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Herefordshire Council Backs Defence Sector Bid Amid Mixed Reactions

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Herefordshire Council has voted to promote the county as a potential site for future investment in Britain's defence sector, including possible munitions production. The move follows the UK Government's recent Strategic Defence Review (SDR), which announced funding for defence infrastructure, including six proposed munitions factories.

Councillor Ed O'Driscoll (Liberal Democrat), who brought forward the motion, called on the council to highlight to the central government the county's "strategic readiness" to support new defence investment.

“Herefordshire is not starting from scratch,” said Cllr O’Driscoll, citing the Rotherwas Enterprise Zone, known for its defence and security focus, and the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE) in Hereford. Rotherwas was also a major site of munitions production during the Second World War.

“If we want better services, we need a stronger economy,” he said, linking future prosperity to industrial development.

Cabinet Member for Economy and Growth, Cllr Graham Biggs, confirmed that the council has already been in discussions with international defence firms interested in the area.

“Herefordshire has already been proactively seeking to develop opportunities in defence and security,” he said.

Cllr Aubrey Oliver, also a Liberal Democrat, said the war in Ukraine had exposed the UK’s shortage of munitions production facilities. “The essential thing in a war is ammunition and munitions, and we are short,” he said, in support of the motion.

However, the proposal was not without opposition. Green Party Councillor Stef Simmons raised concerns over focusing solely on munitions, arguing that it was unlikely Herefordshire would secure one of the six facilities. “There are more opportunities at the high-tech end of the sector,” she said.

Her colleague, Cllr Rebecca Tully, suggested that some towns with existing munitions sites suffer from significant health issues and claimed that some defence companies engage in unethical practices abroad.

Independent Councillor Liz Harvey, leader of the Independents for Herefordshire (i4H) group, said the council should not invest effort into reviving a hazardous industry. “It killed many workers, both quickly and slowly,” she said, referencing the risks of munitions manufacturing in the past.

Despite the objections, the motion passed, with most Green and Independent councillors either abstaining or voting against.

The decision places Herefordshire among a growing number of regions positioning themselves for a share of the government’s multi-billion-pound defence sector expansion. The extent to which the county will benefit remains to be seen, but council leaders have

made clear their intention to bring skilled jobs and long-term economic growth to the region through renewed industrial partnerships.