

Business launches major campaign to get relief road back on track

Herefordshire's business community is to launch a major campaign against moves not to progress the county's long-promised relief road.

They fear that, if the road scheme does not go ahead, a once-in-a-generation opportunity will be lost to put the local economy back on track, solve longstanding problems of traffic congestion and choking fumes and, even more importantly, facilitate much needed inward investment and economic growth.

Well-established plans for a relief road to counter congestion in Hereford have been thrown into doubt after May's local election changed the political make-up of Hereford County Council. The council had been working closely with the Department of Transport and other major stakeholders towards finally getting the bypass scheme underway after decades of debate and analysis.

Now Herefordshire Business Board, which aims to keep government and investment agencies updated on the views and needs of local business, is set to mount a multi-pronged campaign to restore the relief road plans as an urgent priority.

Backed by crowd-funding, a series of major advertisements is planned setting out the detailed reasons why the road is needed - not just for business but for the whole county. This will work alongside a social media drive and postal information blitz.

The business board argues that squandering the relief road opportunity now would mean long-term and irretrievable damage to investment, the economy and jobs. This is especially so when all of the funding has been put in place by central government. The campaign will say that it would be wrong to saddle future generations locally with an ailing economy, traffic jams, pollution and shortage of housing and jobs, just because of a one-off protest vote based on national issues.

It assesses that a no-road decision would severely reduce local investment, trade and business rates contributions, which in turn could have a drastic impact on areas such as health and care provision.

Chairman Frank Myers MBE said: "People must realise that, if we want to be looked after in our old age, we will need a sound local economy and a prosperous, younger working population. No road will mean fewer jobs, fewer young people because they will leave, meaning less money to pay for care provision.

"Currently our average wage is one of the lowest in the Country and we need to change that by attracting investment in higher paid jobs.

"After decades of careful progress and negotiation to get everything in place including funding and government approval, we finally got to a position where we are ready and raring to go. If councillors now throw it all away there may not be another opportunity for decades more and the writing off of investment already made will seriously undermine the Council's finances.

"That would be a tragic waste and run completely against the wishes of so many local people who know how badly the road is needed and how important it is for our future prosperity.

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"Nobody wants more traffic and more fumes, nobody wants less investment and prosperity.

"Politicians who are party to this decision should realise they will be judged against its consequences for many years to come."

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Note to editors:

Herefordshire Business Board aims to:

- Provide a Herefordshire “voice” on the Marches LEP Board and champion the Herefordshire projects within the Marches LEP business plan and geographical area.
- Aid collaboration and communication within the private sector and to the local authority and other public funding bodies.
- Represent local business views to shape future strategy and influence economic policy relevant to economic growth and business benefit at a Herefordshire, Marches LEP, and National level.