms and advice services. The group also raised concerns about cuts to social services and the impact of reductions in the services they access. The group also prioritised specific issues linked to accessibility that limited their ability to be independent and to access the services they used e.g. lack of accessible toilets, inaccessible pavements, issues around using the bus services (prejudice of some bus drivers, time restrictions of bus passes, reductions in bus services).

'Missing' priorities - views of consultees

Consultees were given the opportunity to raise specific priorities that they felt were missing from the proposed priorities. The most commonly identified issues were:

- Measures to reduce traffic congestion.
- Availability of low-cost car parking in Hereford City.
- Services to support the new houses being built e.g. doctors, dentists, schools.
- Keeping shops open in town centres.
- The need for more leisure activities in Hereford City.
- The bypass- in total there were 44 comments written specifically about the Hereford bypass. 34 of them were in favour of a bypass and 7 were opposed.

Specific points for Herefordshire Council

- There were concerns over the contract with Balfour Beatty and the quality of their work