

Herefordshire Voice

October 2009

THE HEREFORDSHIRE
partnership 

Remember us?

It's been quite a long time since the last full panel survey, but we haven't forgotten about you! Some of you took part in some focus groups during the summer, and this newsletter gives a summary of the results from the focus groups and the last full survey.

The planning and development survey

Back in July 2008, a survey was sent out which looked at planning and development in Herefordshire. This was part of a wider consultation on the same topic. 585 Herefordshire Voice panellists completed it, along with 397 other people who had a professional or personal interest in planning issues. The survey was longer than normal and quite technical in places, which resulted in a slightly lower response rate than usual (51%), so thank you very much to everyone who persevered! We do try to keep our surveys as short as possible, but it was unavoidable in this case because there was so much to ask about.

Because the survey was so long, only a selection of results can be shown here. The full report is available in Herefordshire libraries or online at www.herefordshirepartnership.com/hv

Strategic options

Four "strategic options" were identified, which set out broadly where the new development should go. These had a focus on economy, on

society, on the environment, and on a new or expanded settlement. All except a focus on a new or expanded settlement were thought to be realistic options for Herefordshire. A focus on the economy was the preferred option of the four. This option concentrated growth into Hereford, Leominster and the market towns in the south and east of the county where employment demand is greatest.

Growth in Hereford and the market towns

The preferred option for growth in Hereford was to disperse it to a number of small sites in various locations around the city. There was strong support for a Hereford bypass, but no clear preference for a route to the east or west. Spreading the growth to a number of small sites around the town was the preferred option for Bromyard, Kington, Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye, while in Leominster the strongest support was to allocate land to the south or southwest in conjunction with an east-west link road.

Other planning issues

Respondents were in favour of a stricter policy which only allowed development in areas with no known flood risk, and to ensure that new development included methods to collect, store and reuse rainwater. There was support for creating a university style campus in Herefordshire, and for developing new and extended school and college facilities. Respondents wanted a policy to strongly promote the growth of tourism in Herefordshire, and to concentrate on promoting the county as a centre for "green tourism". Increasing the amount of affordable housing in the county was supported, by increasing the number that developers were required to build, and ensuring all schemes have a suitable mix of house types.

Focus groups

In July this year we carried out some focus groups, which is when a small group of people are invited to talk about a specific topic. The topic was the "Sustainable Communities Act", which is a new law giving people the opportunity to make suggestions for ways central government could improve things locally. In the context of the Act, "sustainable communities" is taken to include local economies, environment, social inclusion and democratic involvement.

A number of proposals were gathered in Herefordshire, and then a selection of Herefordshire Voice panellists were invited to take part in a focus group to discuss these proposals. We also talked to a group of 14 – 18 year olds to get their view. About 60 panellists wanted to take part in the focus groups, but unfortunately we only had spaces for 30, so thank you to everyone who showed interest, and sorry we weren't able to invite you all.

The ideas you liked

22 proposals were discussed. Of these, there were 8 which were almost universally liked. These were rebuilding old train lines; opening new stations on existing lines; giving local people priority when allocating social housing; twin-tracking the Hereford to Ledbury train line; setting up a public transport governing body; providing high-speed broadband; taking social impacts into account when closing or moving local services; and making the Herefordshire Black Mountains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

There were a further 6 which were liked by the majority, but not quite to the same extent as the top 8. These were providing public transport to all settlements of 100+ people; starting Post Banks in Post Offices; providing cycle paths on major roads like the A49; a VAT reduction on building conversions to match the zero VAT on new-builds; restoration of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire canal to be funded by the government; and farm visits for all school children.

All 14 of the above were submitted as Herefordshire Council's contribution to the Sustainable Communities Act. Of these 14, the Council's Cabinet particularly endorsed 4, which were twin-tracking the Hereford to Ledbury line, priority for locals in social housing, farm visits for school children, and high-speed broadband.

The ideas you didn't like

There were 8 other proposals which got a mixed or poor response, and which were not submitted. These were preserving redundant train lines; a requirement to vacate social housing in the event of a financial windfall; consideration of public transport alternatives when building new roads; stopping supermarkets from selling alcohol at a loss, or introducing a minimum price per unit of alcohol; stopping the "right to buy" social housing; a 10mph speed limit reduction on all roads; reverting to the 11pm pub closing time; and a chewing gum tax to pay for its clean-up.

What happens next?

The 14 selected proposals went to the Local Government Association (LGA), who will shortlist and merge the proposals they receive from the Councils taking part. Central government are then required to "co-operate and try to reach agreement" with the LGA. The final decisions will result in an "action plan" which will be put before Parliament, and if they cannot implement a proposal, they have to publish the reasons why not.

The full report can be found at www.herefordshirepartnership.com/hv or in the library.

Look out for the next survey, which should arrive in the next few months.

**If you have any questions, please contact
Michael Brown on 01432 260 495**