

Report 22 to Whixall Parish Council by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall + Edward Towers – March 2024

Dear All – Please find below our twenty-second written report as your County Councillors.

Full Shropshire Council Meeting was on Thursday 29th February in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND.

After introductory remarks, approval of minutes, etc there followed **Public Questions**. There were six:

1. The first was from Mr Timothy Ashton of Souldon Hall, Wem, so we will give this one in full and the answer he received. He asked the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Digital (Cllr Robert Macey) about the Council's state of knowledge concerning William Shakespeare's familiarity with Shropshire and the playwright's setting of As You Like It in the Wem-Souldon-Hodent area. He went on to ask:
 - what formal steps have been taken and will be taken by the local authority to exploit this information to unlock cultural, economic and social opportunities for the people, business and students of Shropshire and to recover the county's identity as the destination of the English Grand Tour
 - if the texture of this matters as set out in public lectures in the City of London and the town of Wem can formally entered into the Council's consciousness

In response Cllr Macey said Shropshire Council is aware of fresh research that asserts that As You Like It was set in North Shropshire and that contemporary productions were performed in the county. The Council is not clear whether the research has been widely accepted by the academic community. Shropshire Council will be reviewing its cultural priorities and Destination Management Plan over the coming 12 months. Should it be confirmed that there is a legitimate connection between Shakespeare and North Shropshire, the Council will welcome any interested parties to approach the Culture, Leisure and Tourism team with appropriate information about the research with a view that it helps inform future plans.

2. Asked for confirmation of what the expected total pre-commencement costs of the combined Oxon Link Road and North West Relief Road are to date and what they will be (including costs of business case preparation) at the point at which road construction starts? In reply the Portfolio holder for Highways, Cllr Dan Morris said: ***'To the end of Quarter 3 2023/4, the OLR and NWRR had incurred combined spend of £28.2m. In order to reach Full Business Case completion and therefore moving to Main Construction, including programme critical advance works, is forecast to cost £15.164m. In total therefore the combined forecast spend prior to construction will be £43.364m.'***
3. Asked for a clear answer as to what Shropshire Council meant when it says the North West Relief Road is "fully funded" by central government. In reply the Portfolio holder said: ***'In October 2023 the Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper said the government would 'fully fund' the scheme. Senior Council Officers are in regular contact with the Department for Transport (DfT) and have been given no reason to believe that Government support for the NWRR will be anything other than that announced by the Secretary of State on TV, fully funded, at today's cost of construction'.***
4. Asked for an explanation of what formal measures Shropshire Council has put in place to ensure complete separation of the Highways Department, NWRR project team and Cabinet from the Local Planning Authority function...and could they publish the relevant document(s) describing these measures. The Portfolio holder explained how this was being achieved.
5. Noted the atrocious state of the roads in Hadnall and Clive parishes and asked are re-repair costs of
 - a. increased use of bagged tarmac
 - b. residents' car damage costs from the chronic pothole pressures on springs, suspension, joints and tyresfactored into county value for money costings by the chief financial officer?
The questioner also asked for the release the optional new road funding expenditure projection for 2024 and the 2024 budgeted expenditure on permanent pothole repairs as opposed to temporary bagged tarmac repairs.....and was told ***'All planned maintenance programmes will be published once budgets have been confirmed'.***
6. Asked about an update on the grant figures received from the Department for Transport for the North West Relief Road, as there was some confusion in the publicized figures. The Portfolio holder replying reassuringly said ***'The grant payments outstanding at Quarter 2 of £2,660,807 for 2022/23 and £3,777,271 for 2023/24 and which total £6,438,078 have now been paid by the DfT to Shropshire Council and were received in our bank account on 22/09/2023. No further funding is due this financial year'.*** He also explained that there had been an error of £720,184 on the DfT Spreadsheet and that this has been reported to the DfT for correction.

Each was answered by the appropriate Portfolio Holder and where the more detailed answer is wanted (where there is one!), then please do ask ET, who will forward them to you.

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

1. Financial Strategy 2024/25 - 2028/29 and Setting the Council Tax Resolution 2024/25 – The former caused a lot of discussion and the plea from all in the chamber was for fairer funding from HM Government, as it is not only SC that

is affected by this. However, in order to meet our increasingly large legal obligations with Adult Social Care, etc it leaves very little available for our other services.

An amendment to help cut costs was put to the Council by the Labour Group regarding small cuts in 'staff salaries' so that jobs were protected, but whilst it was promised that these would be looked into by the SC Leader, Lezley Picton, this was not accepted and voted against when put to the vote. A further 'cost saving' amendment was put to the Council by the Green Group regarding Children's Social Care arrangements, but this too was voted against. The Lib Dem Group and Independent Group also made their feelings strong and made suggestions as to alternative ways of mitigating yet another year's 'black hole' that the budget is trying to fill.

The budget before Council is one with very severe implications, as it stands, as it means a potential loss of 300+ staff, and severe cuts in many services....with Libraries seemingly towards the top of the list! When it came to the vote for this budget it was passed by 37 in favour with 32 against....so a close result!

As regards the Council Tax Resolution for 2024/25....knowing the council's dire financial position, the 4.99% rise for Band D property was passed unanimously.

2. Fees and Charges 2024/25 – A large majority agreed to these, but a plea was made for more flexibility with these in future.
3. Treasury Strategy 2024/25 – which deals with how SC's saved money is best kept to earn the highest interest. The proposals for this were agreed unanimously.

The next agenda item was the **Shrewsbury North West Relief Road – Funding Delegation**. This report seeks authority to spend a further £16.981m (£17m) Capital funding towards delivery of the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road (NWRR), and updates previous forecasts around costs and required delegations up to the completion of the Full Business Case (FBC). This is to enable the completion of the Full Business Case submission, to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, noting that £6.667m of this will be funded by the DfT Large Local Majors Grant. The breakdown of this delegation, including contingency, is £16.499m advance works costs, £181,500 to deliver the FBC, and £300,000 to cover exceedance of current delegation. 3.2 Confirms, for the avoidance of doubt, that the previous total combined delegation of £27.9m was comprised of £15m (NWRR) and £12.9m (Oxon Link Road or OLR).

We were told that this was due to unforeseen delays through the Planning process...and so the NWRR project has had to increase spend under its initial delegation to deal with planning responses, additional design and stakeholder engagement. It has also had to pause key activities alongside the FBC until planning determination. In doing so it has added inflationary costs and programme risk. The project now requires a further delegation on spend and actions, in advance of the submitting of the FBC, that will allow time critical activities to be completed in advance of the Main Works to ensure the delivery of the project in line with funder expectations. This will also mitigate any further inflationary impacts on activity that would be incurred by further delay.

This matter caused another vigorous debate in the Chamber. Indeed many members had been contacted privately by constituents and there was a large demonstration outside Shirehall as we arrived. An amendment put forward by the Opposition parties was rejected and when it came to the vote, the authority was given by 37 votes in favour with 32 against, with the Independent Group being part of this vote against.

Then followed the approval of Council for some changes to the Appointment of Councillors to Committees – agreed unanimously.

This was followed by the consideration of 2 motions which were:

1. Social Care Costs – by Cllr Tony Parsons of the Labour Group

It was noted that in October 2023, Skills for Care estimated that there were 1000 vacancies in the adult social care workforce in Shropshire (a vacancy rate of 8%)^[1]. However, in a survey of its care provider members the average staff turnover rate over the last 12 months reported by respondents was 19%, and nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents stated that they are employing less staff than this time last year, with nearly a third (31%) of domiciliary care providers stating that they now employ less staff than a year ago. For much of the past 12 months our local hospitals in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin have continued to face the challenge of trying to discharge people back into the community made all the more difficult by the lack of available care. As was the case a year ago, this is not due to a lack of care providers, but their inability to recruit and retain staff as a result of the low wages they can afford to pay their staff due in part to the low fee rates payable by local authorities.

This is compounded by significant operational cost pressures over the last 12 months. Inflation as measured by CPI rose by 3.9% in the 12 months to November 2023, but for the period April-September 2023 was significantly higher, ranging from 6.7%-8.7%. The National Living Wage (NLW) is due to increase by 9.8%, from £10.42 to £11.44 per hour, from 1 April 2024 and whilst this is a positive move for care workers will directly impact on care providers' staff costs.. Put simply, if local authority fee rates do not at least cover the increase in NLW this will represent a real terms cut in fee rates. In addition to staff costs, care providers have continued to face significant financial challenges over the last 12 months relating to staff recruitment, energy/utility costs, PPE and other operating costs including insurance, IT and staff travel.

In 2023/24 both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council had been awarded additional funding by central Government, through the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), under the Market Sustainability and

Improvement Fund for investment in adult social care, Shropshire Council were allocated an additional £2,119,773 and which was used to improve fee rates together with additional investment from the Council. [We await to see what funding is provided by central government in 2024/25!]

Currently most local care providers have grave concerns regarding their financial viability and the sustainability of their business in continuing with local authority-funded care going forward without a significant increase in local authority fee rates from April 2024. Whilst Council awaits funding from the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund for investment in adult social care for financial year 2024/25....when that funding is provided it needs to be specifically targeted to address this issue. This need is highlighted by the fact that only 19% of respondents to the survey of care provider members conducted by 'Partners in Care' in October 2023 feel that current local authority fee rates cover their actual weekly operating costs. More than half (54%) of all providers who responded confirmed that they have reduced the amount of local authority funded placements/packages they accept in the past 12 months, with 56% of all respondents also expecting to further reduce the amount of council funded care they provide in the next 12 months if fee rates remain the same in 2024/25.

The motion put forward was to **"use funding received from central government for investment in adult social care in 2024/25 to increase fee rates paid to adult social care providers, particularly as we continue to prepare for the implementation of charging reform."**

This was accepted and the motion was passed unanimously.

2. Consultation on Car Parking Increases by Cllr Alan Mosley of the Labour Group

This motion was about the widely varying car parking increases being proposed for Shrewsbury that could undermine the Shropshire Plan that states ***"We'll develop Shropshire as a vibrant destination that attracts people to live in, work in, learn in and visit. We'll deliver excellent connectivity and infrastructure, and increasing access to social contact, employment, education, services and leisure opportunities. We will communicate clearly and transparently about what Shropshire Council delivers, signposting to the right places for services and support, and listen to what communities say about their place and what they need."***

Consequently, this motion proposed that the Council:

- Recognises the need for a new Parking Strategy to be developed and for a review of the role, structure and staff in the Parking Services operation. This needs to be completed and with full public consultation, before such significant proposals are introduced.
- Pause the parking increases until such consultation has gathered feedback from those affected, and demonstrated mitigation.

When put to the vote this motion was fell by 3 votes...31 in favour and 34 against.

The followed Members Questions. There were three:

1. From Cllr Viv Parry from Ludlow.

This was about maintenance concerns regarding Ludford Bridge, and ancient bridge that now carries a lot of heavy traffic/lorries in and out of the town.

The Portfolio holder from Highways, Cllr Dan Morris, said in reply ***'There are no structural concerns regarding the current width and weight limits arrangements currently in place at the bridge, with no future restrictions at the bridge being considered/ planned at this time. There have been some maintenance issues and repairs carried out accordingly'***. He then went on to briefly describe some of these.

He concluded... ***'A review as to the current signing could be carried out (subject to available/ allocated funding) and initial thoughts are that improved signing will assist the current situation, with specifically signing and advising of the width restriction at the A49/ B4361 junction. This review will also include the consideration of height restrictions on other routes into the town centre. We do see that signing improvements will have a positive impact without the introduction of formal weight and width limits, and can be considered as part of a phased approach and that could stand independent of any further phases of work associated with formal weight/ width limits'***.

2. From Cllr David Vasmer from Shrewsbury.

who, following recent experience of a Call in to the Economic and Environment Scrutiny Committee that he detailed, asked:

- Would the Leader of the Council support amendments to the constitution to allow full consideration of call-ins and the issues they raise?
- would she support the setting up of a Task and Finish Group, under the aegis of the Transformation and Improvement Scrutiny Committee, to review provisions for the conduct of call-ins?

Cllr Picton in reply said, with a caveat, ***'Overview and Scrutiny is of course not an executive function and therefore it is not something I want to overly interfere with. However, I, along with my fellow Group 2 Leaders are involved in the expanded Scrutiny Chairs meeting with has been a success in promoting a more collaborative approach to the scrutiny function and so I am willing to consider this request'***. She concluded... ***'I do accept that it would be helpful for this issue to be considered in more detail and I intend to ask the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Statutory Scrutiny Officer to review the current arrangements, look at good practice elsewhere, consult with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and prepare a report to be considered, not by a Task and Finish Group, which I***

consider to be unnecessary, but by the Scrutiny Chairs Group before bringing a recommendation back to this Council.'

3. Urgent Question about a recent ICS Critical Care Emergency Declaration - from Cllr Julia Evans from Shrewsbury

She said that on January 31st of this year, the Integrated Care Board declared a County wide critical care emergency in the health care system, last declared during a Covid outbreak in August 2022. At this point Covid was not the cause, it was simply a matter of being overwhelmed. This will have knock on effects within both the health care system and the social care system. Meanwhile the building of the overspill wards at the front of the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital has not yet started. The Hospitals Trust focus seems to be solely on the Hospital Transformation Plan which is years away from completion. Community Hospitals are either closed or under threat of closure with massive reduction of beds numbers in the County over the last 20 years (stats showing nearly two thirds lost nationally, possibly more here in Shropshire despite an increasing population locally). Consequently:

- A) How is this crisis being responded to by the Council?
- B) How is the council working to seek assurance that this will not happen again and that a working health care system exists here in Shropshire fit for purpose and serving it's population?

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health responded by firstly explaining what is meant by a critical incident. She said ***'a 'critical incident' was declared across the NHS in Shropshire as the county's two acute hospitals deal with "high volumes of very sick patients. This was specifically related to the hospitals being under extreme pressure due to the high demand for urgent and emergency care services and ambulance handover delays. A critical incident is part of the NHS incidence response planning escalation processes. By declaring a system wide critical incident, they can bring more resources to bear on tackling the bulge in demand'***

She then went on to give a very full explanation of the way Shropshire Council responds from an operational and strategic perspective. Shropshire Council has a delivery role in services, working in partnership with Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust in complex discharge pathways. I can share this information with any who would like this additional information.

Finally the Council then went into 'closed session' to approve as a correct record the exempt minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 December 2023, which it did unanimously.

Shropshire Council Member Briefing Sessions:

There has been one more since we reported to you in January. It was about the **Smithfield Riverside - Phase 2 plans and consultation and was on 6th February**. We were given a briefing on the next phase of public consultation on the Smithfield Riverside development that has now begun on Friday 9th Feb. It involved presentations from members of the design team on progress of the plans for the development as well as details on the next stage of public consultation. The session was chaired by Cllr Ian Nellins, who is the cabinet lead on this matter.

You can find out more, and how to get involved here: <https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2024/02/consultation-launched-smithfield-riverside-shrewsbury/>

Shropshire Council Training/Development Sessions:

There have been no further training sessions since 16th September to report upon.

Shropshire Council Committees:

There have been none to report on since our February report.

Shropshire Climate and Carbon Advisory Board:

ET as the Independent Member on the Board went on a day long visit to Keele University's campus on Tues 27 February 2024. It was a very full day meeting the staff of the Sustainability Department and the Vice Chancellor to explain the work that they are doing in preparing students regarding these emerging technologies and piloting, assisting and co-ordinating industry in developing renewable/carbon free energies. We then visited their Low Carbon Energy Generation/Renewables Park which consisted of two wind turbines, 12,300 solar PV panels and an industrial sized storage battery. We learnt about the BioGain project, which is investigating the potential impacts on biodiversity. Finally we went to the SEND Control Room, Horwood Energy Centre to understand how the university's energy is intelligently managed across campus. These are all technologies that Keele is developing to make sure it only uses it's own carbon free energy on it's campus by 2030. The work that they are doing on battery storage and linking this with hydrogen technologies was impressive.

The next meeting of the full Advisory Board is planned for later this Spring, when no doubt much of the information from the Keele visit will be shared.

The following groups:

- a) **Shropshire Helicopter and Noise Liaison Group (HNLG)** – ET and PB attend as representatives of SC also has nothing further to report since it met last on 20th July.

b) Public Transport Working Group: As reported in January this Cross-Party Group (of which ET is part) also has not met since June 8th. The pilot DRT scheme launch now happening in the Hanwood area to one side of Shrewsbury is continuing to be extended in this area.

c) Shropshire Local Plan Member Group: There is nothing more to report this month since we had our last Teams meeting on Thursday 1st February.

Shropshire Council Task and Finish Groups:

There are two that we have been involved in recently:

A] Developer Contributions Task and Finish Group – This met on Wednesday 6th March 2024 to look at this issue.

Members have been invited to 'look in' on this via Teams....so ET was able to attend, listen and contribute to this important topic. On this occasion the discussion had an Integrated Care System focus....where representatives of the ICS and SC Planning Officers explained how they are planning for the increases in population around the county and budgeting for this. They explained they use NHS funding which is in short supply, so look to Section 106 agreements and now CIL monies attached to planning applications to help fund the expansion needed in GP Practice infrastructure....such as having sufficient surgery and treatment rooms. Every 1100 extra patients means an extra GP room and every 1800 patients means extra treatment space has to be provided. Rural difficulties and housing for key workers were also raised as important issues in making this provision.

B] Post16 Transport Task and Finish Group – ET has been invited to join this group as he recently had a very big problem helping a local family get their very severely disabled child back into Severndale School in Shrewsbury after they had transport issues after he reached the age of 16. It had become an issue for our MP Helen Morgan and was raised by her colleague in a 5 hour debate on this topic in Parliament a few weeks ago, after which BBC Midlands came and visited the family and recorded this for broadcasting in their evening news. Eventually provision was found within Shropshire for this young person to continue his education in February after a gap of 6 months! The added stress and pressure upon this family on top of the daily 24x7 care they have to arrange in their home that had been caused by this problem, had been enormous.

This group met for the first time on Monday 4th March to look into the motion agreed by Shropshire Council at their December 2023 meeting to look at the Post 16 Transport problem and come forward with a proposal to the next council meeting that will promote fairness and inclusivity by ensuring that all students, regardless of their economic backgrounds or location, have equal access to education without an unfair financial burden of excessive transportation costs.

As a guide to the new Task & Finish Group it was proposed

1. that Section 509AB(3)(b)(c) &(d) of the Education Act 1996 be looked at and its requirement be incorporated into any recommendations.
2. that the total annual cost of a Post-16 student's transport, when using school buses and public transport, shall not exceed the expense of a single annual Arriva student bus pass within Shropshire.
3. where a student's total transport costs exceeds this amount, Shropshire Council will issue an Annual Student Transport Pass on payment of the value an Arriva student bus pass;
4. that the Annual Students Transport Pass will enable the holder to use all relevant public transport to get to and from their chosen place of education within the approved list of education providers.

For those interested in this issue the attached slides give a fuller picture of the issue shared at this meeting.



JW SLIDES - Slides - Council Motion - Pu



DS SLIDES - Post 16 Transport.pptx

Shropshire Council Cabinet:

This met on 17th January, 2024 and, as reported last month, **part of this Cabinet meeting's agenda the proposed increased Car Parking Charges were discussed and approved!** For Wem this would mean 20p extra per hour after the 15 mins parking for freeand for the first time....half price charging on Sundays. Whilst we know that SC has to find £60m for it's next year's budget, this has, as you know from our separate emails to you...raised a storm of protest across the County. However, the decision was 'called in' and went **to the Economic and Environment Scrutiny meeting on 19th February at 2.00pm in Shirehall.** Former Wem Town and Shropshire Councillor Pauline Dee and ET went to this meeting where we made very clear Wem's opposition to the proposals as they stand beginning with our objection to being in Band 6 instead of 7 charging (which is free parking, as in Craven Arms and Broseley....that we equate to as a town)!!and then this Parking Review threw this raising of prices into the mix! Sufficient to say this makes a difficult situation in Wem, worse! We also need to thank the many people from Wem that included representations from all the four churches in Wem as well as from many residents in the Wem Division for sending in their strong opposition to these proposals. Indeed, the Chair of the Committee told me that there was by far the biggest number of representations from Wem sent into the Committee for consideration at this meeting, more than anywhere else in the County! This clearly had an effect on the committee!!

It was a long meeting but after much debate where the combined opposition presented a powerful and reasoned case against these proposals, the result was a unanimous (with one abstention!) 'let's refer this back to Cabinet with a re-think on several issues' This included the request to re-think Wem to be in Band 7 not Band 6 for parking charges. It also included re-thinking Sunday charging.....for which there is no need!, especially when we found out that SC had made a profit of over £4m that it hadn't spent in the last 4 years....so there is no need to raise charges at all until this is used. Quite a lot of the meeting was

discussing Shrewsbury parking proposals and the need to make sure Shropshire's policies are aligned....as well as the need for consultation, etc before making such proposals.

As this was a 'unanimous' decision...(1 abstention?)....so not party political...I think it means it is less likely that it can just be dismissed by Cabinet saying it's an opposition ploy, etc! So, this is probably the best result we could have got today....where, for once, Wem's economic concerns were brought centre-stage in these Councillors minds as we often feel they may not have understood how serious/frangible our economic issues are here. Councillors from across Shropshire gave us their support. Let's hope that the legacy issue that we brought forward of wrong banding for Wem in 2018 when charges for Car Parking was introduced will now be addressed as well....and not just the present proposals. Imagine if we could then tell people that we have free car parking in Wem and what this would do for side street residential parking problems as we then compete more fairly with the likes of Whitchurch and Shrewsbury for our retailers on the High Street!!

Regarding Whixall Parish, our activity has been:

As usual we have been continuing to look over the planning applications (that you also see each meeting!) and giving general advice to residents where we are requested. The flooding issues raised with us this last month are still 'live' so far as we are concerned but regrettably, we have nothing more to report at the moment about the actions that we asked SC to look into. If there are any other Parish concerns, about which we may not know, then do let us know.

Regarding other matters of local concern to Whixall Parish that we are involved in:

- 1. The White Horse in Wem and Wem Civic Society** – We did have a small and encouraging update sent us on 30th January to say from a key SC Officer who deals with heritage matters who said....***"I am writing to share the good news with you that Historic England have notified us today that our application for a Heritage at Risk Grant for £26,000 (ex VAT) has been approved. The monies are for detailed specialist and structural surveys and a market assessment and options appraisal. Once we have received and signed the Grant Agreement officers will progress the commissioning of these pieces of work. These important assessments will help us to ensure that we are fully informed about the costs of repairing the building and what the best options are for providing it with a sustainable future use."***
We were then told there was an action to arrange a more detailed briefing for ET and PB on the project and we will look to arrange this with you in the coming weeks. After a further month's delay last week we saw a banner notice put up on the side entrance gate to explain what Shropshire Council are now doing and the door, windows have had freshly painted boards put on, to give a more loved feel as you enter the town. Today this was followed up by a call to ET from Dr Wigley (Project Lead at Shirehall) to say ***'the legal processes around the sale then took a period to complete and since taking possession of the building officers have been working to ensure it is secure and emergency repairs undertaken to make it safe'***. He went on ***'we are just in the process of agreeing the terms of this funding and will then be tendering and undertaking the required work, so I would please ask for everyone's patience whilst we are doing so.'***
- 2. The pilot project between Shropshire Council and Wem Economic Forum/Town Council/Wem Rural Parish Council**
This project aims to develop the economy of this area by bringing businesses together, not only to 'network' on a regular basis (as we have just started doing) but from this to form a 'Core Group' that is constituted to help organise and lead this project into the future and develop this joint working arrangement....seeking to turn ideas into action with the resources/skills/potential that we have amongst us.
A meeting took place here in Wem between ourselves (PB attending), WRPC and WTC Clerks and the Chair of WRPC. Unfortunately ET and the Mayor Geoff Soul were not able to attend on this occasion. This meeting reviewed progress made during 2023 and then went onto discuss:
 - stakeholders for future 'Core Group' forum. It was agreed that this to be led by local businesses with WRPC and WTC as stakeholders. SC to be updated but not involved. We therefore need to connect with businesses before setting up any structure to support their forum.
 - Updates from WTC – These included:
 - Match funding to improve shop signs on High Street.
 - Possible UKSPF funding for more gazebos, signs into town for market day
 - Event Dates to fill gaps in June and October such as : Late night shopping in June around Midsummer. See if there's interest from High Street. Connection with Souldon Hall & Shakespeare and an Octoberfest.
 - The Business Development ideas emerging near Robinson & Young's Garage
 - A Banner on High Street and bunting for the summer
 - Updates from WRPC- These included:
 - Women involved in planning meeting for International Women's Day on Friday 8th March at Wem Town Hall are interested in continuing to meet afterwards and to take on a new project.
 - Horse & Jockey launching monthly networking meeting on Monday evenings. £10 for buffet. Launching for Monday 15th April.
 - Next Business Networking Event is on Monday 22nd April at Wem Town Hall with theme on 'apprenticeships'. and to Invite recruitment agencies, training company etc. The question was raised who should pay for room hire?
 - Date for next meeting is Tuesday 19th March, 2pm at Wem Town Hall

- 3. Friends of Whitchurch Road Cemetery** – Held a Coffee Morning is being planned to help raise funds on Sat 20th February in the Methodist Church Hall. Their next business meeting is Wednesday 3rd April 2024 at 6.00pm in the Parish Church Hall. This is the AGM and will be followed by a normal quarterly meeting.
- 4. Wem Area Climate Action (WACA)** - The group met on 21st February at Wem Senior Club and amongst other matters they discussed:
- What next should follow following the Planning Inspectors approval of the development there? Actions are to be in contact with the new Chief Executive of Connexus and contact the Press as well as Save our Shropshire regarding Carbon assessments that can then be used when contacting the media, etc.
 - Training courses on Climate Change for Councillors
 - Wem Projects for 2024....such as stalls at Harvest Markets, Millenium Green Plants sales, Vehicles of Interest/Sweet Pea weekend, Carnival, etc
 - The second wild flower meadow on Trentham Road play area
 - Developing the Incredible Edibles area with a new fencing grant to WTC
 - Different funding applications that are being sought
 - Planning for a visit to Market Drayton Climate Action Group on 27th February and a local farm visit connected with recycling on 28th February

Their next meeting is planned for 27th March 2024 at Wem Senior Club, starting at 7.15pm and all are welcome.

- 5. The Wemian** – The newly re-launched Wemian has been circulating widely in the town/surrounding area and been receiving a warm welcome. The Planning Group/Editorial Board has now just sent out some deadline dates for those wishing to send in news, write articles or place adverts, etc. Should you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact them using wemianmag@gmail.com.

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COPY WRITERS Please send all articles in by the dates below ensure them being included in the magazine. Should you need an extension please contact us so we can try to accommodate you.

Edition	Copy Deadline	Distribution Deadline
Edition 1 – Winter	Friday 12 th January	Wednesday 31 st January
Edition 2 – Spring	Friday 12 th April	Tuesday 30 th April
Edition 3 – Summer	Friday 12 th July	Wednesday 31 st July
Edition 4 - Autumn	Friday 11 th October	Thursday 31 st November

- 6. North Salop Wheelers ('Wheelers')** - They have their 2024 AGM on Monday 25th March at 10.30am at Wem Cricket Club. It would be great if you would like to get involved in some way, if you were able to come along and support them in the fine work they do amongst us as a community.

So, life continues to be full and active as hopefully you will note from this report. However, if you need any further explanation or detail then do ask....and please do let us know if there are things we are unaware about.

Kindest regards *and all good wishes*,

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers

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

Date: 6th March 2024