

Report 19 to Whixall Parish Council

by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall + Edward Towers – November 2023

Dear All – Please find below our nineteenth written report as your County Councillors.

Full Shropshire Council Meeting has not met since September. The next planned meeting is on Thursday 14th December in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND.

Shropshire Climate and Carbon Advisory Board:

The last meeting was held on Friday 21st July for ET and there has been little to report since the detailed business case for investment in a demonstrator pyrolysis plant was agreed at the September Full Shropshire Council meeting. This will now be considered by Full Council at their next meeting in December 2023.

We now have a date for our next meeting – Wednesday 29th November.

The following groups:

- a) **Shropshire Local Plan Member Group:** Cross-Party Group (of which ET is part) has nothing more to report since last month's comments.
- b) **Shropshire Helicopter and Noise Liaison Group (HNLG)** – ET and PB attend as representatives of SC has not met since....so nothing further to report since the update given over last two/three months
- c) **Public Transport Working Group:** Cross-Party Group (of which ET is part) also has not met since....so nothing further to report since the update given over last two/three months

Shropshire Council Member Briefing Sessions:

There has been two of these sessions since we reported to you at the September meeting:

- 1) on **16th September there was a Member Briefing RE: Smithfield Riverside Project.** ET was away but can find the details for any who are interested in knowing more about this.
- 2) On 6th November there was a Teams meeting about SC's Capital strategy that has been identified by the Capital Strategy Task and Finish group. Do ask us to share the slides used in this presentation should you wish to see them.

Shropshire Council Task and Finish Groups:

These are Cross-Party meetings to look into a variety of issues with Officers. The reports produced will then go back to Cabinet and Full Council for their discussion/approval of actions that need to be taken:

A] Housing Member Group for ET still hasn't met since 5th June. As reported last month there was to have been a meeting on 23rd June to further this work, but this was postponed. It seems from my enquiries that this group is now currently inactive!

B] River Water Quality Task and Finish Group for PB and ET

Evidence gathering has been completed and this group is now finalising it's key issues, conclusions and recommendations so that it can send a report to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee that commissioned it. When this important report is published we'll let you know where you can access it. It covers a lot of ground and has involved a lot of work from all involved over the last few months.

As mentioned in our September report to you you'll have seen that Severn Trent's works improvement to the Water Treatment premises just of Harris Croft in Wem are now proceeding steadily....a key infrastructure improvement we have been asking for, for a long time now.

C] Rural Proofing in Health and Care Task and Finish Group for ET

Extensive evidence gathering has also been completed and this group is also now finalising it's key issues, conclusions and recommendations so that it can send a report to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) that commissioned this report in the second half of November. When this strategic report is published we'll also let you know where you can access it where you'll see the hard work and hours this has involved by all involved over the last few months.

Shropshire Council Training/Development Sessions:

There has been just one training session this last month (on 16th September) to explain how Councillors have now to move from using Skype calls to ones on Teams.

Shropshire Council Committees:

Northern Planning Committee took place on Tuesday 31st October. This had a one item agenda....that of the Application by Shropshire Council for the construction of the North West Relief Road for Shrewsbury. In many ways it was a historic meeting as it has taken many years (30 or so) since it was first proposed. It was a long and passionately argued meeting (on both sides of the debate) that you will have seen well reported in the press. You can also see a recording of it on the SC website. In the end when voting took place a proposal for a deferment was voted against [5 for and 6 against]. This was followed by a second proposal to proceed and this was narrowly passed by 6 votes for and 5 against. This means that next steps can now be taken, but there is still have some way to go before other hurdles are cleared, not least needed approval by the Environment Agency.

People Overview Committee for PB. There have been no further meetings since that reported on last month.

Standards Sub Committee – also no further meetings of this committee since we reported last month.

Shropshire Council Community Tree Scheme 2023/24

Shropshire Council is opening a subsidised Community Tree Scheme for planting during the coming season (Autumn / Winter 2023-2024).

As per previous tree schemes, they are only be able to provide trees in multiples of prearranged bundles of 20, rather than offering applicants total freedom of tree species choices and numbers. Successful applicants must be able to collect their trees directly from either of the two places helping us – Prees Heath Forest Nursery in the north of the county or John Holliday (formerly Potters Farm Tree Nursery) at Lower Hayton in the south.

To extend funding as far as SC can and get as many trees planted as possible, this year residents, landowners, farmers, community groups, businesses and charities can apply for trees that are subsidised by 50% by Shropshire Council. The applicant is responsible for paying the remaining 50%.

We have chosen mixes of native trees suited for different planting sites in Shropshire, including:

- A lowland woodland mix
- An upland woodland mix
- A wet ground woodland mix
- A native hedgerow mix

The mixes above are available in bundles of 20 trees and will cost £20.40 per bundle (half-price), including a bamboo cane and spiral tree guard. There is no limit to the number of trees or hedgerow plants that you can order, and trees will be supplied on very much a first come first served basis. For more information and to apply for your trees, please go to

www.shropshire.gov.uk/ShropshireCouncilTreeScheme AND please feel free to notify anyone you think may be interested in planting trees around their area.

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

We have been continuing to look over the planning applications (that you also see!) and giving general advice to residents.

There was also the re-surfacing of a flooding problem in Hollinswood that we have been monitoring. You will appreciate that SC Drainage Officers had their hands full across a lot of Shropshire with Storm Babet between the 18th – 21st October, but this long-standing issue does need looking at again as it has certainly not gone away!

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

1. The White Horse in Wem – Since it's purchase on 13th July by Shropshire Council there still has been no further action to report, other than SC Officers are preparing to show us both around and have discussions with us. The main reason we given to us for this is that with the realisation that there are some serious building problems in Shropshire (as elsewhere in the UK) for some public buildings of a certain age (between 1950's and 1990's) that had Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).....a form of lightweight concrete in their structure, the SC structural engineers, etc have been diverted to look at all our SC buildings (Schools/Libraries/Hospitals, etc) to check that they are safe. If it is found that they aren't then closure and other alternative planning is having to be done – as you will know has happened at Whitchurch Civic Centre. RAAC has now been declared to be 'life-expired' and so liable to collapse with little or no notice! Let us hope that this additional 'checking' task for our engineers is soon completed so that The White Horse redevelopment can continue! We will, of course, be monitoring this.

2. The pilot project between Shropshire Council and Wem Economic Forum/Town Council/Wem Rural Parish Council

The jointly hosted networking event by Wem Rural PC and Wem Town Council at Wem Town Hall on 23rd October (6-8pm) with the theme of 'Healthy Leadership' has now just taken place. It was a successful occasion and there were a good number of attendees and attended by The High Sheriff, and Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, as well as having Samantha Brettell to speak on this theme. We still have to meet to review all that went on, but there were some:

- useful contacts developed from the networking that went on
- good information gained from the round the table discussions as to the challenges and solutions to having a business in this area that needs to be analysed and reflected upon
- repeated requests that there should be more of these occasions in the near future.

So, at the very least we are in the early stages of a solid start. As we have said previously, we do need to maintain our momentum if we are to engage local employers for 'Investing in Wem' and to maintain our unity as a Shropshire, Parish and Town Council organising body. We must together provide the clear leadership our town/area needs in business matters and so will continue to press where we can for some progress in this important project to help boost our town/areas economic fortunes.

3. Friends of Whitchurch Road Cemetery - The minutes of their latest meeting on Wednesday 27th September have been produced and can be sent to all who would like to see them, but in overview they show really positive encouraging developments by the enthusiastic volunteers involved. Do join them if you can. Their next business meeting is Wednesday 10th January 2024 at 6.00pm in the Parish Church Hall.

They also held a Coffee Morning on 21st October in the Methodist Church Hall and raised the handsome sum of £268.90 to help with the work that they do.

Another encouraging development was their being awarded a Gold Certificate and a Nature-Friendly Certificate in the Lichfield Diocese Churchyard Award Scheme.....as well as were presented with a 'bottle top bird hydration station' that they will now put up in the cemetery. About 50 churchyards had entered.

- 4. Wem Area Climate Action (WACA)** – This group continues to be very active and held their latest business meeting on 25th October at Wem Senior Club. When the minutes are produced ET can share them (as the Town Council representative on this body), for any who would like a copy. As stated last month if any other Councillors can also attend these meetings, you would be very welcome and appreciated. They have a very wide range of involvements now in Wem, have managed to open a bank account and are waiting to hear back from the Charity Commission as regards their submitted application for 'charity status'
- 5. North Salop Wheelers ('Wheelers')** – One exciting piece of news from them is that they have now raised sufficient funds to order two new buses that should be delivered in the new year....a huge success for all their hard work. Another piece of good news is that they also had a couple of people come forward expressing an interest in becoming drivers at the recent 'Volunteers Fair' held at Wem Town Hall. Two really positive developments.
- 6. The Wemian** – It is encouraging to be able to report that at last the informal discussions that have been taking place have resulted in a new committee being brought together with the help of Wem Rotary. They are planning for a re-launch and publication of their next issue on 18th January 2024....so great news.
- 7. And Finally.....the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission** were issued on 3rd October.....and in short for us in the Wem Division our challenge to the draft proposals has been accepted....ie that we stay as a two-member division covering Wem Urban, Wem Rural and Whixall Parishes – just as now. This is quite a success for us....and against the flow of thinking originally proposed for Shropshire's future governance. Wem Division was made an exception!! Thankfully our concerns the Wem Urban and then creating one larger out of the Wem Rural and Whixall Parishes and a 1/3 of Wem Urban were listened too!! This change was based on evidence we produced that the draft recommendations did not reflect our community identity.

Shropshire Council has welcomed the [final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England \(LGBCE\)](#) consultation that proposes new boundaries for electoral divisions in the council area. The LGBCE has reviewed Shropshire to make sure councillors will represent about the same number of electors, and that division arrangements will help the council work effectively. The consultation related to arrangements for local government elections. It was separate from the review of parliamentary constituencies that has also recently concluded.

You may remember a consultation into its draft proposals ran from May to July 2023. The council's consultation response was prepared by Shropshire Council officers, through consultation with, and feedback from, current elected councillors. This has been managed through a cross-party working group and consultation with councillors through party leaders. This response had the support of the Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Labour, Independent and Green political groups.

The Commission has published these final recommendations for changes in Shropshire and the Council is pleased that the LGBCE has taken notice of the many points that the cross-party Council Submission raised in its response to the consultation, particularly the need for a single-member division for Bayston Hill, and for a two-member division for Wem.

The LGBCE's final recommendations say that residents should be represented by 74 councillors. This is the same as under current arrangements. There will be 70 single-councillor divisions and two two-councillor divisions. An interactive map is available at www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/shropshire. Other changes to the draft proposals following the consultation are:

- Proposing an exceptional variance in voter numbers for a single-councillor Bayston Hill division, in response to very strong evidence of community identity.
- Reverting to a two-councillor division for Wem and surrounding areas, based on evidence that the draft recommendations did not reflect community identity.

The Commission has made further changes to its earlier proposals. Details can be found on its website at www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/shropshire.

The changes become law once Parliament has approved them with new arrangements in place for the Shropshire Council elections in May 2025.

....and on these positive notes....particularly 2,5, 6 and 7!.... we think this brings you up to date as regards what is happening in both in our area as well as the County! If there are things that are unclear, or more information is needed, let us know.

All good wishes,

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers

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

Date: 6th November 2023