

# Hibiscus

**Herefordshire Voice Survey Report 19 –  
Focus groups into proposals relating to the  
Sustainable Communities Act**

**Prepared for Herefordshire Council**

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# **I INTRODUCTION**

## **1. Background**

Sustainable Communities, defined (by government policy) as ‘places where people want to live and work, now and in the future’, are under the spotlight as local authorities need to submit their proposals for Sustainable Communities to the Local Government Association by 31 July 2009.

After a process of county-wide consultation with various bodies and interest groups, Herefordshire Council developed 22 proposals which might fit the criteria demanded.

The proposals are appended. Research was needed to help prioritise these proposals, to identify which, (if any), are worth progression to the next stage.

## **2. Research objectives**

Overall, to identify which, if any, of the proposals were worth progressing further, based on the views of Herefordshire citizens.

Within this, it was important to understand

a) What was it that made some proposals more attractive than others ...

- What were the key benefits perceived, and for whom
- How might it (the proposal in question) impact on their lives

b) And what was it that made others less attractive ...

- Their perceived weaknesses (with reasons)
- In particular, did the proposal suffer because it was not clearly understood, or because it was fundamentally irrelevant
- Were the perceived weaknesses ones which could be addressed in some way, or were they more fundamental than this?

### 3. Research methodology

Four two hour focus groups were conducted between 13 and 22 July 2009 in central Hereford.

Three groups (one daytime and two evening) were conducted comprising 10 adults each, all of whom were involved with Herefordshire Voice, the Herefordshire Partnership's Citizens Panel.

The adult groups were as representative as possible of Herefordshire, comprising a mix of men and women, age and lifestage, working status, rural / village / city living (see below).

	Male	Female
25 - 44 yrs	4	3
45 - 64	7	6
65 - 74	4	4
75+	-	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

Area in which lived	
Urban	16
Village	7
Hamlet/isolated Dwelling	6
Town & fringe	1

Presence of children at home	
Yes	7
No	16
Not provided	7

Length of residency in Herefordshire	
Less than 5 yrs	6
6-10	7
11-20	3
21+	14

Home status	
Mortgage	8
Owner	13
Renting	8
Not provided	1

Working status	
Full-time	7
Part-time	4
Self-employed	6
Permanent Sickness/disability	3
Wholly retired	7
Other	3

The fourth group comprised five 'youth', aged 14-18, four female, and one male. These respondents were members of the Children's Trust Shadow Board. Of the five, one had left full-time education and worked primarily for voluntary organisations, two were in the sixth form college / Hereford College of Technology, and two were at school.

A discussion guide is appended.

## II SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 1. Comment on the research

It is worth noting that those taking part in the research welcomed the fact that their opinions were being sought. They were very engaged with the research process, were keen to voice their opinions, and were eager to be informed as to the outcome of this particular project and the Sustainable Communities programme as a whole.

The actual proposals when shown were largely well received.

Having discussed all the proposals, those eliciting the most positive responses tended to be those relating to transport, housing, and broadband.

What some felt was missing from the proposals was an indication of a long term plan for Hereford (encompassing transport, housing, and infrastructure), proposals concerned with economic regeneration and inward investment for the county, and also, proposals designed to encourage youth to stay in the county.

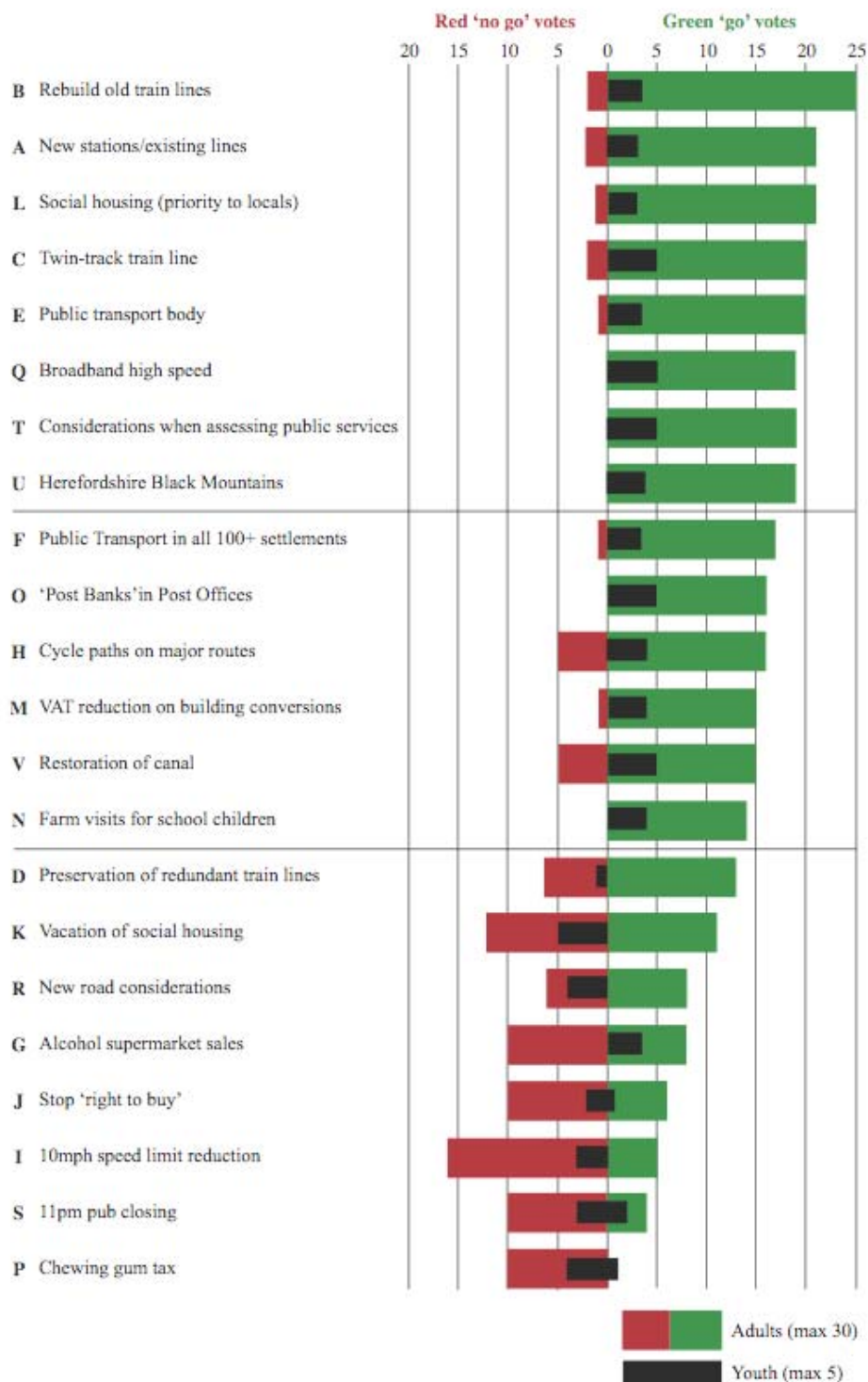
### 2. Summary of responses to the proposals

Overall responses to each proposal are shown on the chart overleaf.

Eight proposals were particularly well received in both the adult and youth groups. Several of these concerned transport.

Three ‘train proposals’ were thought of special interest within all groups: the **Re-building of old train lines (B)** (either for commuter or leisure/tourism use), the **Opening of new train stations on existing lines (A)**, and the **Twin-tracking of the Hereford / Ledbury line (C)**.

The benefits of these proposals were thought very clear: improving public transport in terms of its availability (by expanding the network that currently exists), accessibility (by new train stations), and efficiency (bringing the tracks up to date by twin tracks). Importantly, it was generally believed that these proposals were making use of infrastructure that already exists, and, as such, would be relatively cost effective.



Concerns over the cost of re-building old train lines (ie where there was no longer any track) was thought the main disadvantage within these particular proposals, and the expectation was that a detailed investigation as to its viability would be required.

Linked to train travel, and also of strong appeal, was a proposal that a **Public transport governing body (E)** should be created.

Anecdotes relating to being 'abandoned' at train stations, failed connections, delayed services, and a paucity of (expensive) buses were quite common, as were occasional mentions of the difficulties of crossing county boundaries.

It was readily acknowledged that the transport problems of Herefordshire are considerable given its rurality and scattered population, but the hope was that a governing body could help the coordination of services by close collaboration with the different providers.

The county-wide provision of **High-speed Broadband (Q)** was a 'must have' proposal.

Its appeal was particularly strong amongst business people and students, for general communications, research on the internet, and education, but also amongst people for social, shopping, information gathering and entertainment use. Not only was it thought of as being of practical necessity, it would convey a sense that Herefordshire was part of the 'bigger picture', - not sidelined and behind the rest of the UK, or even global community, as a result of its rurality.

Other proposals of strong, widespread appeal were the giving of **Priority to local people in relation to social housing (L)**, **Considerations when closing or moving public services (T)**, and **Designating the Herefordshire Black Mountains as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (U)**.

Issues concerning social housing were considered very important, but were occasionally controversial and certainly in need of sensitive handling. A proposal to give priority to local people was less controversial than, say, proposals concerning the vacation of social housing, or stopping the 'right to buy', but even the idea of giving priority to local people needed careful expression.

A proposal that social and environmental factors should be considered along with cost when considering the moving or closure of public

services (T) was another proposal which was very popular amongst the majority. The closure of post offices and schools, in particular, is a subject of much attention within Herefordshire, with the implications for local communities felt very strongly.

Other proposals to receive a broadly positive response were as follows:

- **To ensure that public transport is available to all settlements of 100+ people where the settlement is over 3 miles from a town (F):** very positively received but without the quantification (ie public transport should be available to *all* people, irrespective of their distance from a town)
- **The creation of ‘Post Banks’ within Post offices (O):** anything that would help the viability of Post Offices was welcome because of the huge contribution they make to communities, but some were certain that banking services are already available (and that cash machines, especially if ‘hole in the wall’ could make them vulnerable to crime)
- **The provision of cycle paths on major roads (eg the A49) (H)** attracted strong interest, especially amongst those who made use of such paths, as long as these paths were clearly separated from the roads (ie not just a white line on the road), and ideally, ‘joined up’ to be part of a network of cycle paths
- **Reducing VAT on building conversions was of interest (M),** especially for its potential to encourage the regeneration of town centres, but its benefits were not immediately obvious to some without the giving of an example. With an example (the conversion of unused spaces above shops into flats) interest was heightened
- A proposal for **Restoration of the Hereford to Gloucester canal (V)** appealed especially strongly to young people and approximately half the adults for its potential to attract visitors and create a pleasant water-side environment within the city. Others wanted to know whether it would have any commercial value as well as tourist, and how / if it would connect with a wider network of canals
- **Farm visits for school children (N)** received a broadly positive reaction, not only for teaching children where food comes from,

but also for encouraging children to think of farming in a positive light with potential for employment. Additionally, it was thought to be very appropriate for Herefordshire, given its strong farming heritage and roots

- Although most of the proposals relating to trains and train travel help strong appeal, the idea of **preserving redundant railway lines (D)** received a more mixed response. Although largely positive, it was perhaps insufficiently tangible, with less obvious benefits, to elicit a strong positive response

Lastly, there were certain proposals which were less enthusiastically received. The details of these less positive reactions can be found in the next section of this report. In essence, they were as follows:

- **Vacating social housing (K):** the desirability of increasing the social housing stock is recognised, but this can seem ‘unfair’
- **Where new roads are proposed for congestion/safety reasons, to consider investing the money in public transport, cycle paths etc rather than road building (G):** good in theory, but most feel Herefordshire NEEDS new roads, especially a by-pass
- **Alcohol sales in supermarkets (R):** acceptance that there is a problem with cheap drink and anti-social behaviour, but it’s a cultural problem, and those who want to drink will always find a way of paying for it. Also, it’s unfair on moderate drinkers
- **Stopping the ‘right to buy’ social housing (J):** highly controversial
- **Reducing speed limits on all roads by 10mph (I):** impractical, generally undesirable, and unlikely to be adhered to (exception could be made for built-up areas)
- **Pub closing times (S):** many felt this has been proved NOT to be the case, and/that it would just shift the problem from pubs to clubs
- **Introduction of a chewing gum tax (P):** litter as a whole is a problem, not just chewing gum, and it’s more a need for education and enforcement of current legislation than higher prices

### 3. Conclusions

This research would strongly support the progression of the eight most positively received proposals as outlined above. They directly address some of the key areas with which Herefordshire citizens are concerned, namely transport, infrastructure and housing, all of which should benefit inward investment into the county.

The six proposals *slightly less* positively received than the above would also be welcomed by the majority.

Key to successfully progressing them will be to communicate exactly what the benefits of each are, and how they contribute to Sustainable Communities. Some are obvious, such as high speed broadband, new train stations, and priority social housing for locals, but others are less tangible, less well understood, and so less well supported, even if at their core they are potentially very good ideas. The VAT reduction is the most obvious example of this.

Finally, it is worth re-iterating the research participants' engagement with this research project, and their desire for even more consultation and more opportunities to be given a platform from which they can voice their opinions. These national proposals potentially go some way to bringing about positive change in the county, but there are other initiatives that these respondents felt were important to consider which operate at the county level and which they would like to feel are being discussed, consulted, and acted on. Funding for youth projects was a particular example, along with the specific transport issues of building of a by-pass and a river crossing; the hoped-for benefit of these initiatives being that the county is made more attractive to investors, employers, tourists, as well as those living in the county.

#### ***Proposals submitted to the LGA***

The fourteen most positively received proposals were all submitted to the Local Government Association (LGA) as Herefordshire Council's contribution to the Sustainable Communities Act. Of these fourteen, Herefordshire Council's cabinet particularly endorsed four:

- C – Twin-tracking the train line between Hereford and Ledbury
- L – Giving priority to local people in relation to social housing
- N – Farm visits for school children
- Q – High-speed broadband.

### III MAIN FINDINGS\*

*\*Use of quotes: due to the difficulties of attribution, this is only done when particularly relevant. Quotes from the Youth group are identified by '(Y)'*

#### 1. The context of the proposals

Prior to showing any proposals, respondents were introduced to the idea of 'Sustainable Communities' and asked what they thought this meant, and what areas the proposals might/should cover.

'Sustainable Communities' was only familiar as a term to a few, (some with close links with the community via parish councils, for example), but most were able to imagine what it meant, and what areas the proposals might cover.

Top of mind were the following:

- Housing, in particular, affordable housing for those on low / no incomes and young people, the provision of local housing, and the availability of housing in rural areas

*"My Bed and Breakfast was costing £60 per night. We need affordable housing for people like me, people without an income, or only a low income"*

(18, male, ex homeless)

*"It's very difficult for young people to establish themselves at the moment"*

- Transport, especially a by-pass and additional river crossing for Hereford, but also local means of transport such as buses
- Access to, and provision of schools, Post Offices, and health care (doctors, dentists)
- Improvement of the commercial prospects of Hereford, via, for example, inward investment

*"Things which will help the economics – give the economy real strength, that will bring people in ... Getting bogged down in minutiae is very worrying"*

(50s male, businessman)

- Activities for young people to encourage them to stay in the area (voiced by both adults and members of the Youth group)

*“More funding for youth projects, more stuff for youth to do” (Y)*

- Energy, enthusiasm, drive and leadership from the Council and the MPs representing the area.

## **2. Reactions to the individual proposals**

Within each focus group, the 22 proposals, typed onto A2 sheets, were laid out around the room / stuck onto walls and respondents were asked to read them all without discussion.

Each respondent was given a handful of stickers, approximately half green, half red, and asked to place an individual green sticker on each proposal which they thought worth progressing, and a red sticker on any which they thought were irrelevant / not worth progressing. They were asked to leave those which they felt neutral or ambivalent about, blank.

After about 15 minutes when this process was complete, the moderator sorted the proposals into groups according to how many green, red, or a mixture of stickers each had. They were then discussed in turn, as a group, starting with the more popular proposals.

### **2.1 The more successful proposals (in order of popularity)**

#### **2.1.1 Proposal B**

##### **Re-build old train lines**

- **There are a number of dismantled train lines in Herefordshire**
- **Idea: rebuild, either as tourist routes with steam trains and / or as ordinary commuter lines**
- **Eg between Leominster and Kington, and / or Hereford and Ross-on-Wye**

This proposal was well received in all groups, with nine out of ten respondents ‘voting’ for it in two adult groups, seven out of ten in the third adult group, and four out of five in the youth group. Only one

respondent thought it 'not worth progressing', the remainder were ambivalent.

A key benefit of this proposal was thought to be the way it would extend the commuter train network at (relatively) low cost given that the infrastructure was already there.

*“A lot of the structures are already there, some of the bridges no, but you’ve still got the tunnels in place so it wouldn’t take that much to get them back into use ... a lot of the ground work is still there”*

Additionally, it was commented in one group how it would become progressively more difficult to do as time goes by, given the likelihood of other developments taking pace.

Some in the youth group talked of how old, dismantled train lines can look really sad, “awful”, and become quite unpleasant places to pass by / through.

Whether or not the lines should be for commuter or tourist use was uncertain. Commuter use would have obvious benefits in terms of increasing transport options, keeping cars off the road, and providing environmental benefits. In particular, an industrial estate was mentioned where access by train could be of particular benefit.

*“It could open up the train network, give connections to Monmouth, and other places, make the network bigger, bring in more people, and tourists” (Y)*

Leisure use could also be very beneficial to the county, following in the steps of, for example, the Heart of Wales railway. This would not only look attractive and appeal to families, it would also encourage tourism into the area.

Undecided as to whether commuter or leisure use should be the best way forward, some wondered if these line(s) could not have dual usage, say commuter use in the early mornings and late afternoons, but leisure use during the hours of, for example, 11am to 4pm.

Having started off responding very positively to this proposal, interest levels sometimes declined as respondents began to think of the possible costs involved. This was exacerbated in some instances when respondents

had not initially realised that the tracks were no longer present and would need re-laying.

*“I think it will be very expensive. It’s not just a case of laying track; tunnels will need re-lining, there will be lots of subsidence, they’re there for different types of trains, different weights, - I don’t think it’s viable. There are weight restrictions, speed restrictions, trains at 150 mph ...”*

*“It could be very expensive to do given the need for new tracks. It needs a proper commercial / financial feasibility study”*

### **2.1.2 Proposal A**

**Open new train stations on existing lines, eg**

- **Pontrilas (Hereford – Abergavenny)**
- **Woofferton (Leominster – Ludlow)**
- **Moreton-on-Lugg (Leominster – Hereford)**

This proposal was also well received. In the three adult groups, nine out of ten gave it their vote in the first group, seven out of ten in the second, and five out of ten in the third. Three out of five respondents gave it a green sticker in the youth group.

Train travel currently attracted a considerable amount of criticism, and anything that was thought to help make it easier or more efficient was popular.

This proposal was expected to be quite cheap to fulfil given that these train stations already exist. It would be of considerable benefit to those living in the affected areas by bringing train travel closer to their homes and cutting down on their need for (sometimes quite extensive) car journeys. It would have an environmental benefit, and it could possibly boost tourism too ...

*“You’d only need a portacabin. It doesn’t even have to be manned”*

*“There’s no good reason why Pontrilas couldn’t be re-instated. There’s a station there. It’d be great for people who live in that part of the county”*

*“It could help lessen the congestion going in and out of Hereford station”*

*“It would be great for people working at the Industrial Estate at Moreton”*

*“Moreton-on-Lugg’s a really nice, pretty place. It could help attract tourists” (Y)*

For their use to be maximised, some stressed that trains would have to travel at times when they are needed, for example, to fit in with working hours, and that they should feed in to part of a larger rail network providing connections through to other parts of the county / country.

The main, or only downside perceived was the increased slowness of the trains because of the extra stop(s).

*“The number of stops is really irritating (eg on the Hereford-London train), especially when there are two in one place like in Worcester, and Malvern. The downside of this is that it would slow trains down ... Ideally you’d have an occasional express service alongside the slower service” (Male, 40s, frequent train traveller)*

### **2.1.3 Proposal L**

#### **Giving priority to local people in relation to social housing**

- **Currently social housing is allocated to people deemed to have the greatest need for it**
- **Suggestion: in rural communities, priority would be given to people who live locally or who have a connection to the area**

Seven out of ten ‘voted’ for this proposal in the first group, eight in the second, six in the third, and three out of five ‘youth’. Only one person out of the total sample did not think it worth progressing.

This proposal touched on quite a sensitive area. For a few, it immediately raised concerns along the lines of ‘immigrant fruit-pickers and/or gypsies taking up local housing’ to the detriment of Herefordians.

Others were more sensitive, and there were a few examples of respondents with direct experience of the issue.

One woman, for example, described how in her village, Wigmore, there were cases of families unable to move in to larger social housing within the village, needed because of growing family size, who had no choice but to look elsewhere. A young 18 year old man described how he ...

*“... went to a homeless consultation ... and in Kington, if you are made a priority, say you were made homeless, you wouldn't have to leave your friends, your family, and move on to Ledbury or somewhere else. It just helps make life so much easier for that person if it's moving down the road rather than half way round the county”*

(It is interesting to note that this particular respondent was adamant that the issue had nothing to do with immigration into the area).

Positively, as demonstrated above, there were those who strongly felt that this proposal is striving to address a real need if the overall aim is to build sustainable communities. The problems arose with how it would be implemented, and the need to be very sensitive in relation to how it is expressed and communicated.

*“This is about sustainable communities. Quite how it's done is more problematic, but it's great in theory”*

*“How would it be enforced, and is it the beginning of a slippery slope? They wont let you have a house because we don't like the look of you, but we will give one to the next person”*

*“You want people to stay so they can go to local schools, use the local dentist”*

#### **2.1.4 Proposal C**

##### **Twin-track the train line between Hereford and Ledbury**

- **To make it double track all the way from Hereford to Birmingham**
- **Would allow for more trains, fewer delays, and few cancellations**

This proposal had broad appeal, especially to train users and younger respondents, with eight in one group, seven in another, five in a third, and all members of the youth group believing it to be important. Going against the majority view were two respondents who deemed it unnecessary, but for most ...

*“It’s a no brainer”*

In all groups there were anecdotal tales of train journeys ‘gone wrong’.

*“I’ve spent many a not-so happy hour stuck in Malvern – 4 1/2 hours once because of a failing brake, although magically the brake worked going the other way” (Y)*

*“The line does get congested, there are delays, and sometimes the trains just stop”*

The poor reputation of the line meant that some regular train travellers would try and avoid it altogether, preferring to drive to Newport South Wales or even Bristol to catch a train on the much higher speed First Great Western line.

A double track would, it was thought, help ease train congestion, be extremely valuable when breakdowns happen, and would help maintain and increase train speeds. As a result it would encourage train journeys amongst both Herefordians and people visiting the county, including tourists.

*“For a major city, not to have a double line is sort of unbelievable” (Y)*

*“It could help tourism, make Hereford more accessible” (Y)*

*“A single line is dangerous, - you can only do repairs on the one line”*

Some felt it would have positive implications for routes to London too, not just Birmingham, and the financial investment required may not be prohibitive ...

*“... there are two train tunnels already through the Malverns, only one of which is used”*

A small number were less interested. One man felt the answer to the poor service was to run larger trains with more carriages, and that a twin-track was unnecessary. For a few others it simply wasn't relevant: they were not regular train travellers (and perhaps less aware of the problems as a result).

### 2.1.5 Proposal E

#### **Creation of a public transport governing body**

- **Currently bus and train services are provided by a number of independent companies**
- **Proposal: to establish a governing body which would help 'join up' the services and**
  - **Ensure there are bus routes everywhere they are needed**
  - **Allow profitable routes help subsidise less profitable (but socially necessary) routes**

Generally, a welcome proposal enjoying support from eight in one group, seven in another, five in a third, and four out of five of the youth members. Only one person registered an objection, although it led to some quite heated discussion.

The objectives of this proposal were thought sound by all, - ensuring bus routes everywhere where needed, and allowing profitable routes to help subsidise less profitable (but socially necessary) ones.

Where there was less agreement was how these objectives should best be met.

One group was particularly cynical, (as too were some in other groups), and saw it as "just another quango". The feeling (for at least half of this particular group) was that another organisational layer was unnecessary, or at least, *should* be unnecessary. One respondent described his opinion as follows:

*"The key is to make sure that when the franchises come up it needs to be made sure that the franchises are actually designed in a way that incorporates the needs of the area, rather than just having another governing body which would be chaos and take the commercial liability away ... the problem is that you're dealing with private companies who*

*are ultimately interested in the bottom line, and the problem is that the public subsidy of those infrequently used but essential services ... will end up on the council tax”*

Few were aware of who had what responsibilities currently ...

*“There must be someone somewhere making these sorts of decisions at the moment”*

There was certainly dissatisfaction with current services, especially in that few felt they took people’s needs into account.

*“I’d happily get the bus to work (at Wyevale Garden Centre), but there isn’t one that will get me there on time or anywhere near it”*

*“I can’t get a bus or train from where I live to Ludlow because it’s across the county border”*

*“I rely on public transport completely and can’t go and visit my mother-in-law (26 miles away) because there’s no train or bus that will take me there” (F, 40s, disabled)*

Some called for re-nationalisation, and if not re-nationalisation, a “proper transport network which works all over the country”.

*“It would have to be a national policy, with the policy stated nationally and then designed locally in consultation with other counties”*

Overall therefore, although the potential benefits were thought extremely worthwhile, whether or not a public transport governing body was the right or best way to achieve them was a topic which elicited strong feelings, but no clear answers. One man talked of his belief that the UK is suffering as a result of not having this ‘joined up thinking’ in place in contrast to other countries, such as Slovakia, of which he had experience.

*“Who knows, if it all worked properly it might even encourage people to visit the area”*

## 2.1.6 Proposal Q

### Broadband

- **Provision of high-speed broadband throughout the county**

For many, - eight in one group, all the youth members, and half or more of the remaining two groups, - this was a ‘must have’ proposal.

Its appeal and importance was greatest to people in business and students, who used it / needed it for general communications, research on the internet and education. Apart from these more ‘practical’ purposes, it was also important to these, and others, for social use (especially Facebook, MSN etc for students), shopping, information gathering, and entertainment use.

*“It’s needed for people working at home. It supports sustainability”*

*“It’s an enabler, it helps with communications, makes things more accessible”*

*“It’s a great way of communicating with friends and family abroad, cheaply” (retired woman with family abroad, 70s)*

Failure to have access to broadband at all, let alone high speed broadband was a cause of deep frustration for some.

*“Sometimes it just cuts out and it makes you want to scream ... especially if it’s midnight and you’ve been working on something since 6” (Y)*

One respondent, working from home as a management consultant in a very rural area, had had to invest in a satellite in order to receive broadband, and shared the signal with a few local farms.

Certainly, *how* broadband reached people’s homes was not a particular issue; one respondent thought it might ultimately be the most cost effective option for clusters of houses / whole villages to be installed with satellite dishes. What was more important was (a) getting broadband in the first place and (b) receiving it at high speed, with rural areas being the main priority, on the basis that cities were already quite well-served.

The general feeling was that the current standard for high speed was 8mb, but all broadband users were aware that although 8mb might be the standard today, the speed is constantly increasing. Assuming that Herefordshire will not be covered with fibre optic cables (although it would be great if it was!), it was important that the broadband speeds achieved would be kept up to date so that Herefordshire was not lagging behind the rest of the country / world. A few mentioned they thought this was government policy already, but were unsure as to the details.

*“High speed is constantly changing upwards. We need to be able to keep up with speed with the rest of the world and country ... 8 meg is probably the standard now, but it would need to be future-proofed so it can increase over time to keep up”*

As well as not wanting to lag behind other regions, the comment was also made that high speed broadband could potentially create a rift between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. At a very basic level, having broadband enables you to shop on line, seek out discounts, have your food delivered to your door. People without broadband do not have access to these or other services and, as such, are at a disadvantage.

The discussion of broadband in the youth group led to a discussion about the provision of computers and access to broadband generally. High speed broadband is no use if you can’t access it, and / or if you don’t have a computer. Some felt that all students should be provided with a laptop through their school / college so that they are not disadvantaged at the outset. One 18 year old man, who did not own a computer, described the lack of facilities he faced; in particular, the lack of places within the city where you could go and access broadband for any ‘decent’ length of time. There were very few such places (the library was the chief example), there were queues, and the time allowed on the computer was limited.

*“You’re disadvantaged if you don’t have a computer”*

The issue of cost was occasionally raised. Who is going to pay for the extension and upgrading of broadband, and is it going to end up on Council Tax, phone or electricity bills? Obviously none wanted this to be the case.

Finally, there were a few, generally older respondents, who were much less concerned or interested in the whole area of broadband because they either didn’t own or use, need or want a computer.

## 2.1.7 Proposal T

### Considerations when closing or moving public services

- **Currently, cost is the main consideration when closing or moving local services**
- **Proposal: this should be broadened to also include social and environmental factors (eg if considering the closure of rural bus services / pubs / Post Offices)**

The youth group supported this proposal whole heartedly, but it was slightly less enthusiastically received in the adult groups with just over half per group expressing a positive response, and the remainder being ambivalent / neutral. None were ‘against’ it; it was more a case of some thinking it was nothing particularly new or different.

As mentioned in the groups, the closure of Post Offices and schools, in particular, has received quite a lot of attention within Herefordshire over the last few years, and there were certainly some who felt that the implications of closures were not given sufficient attention.

*“If you close a bus route you get more people in their cars so you have to spend more on roads – they don’t always think of the implications. It’s a no brainer!”*

*“(Regarding threatened school closures): Some kids were going to have to travel 16 miles to get to school! And it would lead to job losses” (Y)*

*“It needs to be about people, and what they need. They (services) are there for a reason” (Y)*

*“You can’t really penalise people because they live out in the countryside” (Y)*

As already mentioned, some of the adults felt that the consultations required by the closure or removal of services must already include the consideration of social and environmental factors and, as such, this proposal was not really saying anything very new or different. They saw it as being very valid, and important, but reflecting what we already have, the current situation, rather than moving it on. Additionally, many were quite cynical.

*“It’s good in principle, and maybe having it enshrined in law may help, but ....”*

## **2.1.8 Proposal U**

### **Herefordshire Black Mountains**

- **The Black Mountains are mostly in Wales, but a small part are in Herefordshire**
- **The Welsh part are covered by the Brecon Beacons National Park**
- **Proposal: to either extend the National Park boundary to cover ALL the Black Mountains, or to designate the Herefordshire Black Mountains as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**
- **Aim: to give additional protection to the land they cover**

This proposal received the support of seven out of ten respondents in two groups, half of a third group, and most (four) within the youth group.

Interestingly, not all respondents knew where the Black Mountains were, especially amongst the youth group, and not all realised that they crossed into Herefordshire. It certainly was not an issue they had previously considered, unlike some of the other topics raised such as transport and housing.

Having said that, the proposal engendered considerable support. The idea of the land receiving additional protection was felt, by most, to be a positive move. When respondents were told that AONB status could also attract funding for the area interest levels raised further, as long as the money was used sensitively.

*“Anything that brings in tourists and extra business must be positive”*

*“It would help attract tourism and be a boost for the leisure economy, AND help protect the landscape and the environment”*

Being designated an AONB was generally preferred to the Herefordshire Black Mountains becoming part of the Brecon Beacons National Park. There were some concerns that becoming part of a National Park would be *too* restrictive, not allowing any development of the area at all, but

perhaps more importantly, some expressed a strong loyalty to the county, - they didn't want to feel it was being denuded, or taken over ...

*“I don't want the Brecon Beacons to have them!  
Brecon's not having it! It should be kept in Herefordshire!”  
(Y)*

*“Would it become Welsh, under Welsh jurisdiction?” (a 74  
yr old man who lived on the edge (or in) the Black  
Mountains)*

Although there was general agreement that AONB status would be sufficient, not all felt it was necessary that the area's status was changed at all.

*“The Olchon Valley is beautiful, untouched, and that's  
without national park status”*

*“The area is already well-protected by current planning  
laws. It doesn't need any more. What difference would it  
make?”*

Certainly, if this proposal were to be progressed, its appeal would be boosted by mention of the financial benefits that might accrue if AONB status was awarded.

## **2.2 Proposals with broadly positive responses**

### **2.2.1 Proposal F**

**Ensure public transport is available to all settlements of 100+ people**

- **Where the settlement is over 3 miles from a town**

Respondents were very aware of some of the problems facing the provision of public transport in rural areas; the fluctuations in demand, the geographical scale / distances involved, the number of 'empty' buses seen on the roads, the costs incurred.

However, there some felt quite strongly that there are actions that could be taken that would help with transport provision, especially the use of smaller buses / minibuses (similar to the Hoppa Buses to be seen in

Worcestershire), perhaps more services modelled on some of the local community bus services (eg Dore Community Transport, for which one of the respondents was a volunteer driver), and / or services modelled on the Scottish (and Cornish?) Post Buses / or even making use of spare capacity on school buses.

Key to these services was felt to be planning, and flexibility. Whilst this proposal was positively received in that it is trying to make sure public transport is accessible to all, it was not felt to be going far enough. If nothing else, most felt that the restricting numbers should be removed ...

*“I think it should be anywhere – you may not be able to walk two miles. If an OAP lives two miles from transport how are they going to get to town?” (Y)*

*“100 is too restrictive. It doesn’t take into account old people living in small hamlets who don’t have cars”*

*“The timing of buses needs to be considered too. There’s no point if it only leaves you with time for quick coffee before you have to get the bus home again” (the reality for this particular 74 yr old man)*

*“Our first bus out is 10.15 and you have to walk two miles to get there, so it’s useless. I’d get to work at 11. I would definitely use it if it ran at a reasonable time and leave the car behind. Then you don’t have to worry about parking too which is expensive”*

*“It’s OK as a proposal, but it’s not necessarily the best solution to Hereford’s transport needs”*

## **2.2.2 Proposal O**

### **Creation of ‘Post Banks’ in Post Offices**

- **Offering a full range of banking facilities, and free cash machines**
- **Would also make local Post Offices more viable and less likely to close**

Most respondents reacted positively to this proposal, but some were more ambivalent. In one group it received the support of nine out of ten, and all

within the youth group supported it, but in the remaining two groups, although none were against it, more (around half) did not express a particular view.

Generally speaking, anything that would help the viability of Post Offices was welcome because of the huge contribution they were felt to make to communities, especially in rural areas. They were sometimes the hub of the community, and they provided services (groceries, maybe dry cleaning etc) which went well beyond the 'post' remit. It was felt important that they were maintained for the access it gave people to these services, the jobs they provided, and the fact that they cut down on travel distances. (Again, rural areas in Scotland and Cornwall were sometimes felt to 'do' Post Offices much more effectively than the UK).

*“Closing a Post Office really does ruin the heart of the community”*

*“Having to go to the local Post Office helps maintain local shops and keeps up their business too”*

The creation of Post Banks within Post Offices was expected by the more positive respondents to further enhance the Post Offices' role and value. It would be a very convenient service to have and, in the opinion of one respondent, it would be appealingly different from the global, multinational banks which have (supposedly) created the country's current financial problems. For these respondents, the more services the Post Bank could offer, the better.

Their only real concern (shared by the more ambivalent too) was that rural Post Offices, in particular, could become targets for criminals. Reassurance would have to be provided regarding security, and cash machines probably located inside the Post Office rather than as holes in the wall.

The more ambivalent respondents (none were actually against the idea), mostly claimed that Post Offices already offered banking services and as such, this proposal was not offering anything new or different (apart, maybe, from the cash machines). The issue was one of communicating what services they already offered. A few mentioned TV advertising and leaflets that they had seen aiming to communicate these services, but most remained uncertain or ignorant of them.

### 2.2.3 Proposal H

#### **Provide cycle paths on major roads eg A49 Ross to Leominster**

- **To encourage cycling / make roads safer**

Eight out of ten respondents embraced this proposal in one group, most of the teens in the youth group, five in a second adult group, and three in the third. Five respondents did not think it should be progressed (one of whom was a retired articulated lorry driver).

It received most support when it was explained that it would be a distinct path and not just a white line painted down the side of the road (“a suicide track”) and unsurprisingly, it was cyclists and the more environmentally concerned who were most positive towards it.

For these more positive respondents it provided an environmentally friendly and healthy transport option. Ideally, the cycle paths would join up to form a network of cycle routes across the county.

For those against the proposal, their reasons were largely to do with the anticipated cost.

*“How many people would actually use it? Is it worth it? You may have 100 people on the cycle path in a year, but you could have 2000 people on a bus”*

*“There would have to be an analysis to see whether or not it would actually be cost effective”*

*“You could put a toll charge on the bikes!”*

### 2.2.4 Proposal M

#### **Reduce the VAT on building conversions**

- **Currently brand new buildings attract 0% VAT on materials and labour, while conversions attract 5%**
- **Suggestion: VAT on conversions of existing buildings should be 0% to encourage regeneration of town centres, and reduce the need for houses to be built in open countryside**

This proposal was of muted interest. Seven out of 10 in two groups favoured it, four of the youth group, but only two in the third adult group. One person rejected it.

One reason for the more muted interest was the subject matter per se: most are not especially interested in VAT. Also, they could not readily understand the benefits of the proposal. Once the example of town regeneration was given, with empty spaces above shops being more attractive for conversion into flats, interest was higher. Its relevance to community sustainability also became more obvious.

*“If it increases the use of wasted space then it has to be a good thing”*

*“Encouraging regeneration in town centres is sufficient without the mention of new house in countryside ... anything about reducing costs on housing or transport has to be a good thing. In a few years it could help me financially – money is an issue” (Y)*

A few felt the proposal could go further ...

*“What’s worse is that work on listed buildings, which may be essential for their upkeep, attracts 15%”*

*“5% is not a big figure”*

On balance, the more clearly the benefits of the proposal could be explained, the more positively it was received. Without this explanation, it is still welcomed to an extent, but primarily because it was about paying less tax and no more than this.

### **2.2.5 Proposal V**

#### **Restoration of the Hereford to Gloucester Canal**

- **Currently underway, with work done by volunteers**
- **Proposal: central government or a government agency to fund the restoration and re-opening of the canal**

Two groups were particularly enthusiastic, with eight people in one adult group and all members of the youth group thinking it worth progressing. The remaining two groups more mixed, with half the respondents in one

group and two respondents in the third adult group thinking it worthwhile.

Positively, the restoration of the canal could be a great asset to Hereford. Respondents thought it would boost tourism and bring revenue into the county, and it would provide a pleasant water-side environment within the city.

*“It would be good for its social impact. Everyone loves sitting by water, you could have pubs, cafes opening out on to it ...”*

*“It would be a leisure attraction, it would look nice” (Y)*

Few appeared to know that any restoration work was going on. One man talked of how he remembered going to the opening day “25 years ago”, but whether or not they were aware of this work, it was certainly the case that to some, at least, the Wye river is very underutilised as an attraction within the city ...

*“Currently the river is really underutilised as a resource. There’s only the Left Bank”*

One student thought the restoration of the canal would fit well with the somewhat ‘old-fashioned’ feel of the city.

Others questioned whether or not the canal would have any commercial use, and whether or not it would feed into a larger (national?) network of canals. If this was the case (which some doubted), then their interest would increase significantly. If it did not have any commercial or transport value then ...

*“The volunteers are doing a great job – let them get on with it! It may be slow, but it will happen eventually and the council has more important things to spend their money on”*

## 2.2.6 Proposal N

### **Farm visits for school children**

- **All school children to be offered one day's work experience on a farm a year**
- **Aim: to increase understanding of where food comes from**

Eight out of ten adults in one group thought this proposal worth progressing, plus most of the youth group (four out of five). In the remaining two groups, five out of ten thought it worthwhile in one, and one respondent in another. None rejected it outright.

The positive reactions were based partly on educating children as to where food comes from, but also for encouraging children to think of farming in a positive light with potential for employment. One youth respondent commented on the behavioural benefits of taking children to farms too.

*“There was a kid who asked ‘where does milk come from?’ and they said ‘Tesco’. There is a real need for kids to know where things come from”*

*“Farming is an essential part of our lives – children need to learn / know what is going on ... It’s not just about learning where food comes from but also to learn how it’s done, and different types of farming like organic, vegetable growing and so on”*

*“Involving people could boost interest in farming and we’re going to need more farming, so taking children to farms will help create this interest. They could be taken to allotments too”*

Additionally, it was thought to be very appropriate for Herefordshire given its strong farming heritage and roots.

*“Understanding what the county is famous for, like the beef!” (Y)*

Although some thought the most obvious target for a proposal would be children from urban areas, ie not Herefordshire, some young people in

particular thought that even Herefordshire children would benefit since many don't actually go 'anywhere near' the countryside.

A counter reaction was expressed by an ex-teacher:

*"It's not needed in Herefordshire – give us / our kids credit!  
It's more relevant for kids from big cities"*

Initially, the prime target was felt to be primary school age children, but with further thought it was felt that secondary school age children would benefit too, especially in terms of potential work opportunities. A single day may not be sufficient for these children – maybe a week's work experience (perhaps dropping the word 'work').

*"I remember going to a farm in primary school – it was great! We milked some cows, fed the animals ..."* (Y)

*"I think it's really valuable – partly seeing where food comes from, but also general exposure to farming"* (Y)

Some snags with the proposal were identified which would need addressing, especially in relation to Health and Safety.

*"Farms are really dangerous places ..."*

*"Surely the farmers won't want gangs of kids traipsing through their farmyards. What about Health and Safety?"*

Suggestions were made to help overcome these concerns: dedicated 'city farms', or publicly funded farms where the requisite systems are in place. Some of the youth group talked of experiences helping the Brownies taking children to farms which they thought really valuable, and / or of a Coop 'Farm to fork' initiative which they thought was excellent.

Having generated quite considerable discussion, there were still some who, 'all things considered', thought it the work of the schools to educate children about food and its origins.

## 2.3 The less successful proposals

### 2.3.1 Proposal D

#### **Preserve redundant railway lines**

- **Planning restrictions to stop any developments which would prevent them from being turned into rail, walking or cycling routes in the future**

This proposal had mixed appeal. Six in one group supported (with two rejecting it), five in a second group (with four rejecting it), two in one group (no rejectors), and none in the youth group (with one rejecting it).

Sometimes respondents struggled a little to understand it, unsure initially as to whether these were simply unused lines, or dismantled lines, and / or whether it was referring to future use or current use.

Overall it was not found especially motivating. The most positive respondents appeared to be some more environmentally concerned, who were interested in preserving our ‘assets’ and saving them from the developers.

*“They should be viewed as a national resource”*

Most were less inclined to take such a long term view. There was no obvious benefit, and certainly none in the short term, and if they weren’t particularly interested in walking or cycling then there was even less reason to give the proposal their support.

On balance, it was a proposal that was ‘nice to have’, but not thought very important in a larger economic context.

### 2.3.2 Proposal K

#### **Vacating social (Council) housing**

- **Introduce a scheme so that if a tenant comes into a large amount of money, they are required by law to give up their house**

The desirability of increasing the social housing stock was recognised, but this proposal was not generally thought a particularly appropriate way of addressing the problem.

In two of the adult groups, approximately half 'voted' for it and half against. In the third adult group only one gave it their support, with half the group against it. In the youth group, all rejected the proposal.

For many it seemed unfair and arbitrary. Some felt there was even something distasteful about it.

*"It's like playing God. How much is a 'large amount'? Who is going to be the judge?"*

*"What if the person wants to spend the money on their kids' education, or go on a cruise?"*

*"If you inherit 100k from your ageing parents, then you should be able to spend that on your retirement rather than being forced into buying a house"*

*"That's a bit harsh! It's not their fault!" (Y)*

The key cause of respondents' unease was not being clear how the proposal would work in practice.

Who would decide what the amount was going to be, and how much would this amount be? Some felt it would have to be enough money to buy a three bedroomed house, say around £150,000, but there was widespread agreement that a 'large amount' of money for one person may only be a small amount for the next, and if the person was 'forced' into having to go into debt, ie take on a mortgage, then it was thought dubious on ethical grounds.

Further, how would anyone know that someone had come into money? This, for some, smacked of officialdom poking around in a person's private affairs.

Taking a different view of the proposal, there were some who thought there would probably be very few instances of occasions when this proposal would actually be applied.

Further, if someone really did come into a large amount of money it may well be that they would want to buy a property anyway.

Taking a different view again, some of those who were in favour of the proposal thought it absolutely right that if you have the money, you should no longer qualify for social housing. Social housing is meant for people who really need it, an argument that was supported in one group by a solicitor who argued that ...

*“(Currently), people can effectively buy an inheritance at a heavily discounted price, resulting in a lack of housing for people who have a real need”*

Overall, there was a sense among many that maybe the proposal is acceptable in principle, but that there would need to be a fairer, less divisive way of way of implementing it.

### **2.3.3 Proposal G**

**Where new roads are proposed for congestion / safety reasons, to consider investing the money in public transport, cycle paths etc rather than road building**

This proposal evoked quite heated responses. Half the respondents in two of the adult groups and the youth groups felt it was worthwhile, but in one group in particular, nine out of ten thought it should not be progressed, and the other respondents (ie half of three groups) expressed neutral responses.

Again, this proposal was “good in theory”, but many thought it too generalised. They also thought it avoided the transport issues of Herefordshire and the city, which were seen as a major problem.

*“The issue in Hereford is more about the need for a by-pass and river crossing. THAT’s where the work should be taking place”*

*“It’s back to the idea of a transport policy. That’s what we need”*

*“It depends on the size of the road and what it’s for. You can’t have a cycle path around Hereford instead of a by-pass!”*

*“We WANT new roads! ... It’s much more important than new council offices or the ESG – let’s sort out the infrastructure first. It’s a glaring omission from these proposals”*

*“You can drive all the way from Wigan, even small villages have by-passes, but you get to Hereford and you stop”*

*“Hereford NEEDS new roads, a road building programme, but not to the detriment of the environment” (Y)*

*“We’re supposed to be a city. We need better roads!” (Y)*

*“The countryside is very nice to look at, but it’s dangerous with its windy, bumpy roads. We need better quality roads” (Y)*

*“We need a balance of new roads, road maintenance, AND alternative solutions ... it’s a very fine balance” (Y)*

The call from respondents was very clear. Give us a clear transport policy with three objectives: the building of new roads, (especially a by-pass and river crossing), improvement of the maintenance and standard of the current roads, *and* expansion of alternative transport solutions (public transport and cycle paths).

### **2.3.4 Proposal R**

#### **Alcohol sales in supermarkets**

- **Currently, supermarkets sometimes sell alcohol ‘at a loss’ (ie for less than they paid for it)**
- **Cheap alcohol may fuel anti-social behaviour**
- **Proposal: either supermarkets are banned from selling alcohol at a loss, and/or that there is a minimum price per unit of alcohol**

Responses to this proposal were mixed / negative. Four respondents thought it a good idea in one group, three in another (with one objection), only one person in the third (with five people rejecting it), none in the youth group (with four out of five rejecting it).

The view of many was that anti-social behaviour was indeed often linked to alcohol, but that it was a cultural problem in the UK, and one that reduced prices was insufficient as a measure to make much (if any) difference.

*“ Cost isn’t the problem. People will always drink if they want to, they’ll always find the money”*

Further, why should the ‘sensible drinking’ majority suffer because of the binge drinking few? A minimum price per unit of alcohol was more acceptable than a complete ban in supermarkets, but even this was thought a little extreme.

*“It needs more policing. Parents need to be more responsible ... ”*

... was the view of a few.

### 2.3.5 Proposal J

#### **Stop the ‘right to buy’ social (Council) housing**

- **Currently, long standing tenants may have the ‘right to buy’ their property, but this means there’s less available for those who need it**
- **Proposal: stop this, to keep more social housing available in the county**

This was a highly controversial proposal. Within each group, a few (ie one, two, or three respondents) were in favour if it, and a few (two to four) rejected it. The remainder stayed neutral.

Many were unsure as to the current situation, especially in terms of how long someone had to live in their property in order to qualify, but also, in terms of where the money went when a property was sold.

In one group there were some particularly articulate respondents with opposing views ...

For the proposal: *“I believe that social housing should be available to those who need it. Buying it takes it out of the stock and that stock is invariably not replaced. My concern, for the whole of the country, is that if this is allowed to*

*continue there will not be much of a housing stock left and people will be forced into the private sector”*

*Against: “I totally agree with the right to buy. It’s been in existence for many years now and it enables people who of necessity had to live in those houses, initially, but then when their situation improves have the opportunity to actually buy a property which they may have never ever managed to achieve otherwise. My father was an example of that ... but if you have enough money to buy a house then you should move so that someone else can move into it”*

Similar conversations were had in other groups.

Whatever the view held, there were questions as to where the money goes after a sale.

*“Where does the money go? I’ve a feeling that it doesn’t go into the building of new houses – does it all get paid out into bonuses for directors? It should be a matter of law, and be transparent, that it has to be spent on new housing / upgrading of stock”*

... and there were concerns too that the system was open to abuse, with ‘greedy children / grandchildren’ being the beneficiaries through knowing how to ‘play the system’.

Overall, there was acknowledgement that social housing has a fundamental role to play in our society, but a proposal stating that the ‘right to buy’ should be stopped was perhaps simplistic, and not sufficiently well thought through. Education as to where the money goes / how it is used could be a way to lessen the emotions that are stirred by the debate.

### **2.3.6 Proposal I**

#### **Reduce speed limits on all roads by 10mph**

- **To encourage cycling / make roads safer**

This proposal had very little support: three respondents in one group, and two in another, but zero in one, and zero in the youth group. Further,

approximately half of the respondents in each group registered their active dislike of it.

Roads are dangerous, and some people drive too fast, but reducing speed limits by 10mph was not thought the answer.

Some responded that it was hard enough to drive at 30mph in the city, so there was no need. Others thought that reducing the speed limit in built up areas, especially near schools, might be worthwhile, but certainly not on all roads in the whole of the county. Sensitive, ‘intelligent’ imposition of 20mph limits may be more acceptable where drivers can tell there is a potential benefit, such as if there is no pavement / outside a school.

On country roads, horses can be a real hazard, but so can people who drive too slowly. Such drivers can lead to high levels of frustration, annoyance, and risk taking.

Enforcing such a law was expected to be very difficult to achieve, rendering it meaningless.

On the other hand, for some of the more cynical, the whole idea of reducing the speed limit was perhaps to generate more revenue by issuing speeding tickets so maybe they *would* have the incentive to enforce it.

*“If it would make roads safer for cyclists then fair enough, but I doubt it would actually make any difference”*

### **2.3.7 Proposal S**

#### **Pub closing times**

- **Re-introduce pub closing times at 11pm to reduce drinking hours in the hope of reducing anti-social behaviour**

This proposal also had very little support: two respondents in two of the groups (including the Youth group), and one respondent in each of the other two groups. Actual rejections varied from seven people in one group, to zero in one.

It was sometimes older respondents who tended to be more in favour of this proposal (as was the case for Proposal R, also about alcohol and anti-social behaviour).

The majority felt this proposal would be a retrograde step, and that pubs closing at 11pm led to more problems than those experienced now.

*“It’s been proven that since the 24 hour licensing laws were brought in that it had over the country reduced anti social behaviour. It was passed, and everyone seemed fairly happy about it, so ...” (Y)*

*“Drinking to excess is a problem regardless. It would just move the problem from the pubs into the clubs” (Y)*

*“Currently the giving of licenses takes into account where the pub is, whether there are houses next door etc and so it’s flexible in the way that it’s applied. There’s no need to go back to a blanket 11pm ban” (ex landlord)*

*“The pub in our village never shut at 11pm anyway!”*

In addition to not being considered a good idea by most, it also couldn’t be seen how imposing an 11pm closure time would contribute to sustainable communities.

### **2.3.8 Proposal P**

#### **Introduction of a chewing gum tax**

- **To pay for its removal from pavements**

Everybody hates chewing gum on pavements or indeed anywhere – benches, seating, desks etc, but only one person in the youth group felt that introducing a tax on it would make any difference.

About half were ambivalent about the idea, and half rejected it.

*“That’s pants!” (Y)*

*“I don’t want to pay extra because of some stupid person putting their gum on the floor when they can’t be bothered to use a bin” (Y)*

*“There are more important things to worry about than chewing gum on the pavement”*

Again, as with the one of the alcohol proposals (R), there was a sense of unfairness: why should all suffer for the actions of a few? It's about education, or so some said, but it is also too limited in its scope ...

*“This is too narrow. It's about enforcement – litter generally, McDonalds packaging, not just chewing gum.”*

## **Appendices**

The proposals

Discussion guide

<b>A</b>	<p><b>Open new train stations on existing lines, e.g.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pontrilas (Hereford – Abergavenny)</li> <li>• Woofferton (Leominster – Ludlow)</li> <li>• Moreton-on-Lugg (Leominster – Hereford)</li> </ul>
<b>B</b>	<p><b>Re-build old train lines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a number of dismantled train lines in Herefordshire</li> <li>• Idea: rebuild, either as tourist routes with steam trains, and / or as ordinary commuter lines</li> <li>• e.g. between Leominster and Kington, and / or Hereford and Ross-on-Wye</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	<p><b>Twin-track the train line between Hereford and Ledbury</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make it double track all the way from Hereford to Birmingham</li> <li>• Would allow for more trains, fewer delays and fewer cancellations</li> </ul>
<b>D</b>	<p><b>Preserve redundant railway lines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning restrictions to stop any developments which would prevent them from being turned into rail, walking or cycling routes in the future</li> </ul>
<b>E</b>	<p><b>Creation of a public transport governing body</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently bus and train services are provided by a number of independent companies</li> <li>• Proposal: to establish a governing body which would help 'join up' the services and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ensure there are bus routes everywhere they are needed</li> <li>○ allow profitable routes help subsidise less profitable (but socially necessary) routes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>F</b>	<p><b>Ensure public transport is available to all settlements of 100+ people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where the settlement is over 3 miles from a town</li> </ul>
<b>G</b>	<p><b>Where new roads are proposed for congestion / safety reasons, to consider investing the money in public transport, cycle paths etc rather than road building</b></p>
<b>H</b>	<p><b>Provide cycle paths on major roads e.g. A49 Ross to Leominster</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage cycling / make roads safer</li> </ul>
<b>I</b>	<p><b>Reduce speed limits on all roads by 10mph</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage cycling / make roads safer</li> </ul>
<b>J</b>	<p><b>Stop the ‘right to buy’ social (Council) housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, long standing tenants may have the ‘right to buy’ their property, but this means there’s less available for those who need it.</li> <li>• Proposal: stop this, to keep more social housing available in the county</li> </ul>
<b>K</b>	<p><b>Vacating social (Council) housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce a scheme so that if a tenant comes into a large amount of money, they are required by law to give up their house</li> </ul>
<b>L</b>	<p><b>Giving priority to local people in relation to social housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently social housing is allocated to people deemed to have the greatest need for it</li> <li>• Suggestion: in rural communities, priority would be given to people who live locally or who have a connection to the area</li> </ul>

<b>M</b>	<p><b>Reduce the VAT on building conversions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, brand new buildings attract 0% VAT on materials and labour, while conversions attract 5%</li> <li>• Suggestion: VAT on conversions of existing buildings should be 0% to encourage regeneration of town centres, and reduce the need for houses to be built in open countryside</li> </ul>
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<b>N</b>	<p><b>Farm visits for school children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All school children to be offered one day's work experience on a farm a year</li> <li>• Aim: to increase understanding of where food comes from</li> </ul>
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<b>O</b>	<p><b>Creation of 'Post Banks' in Post Offices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering a full range of banking facilities, and free cash machines</li> <li>• Would also make local Post Offices more viable and less likely to close</li> </ul>
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<b>P</b>	<p><b>Introduction of a chewing gum tax</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To pay for its removal from pavements</li> </ul>
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<b>Q</b>	<p><b>Broadband</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of high-speed broadband throughout the county</li> </ul>
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<b>R</b>	<p><b>Alcohol sales in supermarkets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, supermarkets sometimes sell alcohol "at a loss" (i.e. for less than they paid for it)</li> <li>• Cheap alcohol may fuel anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Proposal: either supermarkets are banned from selling alcohol at a loss, and / or that there is a minimum price per unit of alcohol</li> </ul>
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<b>S</b>	<p><b>Pub closing times</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-introduce pub closing times at 11pm to reduce drinking hours in the hope of reducing anti-social behaviour</li> </ul>
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<b>T</b>	<p><b>Considerations when closing or moving public services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, cost is the main consideration when closing or moving local services</li> <li>• Proposal: this should be broadened to also include social and environmental factors (e.g. if considering the closure of rural bus services / pubs / Post Offices)</li> </ul>
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<b>U</b>	<p><b>Herefordshire Black Mountains</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Black Mountains are mostly in Wales, but a small part are in Herefordshire</li> <li>• The Welsh part are covered by the Brecon Beacons National Park</li> <li>• Proposal: to either extend the National Park boundary to cover ALL the Black Mountains, or to designate the Herefordshire Black Mountains as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</li> <li>• Aim: to give additional protection to the land they cover</li> </ul>
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<b>V</b>	<p><b>Restoration of the Hereford to Gloucester canal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently underway, with work done by volunteers</li> <li>• Proposal: central government or a government agency to fund the restoration and re-opening of the canal</li> </ul>
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# Hibiscus

## SCA Proposals: discussion guide 10 July 2009

(Timings are approximate, for guidance only)

### Section A: introduction (20 mins)

- **‘Standard’ introduction**
  - who we all are (Herefordshire Voice, my independence)
  - explanation of research: no right/wrong answers, no consensus needed, their honest views and opinions
  - tape recorder, confidentiality, MRS Code
- **Warm up exercise**
  - Brief individual details
  - One thing we don’t know about them

*This exercise is to get them to relax, start thinking and talking!*

### Section B: exposure of the proposals (15 mins)

- **Introduce task** for the evening: briefly explain the idea of Sustainable Communities and that the Council needs to submit proposals for possible development, and that we’re here to help them in that process

**Moderator to spread the proposals around the room** and ask the group to stand up, wander around, and read them. Each to place stickers on them to show which have the most and least resonance

*The idea of this is to inject a bit of energy into the group (ie get them out of their chairs!), and, by placing the stickers, get their immediate individual responses (prioritisations) to the proposals before they’re discussed as a group (ie non contaminated)*

- Moderator to then count up the stickers – ie – get an initial idea of which proposals catch respondents’ attention, and which do not (again prior to discussion)

### **Section C: the most positive proposals**

**(40 mins)**

- Discuss each proposal in turn, starting with the one(s) with the most stickers
  - Why did that proposal get so many stickers
  - What they liked about it
  - What they understand by it
  - What the key benefit(s) is
  - How important do they think it is (eg on a scale from 1 to 10)?
  - Who does it appeal to / who’s going to benefit from it?
  - What are the downsides / weak points? How could it be improved?
  - How could it change behaviour / attitudes – what impact might it have on them / others?
  - If it is implemented, what does it say about Herefordshire / the Council? What does it say if it isn’t implemented?

### **Section D: the more neutral / negative proposals**

**(30 mins)**

- Why did this proposal get fewer / no stickers?
- What didn’t they like?
  - Check understanding and input as / when necessary
- What are the main weaknesses here?
- Are there any benefits? To anyone? (ie maybe it doesn’t seem relevant to themselves, but it may to others)
- Is it fundamentally flawed, or are there some aspects within it which *are* worthwhile (maybe if they were worked on)
- How could it be improved / made to work?
- How many marks would they give it out of 10?
- If this was implemented, what would it say about Herefordshire / the Council?

**Section E: Summary**

**(15 mins)**

- Which proposals should be progressed? Which should be amended and then progressed? Which should be stopped?
- What else may have been interesting?

**Thank and close  
(Approx total 120 mins)**