

Report 9 to Whixall Parish Council by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall + Edward Towers – October 2022

Dear All – Please find below our ninth written report as your County Councillors:

Full Shropshire Council Meeting....took place on Thursday 22nd September 2022 in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND.

It began with A MINUTES SILENCE to reflect upon and show our appreciation/thankfulness for the faithful service to our nation during her long life of Her Majesty the Queen. Her State Funeral had been held earlier in the week, on Monday 19th September. Combined within this act of commemoration was also our thoughts, thanks and remembrance for the life and long service of Councillor Les Winward from Bridgnorth who had passed away since we last met as a Full Shropshire Council.

Then, after introductory remarks, minutes, etc there followed Public Questions. There were two, the first asking about the timing of Pedestrian Crossings in Shrewsbury Town Centre because of Active Travel and Net Zero concerns. The second asking about how long was the period of 'temporary closure' of the two Highway Depots in the east of the county [Hodnet and Bridgnorth]. Replies and some assurances were offered in answer to them both by Cllr Dean Carroll the Highways and Assets Portfolio Holder.

The followed a series of reports for the Council to receive. These were on:

- **Annual Treasury Report 2021/22**
- **Annual Assurance Report of the Audit Committee to Council 2021/22**
- **Alternative Budget Process** – generally welcomed with the assurance that this can be reviewed again.
- **Modern Slavery Statement** – Monitoring is continually being done with partners and the Police to ensure aspirations are met in a world of evolving practice.
- **Update on Cornovii Developments Contracting Arrangements - This is Shropshire Council's wholly owned homebuilding company to develop a range of new and sustainable homes to meet the council's [Housing Strategy](#) priority ensuring people whose housing requirements are not met through open market housing, can access housing that meets their needs.**
- **Whitchurch Swimming and Fitness Centre rebuild** – Costing around £13m – Incidentally, I did tell the meeting that Wem hadn't been included in the Officers Report and we too needed consideration when funding was being sought as all our requests for much smaller sums in former years had fallen on deaf ears!
- **Establishment of a Climate Change and Carbon Reduction Stakeholder Board** – which Edward is on
- **West Mercia Youth Justice Plan for 2022-2023**
- **Interim Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2022**
- **Appointment of Statutory Scrutiny Officer** – Tom Dodds
- **Appointment to Committees – changes to report**

[All the above reports were unanimously accepted.](#)

One motion was then considered:

1. Motion. Small Lots of Public Land and the Right to Grow Food.....from the Labour Group.

Shropshire communities face a perfect storm of escalating prices for food, for energy just as the evidence for the climate crisis is unfolding before our eyes. This motion requested the council to make available small plots of public land for community food growing. This initiative sought to help Shropshire neighbourhoods become more sustainable and increase resilience by making it easier for community groups to grow more food for local people on underused, or unused, public land, on plots as small as 4 – 5 m2. Even contaminated land could be used for composting or beekeeping.

Under current rules, it can be complex and costly to access such land – for example, residents can request to take on responsibility for sections of road margin but this includes provision of public liability insurance and includes the obligation for costly tree and hedge management, if any are present. However, the Council was told, there are great examples of groups that have pushed on with community growing despite the challenges, such as the Street Allotment Project* in Shrewsbury, **Incredible Edible groups in Ludlow and Wem** and Bridgnorth Community Garden Project, showing what can be achieved. The Shropshire Good Food Partnership is set up to support

communities across the county to access the skills and resources they need to get started and sustain community growing activities. However, more small lots are needed to take this excellent initiative forward and get more fresh food to more Shropshire people.

The Right to Grow Food will help communities help themselves in really difficult times. Successful projects have potential for even more benefits than nourishment. Through common purpose, improved mental and physical health, reduced loneliness and isolation and more connected and supportive communities can be achieved and this comes with economic benefits far beyond helping out with shopping bills. This is linked to a national initiative on the Right to Grow Food with a proposed Community Food and Land Bill at Westminster.

It was pointed out that the actual ownership of the land in question was not to be transferred. [This council then resolved unanimously](#), following a Conservative amendment, to facilitate community growing in Shropshire as follows;

- *This Council will expand the group that considers Community Asset Transfer requests to receive Expressions of Interest from town and parish councils on behalf of their residents and/or local community groups who have identified small parcels of land suitable for food cultivation.*
- *If identified land is deemed to be appropriate, and is supported by local people within the parish/town council area for the purpose of food production, a license to operate on the land covering insurance, risk, ground investigation surveys, tree impact assessment etc will be negotiated on a case by case basis with the town or parish council.*
- *Councillors would be able to seek out land in their division available for community food gardens.*
- *Promote the initiative via the council's website.*

Five Questions to Cabinet from Members then followed. These concerned:

a) Asking for updated information about the proposed North West (Relief) Road in respect of:

The Balfour Beatty Audit of SC's projected costing [now £81m rather than £87m]. This has not been concluded as yet as there are a number of areas still needing further clarification

£20m has been spent on preliminary investigations with approx. £4m being spent on ground investigations along the length of the NWRR – final investigations still ongoing. They are not 'location specific', so accurate costs specifically associated with the viaduct not available. The data to date however does support the original project assumptions and approach to construction. The design and construction of the sub-structure and super-structure is challenging but achievable and this forms the basis of the 'environmental assessment included within the live planning application. Supplementary ground investigation data will be made available in due course.

It was made clear that the Cabinet's position on the NWRR has not changed.

b) The disposal of housing stock by local Housing Association, Connexus in south-west Shropshire (which incidentally in the last paragraph in this section explains the reasoning for some Connexus house sales in Wem Rural!)

This is causing serious concern given the dire shortage of affordable accommodation in this area. This is further compounded by the fact that no new building is taking place, which isn't due to a lack of planning, but the total stop on new developments, including any that Cornovii may wish to develop, due the challenges posed by the Clun River phosphate problem.

The response from Councillor Rob Gittins, [Portfolio Holder for Digital, Data & Insight and Built Housing] said current registrations on the Council's HomePoint system, broken down by Place Plan area, show the following numbers of households awaiting housing in south-west Shropshire:

- Bishops Castle 132
- Church Stretton 12
- Craven Arms 72
- Ludlow 284

In respect of Shropshire Council's actions to address the environmental issues affecting the Clun Valley and its development implications, he said that Shropshire Council has led the establishment of a Strategic Clun Liaison Group to bring together senior leaders from across the Environment Agency, Natural England and Severn Trent Water with the aim of establishing a multi-agency response to address issues in the Clun as soon as practicably possible. At present, there is no up-to-date Nutrient Management Plan or Special Area of Conservation Restoration Plan for the Clun catchment. It is Natural England's responsibility to lead this work.

Despite the need firstly to understand the restoration requirements for the Clun, the Council does not want to wait to develop an evidence base and understanding around mitigation. The Council has therefore reached agreement with Natural England to undertake this work alongside work on the Restoration Plan.

In respect of planned disposals of certain affordable housing stock by the local Registered Provider Connexus, CDL and STAR are exploring any potential to purchase the units on either an affordable or private rented sector basis. However, it should be noted that the key driver for Connexus to dispose of the homes is their poor thermal performance and the associated high costs of refurbishment. The issues associated with these homes arises from their rural locations, heating systems, build type and associated high construction costs. These same issues will also affect the viability of the homes should CDL and STAR purchase the units

- c) A question was asked about why was the wording of a recommendation by Cabinet on the 30th of June 2021 with reference to a contract between Shropshire Unitary Council and SCLG (SERCO) changed, from “up to five years” to “for five years” when presented to Full Council and who made the decision to change the wording?**

In response Councillor Cecilia Motley [Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture, Leisure & Tourism and Transport] said that the extension to the contract with Shropshire Community Leisure Trust is for 5 years, with a break clause in year 2. The extension negotiations came at a time of considerable uncertainty in the leisure market. Issues include:

- The speed of income recovery following the Covid pandemic
- Rapidly increasing inflation
- Increases in utility costs
- Increases in staff salaries.

This all meant that there was a significant increase in subsidy required. Given that the impact of the issues mentioned above are yet to be fully understood, it was felt prudent to add a break clause at the end of year 2. This meant that the delivery of the contract could be monitored and potentially reviewed, by both sides, depending on how market conditions change over the next 12-18 months. As a result, whilst the contract is for 5 years, there is an opportunity to renegotiate the contract for years 3-5, or to retender if market conditions are favourable. The wording change from ‘up to five years’ to ‘for five years’ simply more accurately represents the full term of the contract. The drafting of Council reports benefit from the input of many colleagues providing their professional advice.

- d) A question was asked about Border issues with English Concessionary bus passes in Wales and the impact this is having on passengers.**

In response Councillor Cecilia Motley [Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture, Leisure & Tourism and Transport] said the English National Concessionary Travel scheme when introduced was not intended for use in Wales for which separate legislation exists, however there are agreements in place allow Shropshire concessionary passengers to commence their journey in England and travel onwards to Wales. The issue highlighted is where passengers then want to change to a more local service in Wales for onwards travel to access essential services, for which their concessionary pass is not valid and a charge would be made. I don’t believe we can provide a blanket approval for Shropshire passes to be used on any bus service in Wales, but I am happy for us to explore which individual services in Wales passengers are looking to use to gain access to essential services and I have asked our Transport Team to explore this option with their colleagues in Wales. Officers will report back once they have had those conversations.

- e) A question was asked to update Council on what is currently holding the planning process up, when it is expected that the NWRR application will go before Planning Committee and the plans to mitigate current inflationary pressures as a result of the delays. Also asked was when contracts expect to be awarded and when the road will be in use?**

In response Councillor Dean Carroll [Portfolio Holder for Physical Infrastructure (highways and assets)] said the project team are currently undertaking more detailed design work to seek to remove objections raised by the Environment Agency and Natural England during the Planning Consultation. The project team remain confident that outcomes of the work will result in objections being removed. The detailed work currently being undertaken is work that was planned for post planning consent and so the delay will not have a significant detriment to timescales. It is hoped that a resolution will be reached in the coming weeks and that a planning application can be considered before Christmas. The web site will be updated to reflect the new timescales once the date of the Planning Committee has been confirmed.

Shropshire Council Committees:

- I. [Northern Planning Committee on 13/9/22 for ET was cancelled!](#)....as was a scrutiny one for Adult Health and Social Care and a Backbenchers one, both on 19th September – the date of HM Queen’s Funeral and resulting additional Bank Holiday.
- II. [People Overview Committee on 28/9/22 for PB](#). Amongst other things they discussed are details of how SC deal with the Ukrainian children that go to our local schools. The report below gives us all helpful information about this matter:

Shropshire continues to welcome Ukrainian refugees including many children of school age.

How many Ukrainian children have places in primary, secondary and 6th form or further education schools and colleges and critically how many children and young people are still without a place?

As of Friday 26 September 2022, there are known to be 140 Ukrainian refugees in early years, primary, secondary and FE college settings across Shropshire. It is understood that Shropshire settings are processing further in-year applications that the local authority is yet to be advised on as families are arriving in county every week. An exercise is being undertaken with schools to confirm the Ukrainian pupils currently in their schools so that we have an up-to-date countywide picture, particularly given the new academic term and a number of instances of pupils transferring from early years to primary, primary to secondary and secondary to FE. To date the vast majority of Ukrainian families seeking a place for their child have been able to do secure one.

Where primary school class sizes are already at capacity what support is being provided to Ukrainian families to ensure that their children are able to access a school place.

A fair access process is in place to deal with those cases where schools are unable to offer a school place for an in-year admission, for example where they are constrained by statutory infant class size regulations or the particular year group is full. Since March the Fair Access Panel, which is tasked with finding an alternative school, has only had to meet twice and was able to find a school place in each case.

What funding is available to schools to provide additional support to Ukrainian children?

The Department for Education is providing funding for schools, with phased payments based on the following annual allocations per pupil: early years (2 to 4 years) - £3,000; primary (5 to 10 years - £6,580), and; secondary/FE (11 to 18 years - £8,755). The first payment for Shropshire was received at the end of August for the arrivals between 1 March and 31 May 2022, which is currently being distributed to schools. Further payments are expected to be received quarterly. It is important to be aware that only schools admitting refugees arriving through the Homes for Ukraine scheme qualify for this financial support. Schools offering places via the Ukraine Family scheme are not eligible for funding as these arrivals are deemed to be the normal visa route for families arriving in the UK from overseas for whom schools do not routinely receive funding for their education.

What English lessons are being provided to Ukrainian children and young people and their families?

The following website has the most up to date information regarding this:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/homes-for-ukraine/education-%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%96%D1%82%D0%B0/esol-english-for-speakers-of-otherlanguages/>

Children and young people's language learning is supported by their Early Years settings, school or college. EY settings and schools receive additional funding to support a) refugee pupils and b) pupils learning English as an Additional Language. Young people aged 16-18 whose English is limited are able to access a specialist full-time college course at Shrewsbury College. Adults are able to access English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision through the following routes: see <https://shropshire.gov.uk/homes-for-ukraine/education-%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%96%D1%82%D0%B0/esol-english-for-speakers-of-other-languages/>

- accredited courses at The Gateway Centre and North Shropshire College, Oswestry.
- ESOL programme run by Shropshire Supports Refugees based at Shrewsbury Community Hub; recent confirmation of funding from Shropshire Council will allow this programme to grow and become more formalised. It includes online learning options.
- informal ESOL provision run by volunteers in other towns including Ludlow, Oswestry, Market Drayton, Wem, Church Stretton and Bishop's Castle
- future outreach classes planned by Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College in Market Drayton, Whitchurch and Wem

- III. [Strategic Licensing Committee – 5/10/22 \(ET+PB\)](#) when following some public questions that received written answers about taxi driving issues (that can be sent you if you'd like to see them) reports were received from the Transactional and Licensing Team Manager on:

- Licensing Fees and Charges 2023 – 24
- Review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2023 to 2027
- Revision of Hackney Carriage Table of Fares
- Proposed Variation of the Designation of Licenced Streets
- Responsibilities of Premises Licence Holders under the Licensing Act 2003

- Exercise of Delegated Powers
 - Report of the Transactional and Licensing Team Manager
- were all fully discussed and unanimously agreed to.

Shropshire Council Briefing Session:

There have been no further briefing sessions since our September report:

Shropshire Council Training/Development Sessions:

None have been held this last month.

Shropshire Climate Change Stakeholder Group:

As was reported in our report last month, ET was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of this Cross-Party group that was held via Teams on Tuesday 30th August when a very active discussion took place starting off with agreeing 'Terms of Reference' and then moving on to review the wide range current projects and initiatives being undertaken by Shropshire Council. The results of this was that at our recent Full Shropshire Council meeting it was agreed by Council that it should now agree the formal **Establishment of a Climate Change and Carbon Reduction Stakeholder Board** in line with what was agreed at the inaugural meeting. As we reported last month the issues of poor broadband coverage in rural areas and Active Travel needing to be included as a 'golden thread' running through all future SC policies (such as planning...where it is not even mentioned in the emerging Shropshire Local Plan!) should now be looked into as part of the future work programme for this Board. The next Stakeholder meeting is being planned for early October.

Shropshire Local Plan Member Group:

As we reported in last month's report ET had been invited to attend a meeting of this revived Cross-Party group held via Teams on Monday 8th August. A further meeting was held on the 14th September at which the '**Amended and Additional Text for Inclusion in Draft SPD or Supplementary Planning Document (Agreed with Telford & Wrekin Officers)**' was further debated and refined. There was a vigorous debate with SC Officers to make sure it reflected Shropshire's concerns were on equal footing with those of Telford and Wrekin. [These were about issues related to the old power station site/developments at Buildwas on land that is partly in Shropshire Council's area and part within Telford and Wrekin's...so adding this extra layer of complexity]. It was agreed these need to be addressed before both Council's deadlines.

Public Transport Working Group:

As we said in our last report ET was invited to attend meetings of this cross-party group. The group met again on the 8th September to learn of three matters:

1. Levelling Up Fund - Transport Submission

The LUF Bid 2 was submitted by the due date, 2nd August 2022, to central government. The bid reflected a lot of what we had initially planned as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) back in October 2021. This time we submitted a package bid that incorporated two major schemes under the banner of 'Shropshire Connect';

- **Shrewsbury Connect**, is a reimagining of Shrewsbury Park and Ride, providing an improved frequency and interconnectivity between all three routes operating around the town. New stops are planned including Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings to allow a fully integrated service for passengers.
- **Rural Connect**, Shropshire's plan for a demand responsive transport service (DRT) operating in and around the 18 market towns located within the county. This would provide an essential lifeline to rural residents without public transport to access essential services. The DRT will also be designed to complement existing local bus services in the county.

We have been advised that a decision on funding could be as soon as October 2022.

2. VIA

Members had the chance to meet representatives from VIA who are currently working with Passenger Transport Group officers on the scope and potential design of pilot zones for a DRT service in Shropshire. VIA specialises and designs the software and systems that allow local authorities to operate DRT in their areas and their contribution so far has enabled the local authority to understand modern and cost-effective initiatives to navigate Demand Responsive options. Expanding the concept of Rural Connect, an area in the South of Shrewsbury has been identified as a possible pilot zone for the scheme and has the potential to be in place without funding through the LUF bid. Members used the time to pose questions to VIA representatives about how their model would work.

3. Sigma Bus

Everyone present was given a demonstration vehicle kindly loaned to us from MellorBus. It was the Sigma 7, a fully electric, emission free bus making cleaner travel accessible for all passengers. Members were given a unique first glimpse of the vehicle being as Shropshire Council is the first authority to glimpse this unique vehicle. Discussions were had into its potential inclusion on a DRT service operating in the county and how it could potentially revitalise bus travel in the county for passengers of all ages. Members got to experience the comfort of the bus for themselves with a quick trip into Shrewsbury Town Centre and back.

The next meeting for this group is being planned for some time in October.

Cross Party Group to help advise on Draft Submissions to the Boundary Commission.

The questionnaire has now been completed (reported in our July Report), it's data has been analysed to support the text of the submissions now passing between officers and Councillors as it is prepared to take it to Full Council. ET is part of this group. Amongst other things it is being agreed that there should be no change to a Cabinet style of leadership and that a rise of two members of SC to 76 are needed to help us function efficiently in representing residents where there has been a large increase in population due to demographic changes caused by new house building and employment patterns

Ambulance Task and Finish Group

ET was on holiday and so unable to attend the second meeting on the 9th September of this group as the representative for the Independent Group. It's objectives were:

- To consider how the wider system needs to contribute to enable Ambulance response times to improve
- To look at this through three areas of focus:
 - Primary Care and preventing A&E attendance
 - A&E Attendance and admission to Hospital
 - Preparing for discharge from hospital and discharge from hospital

and then to make evidence-based recommendations so that its work is completed by the end of October '22. A further meeting is now planned for 10th October for an 'evidence gathering day'.

Regarding Whixall Parish, our activity this last month has been focussed on:

Monitoring and, where needed, giving advice and support for planning/pre-planning applications and single plot eligibility for local young people and an on-going social care need involving a number of agencies made more tricky to resolve because we are in a rural area.

It is encouraging to be able to report this month that we have just been notified that there has been a successful planning application for two young people from a local family in Rack Lane. We are now aware that there are two separate similar applications being considered for other local young people who want to live and work in this area, which clearly shows this is a local need that must be addressed.

Regarding other matters that concern that we are either involved in or notified about:

The Wemian – Still needs a new Editor and team members to help ensure this long running and valued local publication is able to continue to flourish, adapt and serve our community. Cllr Geoff Soul (Wem Town Council and Mayor of Wem) is its Treasurer and can be a point of contact for any who may want further details.

North Salop Wheelers – we were pleased to let you know last week that NS Wheelers Community Bus....styled as 'Wheelers' have launched a new website but forgot to add the link to their website so here it is:
<https://northsalopwheelers.co.uk>.

As we said then, a lot of work has gone on behind the scenes to produce this and revamp quite a lot of the good work they do in our community. It is still possible to make changes to the website, so do give feedback over the coming weeks. If you think they have missed anything do let them know. Also, do let others know of this initiative....and they are still looking for more/new drivers to help develop this voluntary community service. Ask any interested to get in touch through the website.

Wem Area Climate Action Forum – The group held their latest meetings on 5th September when ET was unfortunately away on holiday and so cannot report in any detail. I have a copy of their minutes should any wish to see them, but the items discussed on the agenda were:

Charity Status/Biodiversity Project/Wildflower Planting and Trees/Buildings and the Environment/Footpaths/Level Crossing Signage/Concern over Group Numbers and notification given of upcoming Civic Society talks on Food and a reminder of Wem's Annual Harvest Market that has now taken place on 24th September.

The next meeting is on 10th October.

Wem Economic Forum

We had the long-awaited 'face to face' meeting (rather than on Teams/Zoom) with four Shropshire Council Officers in the Roden Suite Wednesday 21st September. It was a productive meeting that introduced at least 3 new SC Officers to the issues we have finding the way forward in attracting businesses into Wem, as well as supporting existing ones! A report from this meeting will be given under item 9 of the agenda for this week's Wem Town Council meeting. Sufficient to say we have now planning monthly meetings to progress things and so have put 3 dates in our diaries for Oct, Nov and Dec.

Two Useful Upcoming Wem Diary Dates

[Wem Christmas festival and Lights Switch-on](#) (or 'Late Night Shopping'!) – Friday 2nd December 2022

[Wem Sweet Pea Show 2023 on Sat 15/Sun 16th July at Wem Town Hall.](#)

This should bring you up to date this month. If there are other matters you wish to bring to our attention, or you need clarifications, then let us know.

Kindest regards,

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers

Shropshire County Councillors for the Wem, Wem Rural & Whixall Division

Date: 8th October 2022