

## **COUNCIL 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 - AGENDA ITEM 10 – QUESTION TIME**

***Answers given at the meeting may have been a précis of the full answer which is set out below. In some cases additional information is also included. Where, due to time or other constraints, it was not possible for the question to be asked formally the written response is also included below.***

**QUESTION 1** – Mr R M Udall asked Mr S E Geraghty:

*"Will the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Skills and Infrastructure explain how he can help to promote and support the food production industry within Worcestershire?"*

### **Answer given**

Firstly, can I thank Richard for his question which gives me an opportunity to update Council on a host of initiatives we are doing to support the food production industry in the county.

As members will know, agri-tech was identified as one of three key sectors within the Worcestershire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) produced by our Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and endorsed by partners. The plan recognised the importance of horticulture and food production in the county and has led to a greater focus on this sector. I will highlight just a couple of examples.

### **LEADER programme.**

The County Council has been successful in applying to deliver the LEADER programme, with a total of £1.96m, over 5 years. The LEADER programme will help in a number of ways including:

#### **1. Support to increase farm productivity**

LEADER is looking to support and improve the overall performance and sustainability of an agricultural holding, supporting farmers, growers or land owners with capital grants at a grant rate of 40%. Grants will be available for processing, marketing and/or development of agricultural products.

#### **2. Support for micro and small businesses (non-agricultural) and farm diversification**

Provide support for micro and small businesses (non-agricultural) and farm diversification. For example we could support a new start up business in food production, with 40% matched grant of capital items. Grants will be between £2,500 and £35,000.

#### **3. Raising awareness**

The Local Action Group (LEADER project Board) are working with Worcestershire LEP and DEFRA to run a large scale event targeting rural business to raise awareness of the support that is available from Public sector organisations. The NFU and Country Land and Business Association will also be involved to ensure a joined up approach to local businesses.

## ***European Agricultural fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)***

The County Council and partners will promote the EAFRD Growth Programme; this is a larger grant scheme with minimum grant of £35,000. The grant is administered by DEFRA. Worcestershire LEP's allocation of **EAFRD is £2.3 million**; a number of calls will be published by the LEP until 2017 to assist rural development and food production.

### ***Food Enterprise Zones***

Worcestershire's 'Vale of Evesham Project' is one of eleven of DEFRA's new Food Enterprise Zones (FEZS). The zones free up food and farming businesses, making it simpler and easier for them to grow local produce, attract new businesses and create jobs. A grant of £50,000 has been made available to set up the FEZ. Based around Local Development Orders, and in line with local priorities, they will make the planning process simpler and easier for food and farming businesses that want to expand.

### **Pershore College**

With agri-tech skills, especially in the fields of crops and horticulture, already a key local strength, the redevelopment of Pershore College will push it forward to become a nationally-renowned centre of excellence.

I hope this summary reassures you that we are actively working to support the food production industry in this county.

### Supplementary Question

Mr Udall raised a supplementary question about the possibility of approaching Heinz, the brand owners of Lea and Perrins, to seek EU Protected Status for Worcestershire Sauce. Mr Geraghty said he was happy to help and highlight any world class brand.

**QUESTION 2** – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr A N Blagg:

*"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment please inform me how many electric vehicles the County Council has now purchased in light of its funding of electric charging points?"*

### **Answer given**

We have had a number of trial vehicles from Nissan and Citroën over the past two years. As a result we are examining the potential to purchase one or two pool cars under the 'Spend to Save' scheme as replacements for the current conventionally fuelled vehicles, and consideration is being given to replacing the courier vehicle used for local journeys with an electric van. Payback in each case appears to be within the five-year battery life guarantee.

Electric pool vehicles would be available for use by both officers and members. The feasibility of acquiring an electric bicycle was also being looked at.

### Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about a charging point in the town of Bromsgrove Mr Blagg explained the rationale for how present locations had been selected and said any further requests could be considered as more potential sites were identified.

**QUESTION 3** – Mr P M McDonald asked Mr M L Bayliss:

*"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning please inform me how much money has been spent on hospitality i.e. beverages, food etc. over the last three years?"*

### **Answer given**

We have significantly reduced our expenditure in this area through the introduction of much tighter rules on when hospitality can be provided.

This is evidenced by how council spend has continued to decrease over the past three years. In 2014/15 we spent £72,935 in this area compared to more than £73,000 in the previous year.

The figures given for 2014/15 include refreshments at meetings attended by external visitors and events to support council activities, such as our apprenticeship scheme and Young Enterprise.

We are continuing to look closely at ensuring value for money from all budgets, including hospitality.

### **Supplementary Question**

In response to a supplementary question Mr Bayliss reiterated that all budgets were being controlled very tightly.

### **QUESTION 4** – Mr P A Tuthill asked Mr A I Hardman:

*"Surprise, surprise the EU allows tax breaks for micro- breweries and small vineyards but not small cider and perry producers.*

*Will the Leader ensure this Council supports our MEP Daniel Dalton who is campaigning for equal treatment for the custodians of ancient orchards, as well as the subsequent traditional processing of a regional artisan British product?"*

### **Answer given**

Thank you very much indeed for your question - it is of course referring to the tax break that our small cider and perry producers currently enjoy and our latest MEP, Daniel Dalton is spearheading the campaign to ensure that this tax break is maintained. I am delighted to be able to tell the Council that last week the argument that has been put forward by Daniel and other organisations such as CAMRA that we need a rule change to reflect this industry's pivotal role in our community, has made some progress. Currently EU rules allow for a tax break for small vineyards and micro-breweries, but not for cider and perry producers and the Commission has agreed to consider extending the tax break out to cider and perry producers. The producers that we are trying to protect have a turnover of less than £20,000 per year and the European Commission demanding that they pay an additional tax of almost £3,000 I think will affect many of their businesses.

We must remember that they are often custodians of ancient orchards and use traditional methods to make their products and I am sure they are not getting rich on selling the cider that they make, but it is important to preserve our landscape and its orchards and their role in it. So we must do all we can to protect and encourage them.

It would be very helpful if we could, along with all our district councils, make a submission to the EU Consultation which does not close until the end of November and I would encourage other people in Worcestershire to do the same.

### **QUESTION 5** – Mr R C Lunn asked Mrs S L Blagg:

*"Does the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care regret the non-introduction of the cap on lifetime care costs as previously promised by the Government, and how will this impact on the provision of care in Worcestershire?"*

**Answer given**

I respect the democratic process and the right of our elected politicians to set national policy. There will be no immediate impact on the provision of care in Worcestershire because the second phase of changes under the Care Act is being deferred. The Council will continue to plan for these changes to become law from 2020.

Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mrs Blagg reiterated that this was a matter for the national Government.

**QUESTION 6** – Mr M E Jenkins asked Mr J Smith:

*"Would the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways describe what investment has been made in improving cycling infrastructure and facilities in Worcestershire over the past decade and how successful this has been at improving cycling levels across the county?"*

**Answer given**

Thank you for your question.

We maintain finance records for a period of 7 years and the data regarding investment in cycling schemes is as follows:

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Capital spending on schemes predominantly of a cycling nature.	£502,083	£1,726,050	£1,222,633	£241,726	£175,137	£147,470	£35,695
Capital spending on schemes with a cycling element.	£859,443	£1,104,080	£8,234,188	£2,212,242	£1,973,565	£3,073,390	£3,326,729
Spend on schemes of a cycling nature funded by Section 106 contributions.	£95,685	£513,359	£211,086	£423,119	£331,661	£59,772	£28,610
Grants and Recoverable Expenditure	£18,000	£0	£80,000	£133,680	£37,840	£416,718	£195,245
	<b>£1,475,211</b>	<b>£3,343,489</b>	<b>£9,747,907</b>	<b>£3,010,767</b>	<b>£2,518,203</b>	<b>£3,697,350</b>	<b>£3,586,280</b>

Key highlights over the years include schemes delivered under the Choose How You Move schemes in both Worcester and Redditch, plus the Connect2 project incorporating the introduction of significant walking and cycling infrastructure improvements adjacent to the River Severn, including of course the Diglis Bridge.

With regard to cycling levels within Worcestershire, our data is based on the Active People Survey (APS), administered by Sport England and used to derive official estimates of participation in sport and active recreation. The APS has a sample size of over 160,000 persons, thus enabling analysis at local authority level. The next release in this series is due

to be published in Spring 2016 and will contain statistics on walking and cycling from APS9, which covers the period October 2014 to October 2015.

According to the statistics, the percentage of people in Worcestershire cycling at least once per week rose steadily between 2010 and 2013 to over 9%, with significant increases in Malvern Hills, Redditch and Worcester. The 2013/14 results show a slight decrease in cycling levels to around 7% however local counts indicate that activity is still growing.

#### Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question about decreasing cycling activity Mr Smith said the Council would do all it could to encourage an activity which held such benefits in terms of better health, less congestion and reduced pollution.

#### **QUESTION 7** – Mr P Denham asked Mr J Campion:

*"Can the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families please advise Council how many science and modern foreign language GCSE examinations were taken per student, on average, in Worcestershire schools in 2013 and 2014?"*

#### **Answer given**

We do not collect information regarding individual subjects such as science or modern foreign languages.

#### Supplementary Question

In response to a supplementary question Mr Campion stated that the Council would continue to support skills providers.