

Report 20 to Whixall Parish Council

by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall + Edward Towers – January 2024

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

Full Shropshire Council Meeting the latest took place on Thursday 14th December 2023 in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND.

After opening formalities there was the opportunity for public questions that were given written answers. These were three on this occasion:

- 1. About the nature of Declaration of Interests** from Michael Hinds. This was answered by Lezley Picton, as Leader of SC. The question was ‘The declaration of interests for the current Leader of the Council and the current Chair of Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee state that they are partners. The remit for the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes scrutiny of the leader's portfolio of responsibilities. How do the Leader of the Council and the Chair Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee ensure that there is no conflict of interest between their public roles and their declared partnership? The declaration of interests for the current Leader of the Council and the current Chair of Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee state that they are partners. The remit for the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes scrutiny of the leader's portfolio of responsibilities. How do the Leader of the Council and the Chair Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee ensure that there is no conflict of interest between their public roles and their declared partnership?’

Cllr Picton said in reply: Cllr Wild has been Chair of the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee since May 23 and Chair of its predecessor, the Performance Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee since 2017. I have been leader since 2021. It is the remit of the whole committee to scrutinise the administration's policies and it is the whole committee who set the work plan for the year. I can assure Mr Hinds that there is no conflict of interest in this matter. We are both very clear that it is our responsibility to act at all times in the public interest and if either of us considered there to be a personal conflict we would, of course, not take part. I should also add that the recent strengthening of the scrutiny function following the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny review, which was at my invitation, has ensured greater openness, transparency and cross-party working across process and substance. It is not unusual for familial relations to occupy these positions and Mr Hinds will find a number of councils across England have similar arrangements including our immediate neighbours to the east.
- 2. About Traffic & Safety Issues on London Road** by Ruth Cranley. Cllr Dan Morris, as Portfolio Holder replied. The question was ‘Further to my question to the Council on 21st September regarding the ongoing traffic and safety issues on London Road in Shrewsbury, Councillor Dan Morris replied: “Following the site meeting, council officers will work with the police on implementing safety measures. Any recommendations will be added into the programme of work for the county and work undertaken when funding is available.” That site meeting took place over two months ago and the Highways Officer and the Police and Crime Commissioner agreed that there were serious issues needing to be addressed and made a number of recommendations, including some pledges of funding from the PCC, so could Councillor Morris please advise what action has been taken or measures added to the programme of work as promised and what is the timescale for implementing them? This does not include the Shirehall overflow car park he mentioned previously, which is both impractical and unaffordable for most residents. There have been further near-misses on London Road since my previous question, highlighting the urgency of the situation.’

Cllr Morris replied I can confirm that Officers met with the Police and Crime Commissioner and the residents to discuss their concerns following the collisions on the resident's vehicle. It is noted that engineering improvements and behavioural changes to driving could benefit the area. These works have been added to the programme and are awaiting funding, being prioritised against other schemes. Officers are also working with the PCC regarding funding the work on the road. They have contacted the Council recently regarding their next round of funding and officers are working on projects to apply to them for funding. When the council has the feedback from this, it should be able to be more specific on timings for implementation for any works. As noted, Shropshire Council has implemented a residents parking scheme on Shirehall overflow carpark to allow cars to park off the road. Whilst this may not be practical for some as indicated in the question posed, it should be noted that it could be an option for other people, particularly perhaps whilst awaiting the funding decisions of any potential new engineering improvements for the area.
- 3. About Consultants** from Chris Naylor. Cllr Lezley Picton The Leader of the Council replied to this. The question was ‘Cllr Lezley Picton, recently admitted that consultants appointed to help the Council make savings had only saved £5m but cost £3m. When the consultants were appointed in February this year Cllr Picton said she hoped "they're going to help us save more than £51m." Given the amount of officer time that must have been taken up by providing information for and working with the consultants, hasn't their contribution been a waste of time and money that could have been better spent to support Shropshire residents?’

Cllr Picton said in reply....PwC were appointed to help provide the capacity and capability to help deliver transformational savings identified within the MTFs. As at the end of November we have committed £3.3m of one-off spend which is linked to the delivery of 16 projects being run in parallel and £37.7m year on year savings. The additionality provided by PwC means that their costs will be covered by savings delivery in excess of that built into MTFs, and an element of this will be reinvested to secure transformational savings into 24/25 and beyond. Rest assured, we are committed to ensuring that our efforts and resources are being used in the most effective manner to support Shropshire residents.

- Then followed the following items:
 - a) **Report of Returning Officer about a recent By-Election in Alveley and Claverley** that reported Mr Colin Taylor for the Liberal Democrats had won this seat.
 - b) **Setting the Council Tax Taxbase for 2024/25** – agreed unanimously
 - c) **Annual Treasury Report 2022/23** - agreed unanimously
 - d) **Treasury Strategy 2023/24 - Mid Year Review** - agreed unanimously
 - e) **Statement of Licensing Policy 2024 to 2029** - agreed unanimously
 - f) **Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station Review 2023** - agreed unanimously
- This was **followed by two annual reports**, from:
 - i) Annual report - People Overview Committee
 - ii) Communities Overview Committee.....both discussed and noted.
- Then followed a **statement about the forthcoming ‘Community Governance Review’** when ET questioned how the 5 areas selected for the 1st phase had been selected, and why areas such as Wem were not included. I have since had further conversations with Officers about their reasoning for this. Basically, this is about the 5 areas are where parish boundaries have now been split by the new SC Division boundaries to be introduced in 2025 Local Elections. It seems there isn’t the time or sufficient administrative capacity to do more than these in a CGR for the rest of Shropshire before then. Subsequently this is being planned for after these elections. When it came to the vote this approach was then agreed unanimously.
- **Adoption of Pontesbury Neighbourhood Plan** was then proposed by Cllr Chris Schofield. He told the Council that it had had a public vote in the Parish that was 85.54% in favour. The Council agreed unanimously to accept this proposal and so allow it to be adopted.
- Next we **approved a Cross- border Claim to Upgrade Footpaths and add a Section of Bridleway in The Parish of Woore and Parish of Buerton in Cheshire East** and to delegate this to Cheshire East Council to Investigate and Determine.
- **Constitution of Committees and the Allocation of Seats to Political Groups** were then discussed and how this affects the smaller political parties particularly as a result of the recent By-Election gains by the Liberal Democrats. A review of how this structure should be looked at, not just on a seat by seat basis and should the Standards Committee be also subject to these ‘proportionality rules’ was requested by the Liberal Democrats but when put to the vote this proposal was lost. 37 wanted the current practice to continue, 27 against and 5 abstained.
- **Changes to Appointments to Committees** were then agreed unanimously.
- Then followed **debates on 5 Motions from Councillors** supported by their party groups.

a) **Waste Minimisation Strategy proposed by Cllr Duncan Kerr and the Green Group**

This stated that ‘on the 15th July 2021 they presented a motion to this Council calling on the authority to adopt a waste minimisation strategy by Dec 2021. This motion recognised that despite declaring a climate emergency Shropshire Council has the unenviable record of collecting more household waste per household than any other mainland authority in England. The consequences are higher carbon emissions and costs falling on our residents.

Even though the Council had a waste minimisation strategy in 2011 this motion was opposed by the Conservative controlling group who argued that it might result in charging for green waste and that the Government might be removing the powers of Local Authorities to do this. Recently the Government has made it clear that their fears were unfounded.

In the meantime, the Cabinet had received a report from a Scrutiny Committee recommending that a waste minimisation strategy be developed but not producing any timetable.

As a result of this lost opportunity for action our recycling performance has dropped by 2.7% from 2018/9 to 2021/2 relegating us out of the top 50 authorities for recycling; and our total waste arisings have increased by 7%. We are heading rapidly in the wrong direction.

It’s time to take some action on a service that the Council has direct control over and is an important contributor to the climate change which is already affecting Shropshire. This motion therefore commits the Council to have a Waste Minimisation Strategy approved by June 2024.’

[Following debate and Cllr Ian Nellins saying that ‘despite not having a strategy at present, this is being worked on and the 2019 Plan is still being worked to’.](#) A vote was taken and this motion was accepted unanimously.

b) **Limit Post-16 Student Transport Costs proposed by Cllr Mark Williams + the Lib Dem Group**

This stated that ‘With the imminent closure of the Bridgnorth 6th Form, the Post-16 students in my ward will now be disadvantaged by having to travel much further for their compulsory Post-16 education. The significant problem that this causes my and many other rural wards is that these students will have to purchase at least two bus passes to get to their chosen college.

Using my ward, Highley, as an example; almost every student will need to purchase an annual Diamond Bus Pass costing £800 to get to Bridgnorth and then either a college specific pass at around £600 or an Arriva annual bus pass at £715 to get to their chosen college.

Our current system is forcing the parents and carers of our children to find around £1500 per year to send them to school. This is clearly unfair, if you live within the reach of a single bus service like Arriva which covers most of the county, then you will pay no more than £715 for your annual bus pass, if, like us, you have to use multiple services you have to pay far more.

The Department for education Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training Statutory guidance for local authorities clearly states the Council's responsibilities:

- That those who are vulnerable to becoming not in education, employment or training should be offered **any transport support that is necessary** to enable them to participate.
- **That young people in rural areas should not be worse off financially because they may need to travel further to access education and training provision than their peers in urban areas**
- That they ensure that any contribution is affordable for learners and their parents.
- That they ensure that there are arrangements in place to support those families on low income.

Also, to aid transparency, it is good practice for local authorities to set out the average cost per young person of post-16 transport in their area before any are subsidies deducted. **Section 509AB(3)(b)(c)&(d) of the Education Act 1996**. I couldn't find this information anywhere in the Council's transport policy. This policy 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.

Therefore, he proposed

- 1) **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;**
- 2) **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;**
- 3) **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.**

[Cllr Lezley Picton \(Leader of SC\)](#) said that this motion should be costed before Council approves it. She suggested that this matter be brought back before the March Council so giving time for this information to be made available. This was then voted upon and Council approved this delay unanimously.

c) Affordable Housing proposed by Cllr Ruth Houghton and supported by the Lib Dem Group

She said 'Affordable housing is often difficult to develop in many areas of the County. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Limited land availability
- Length of time to reach the development stage and now
- Increasing construction costs.

Shropshire is experiencing a significant shortage of affordable Housing which impacts on our local communities. With this in mind we propose the following :

This Council agrees to develop a strategic policy in conjunction with Housing providers that will help to:

- **maintain and improve existing social housing stock across the County**
- **ensure that existing stock is retained and not subject to disposal**
- **Upgrade the existing housing social housing stock to an EPC rating of C or above'**

[Cllr Dean Carroll \(Portfolio Holder\)](#) then told the Council that SC was setting up a Task Force to look into this issue in the New Year. A vote was taken at the end of this short debate and it was lost with 31 For, 36 Against and 1 Abstention.

d) Improving Shropshire's Footways proposed by Cllr Rob Wilson + the Lib Dem Group

He said that:

1. Every journey includes walking or wheeling, therefore good quality, accessible footways are essential.
2. Every councillor is aware of footways in their division of footways that are of poor quality, and are not accessible by all users, often because of overhanging vegetation, a lack of sufficient cleaning, or outstanding repairs.
3. The "highway" is 'hedge to hedge', therefore the highway includes the carriageway, footways and any cycleways.
4. The Council has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to ensure that the highway is not obstructed. Even small overgrowths can be hazardous particularly to blind and visually impaired people who often use property boundaries as a guide, or when a footway is narrow. It is also a requirement that anything overhanging a footway must be at least 2.3m above the footway, cycleway, verge and 5.3m above the road surface
5. It is an offence under the Highways Act 1980 to allow trees, hedges, shrubs and so on to obstruct the highway.
6. Councils can, after an initial informal request, serve a 21 Day Notice on the occupier of a property, to cut back the offending vegetation. If the occupier does not comply with the Notice, Councils may carry out the work themselves and recover costs in doing so from the occupier, through the courts if necessary.

[\(H Hedge hazards web 18.pdf \(westberks.gov.uk\)\)](#).

7. Shropshire Council is making an £59m capital investment in improving the quality of Shropshire's highways.
8. A number of Council's, for example Oxfordshire, have formally moved from "Predict and Provide" to "Decide and Provide" ([UK county pivots to 'decide and provide' transport planning - Cities Today \(cities-today.com\)](#)).

Consequently his motion proposed that **'The council resolves:**

1. **To recognise the importance of high quality, accessible footways in all our communities, both rural and urban**

2. To request that a report is brought to Cabinet within 3 months explaining how our existing footways will be cleared and cleaned to a higher standard, including (but not limited to):
 - a. A review of the cleaning regime for footways
 - b. A review of the process for cutting back Shropshire council owned hedging and other vegetation
 - c. A review of the process for cutting back privately owned hedging and other vegetation
3. To include in the report to cabinet details of how the £59m capital investment is being divided between carriageways, footways and cycleways, and to comment on this point in any future reports to Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.
4. Ensure that LTP4 is based on the principle of “decide and provide” rather than “predict and provide”.’

Cllr Dan Morris (Portfolio holder) in reply said that Oxfordshire was not a good example to quote, our Director of Highways having come from there! He suggested that these proposals should instead be fitted in with the ‘limit of 20mph outside our schools’ initiative that is now being implemented. A vote was taken at the end of this debate and the motion was lost with 32 For, 36 Against and 1 Abstention.

e) Free School Meals proposed by Councillor Roger Evans and the Lib Dem Group

He said ‘School budgets are being squeezed in many ways. Family income is also being squeezed. Wage rises, heating costs and travel to school events all cost more. Parents who are not able to pay for breakfast clubs and after school clubs are now being faced with not being able to work if the school can’t afford to support them. This applies to many where both parents are working on low wages especially with high rents and energy costs. Help is available from other sources in certain areas. One area where help can be given is in the supply of free school meals. The benefits of introducing free school meals have long been proven. Children who eat healthy, free school meals have lower obesity rates, better academic performance and behaviour and improved lifetime productivity. However, the numbers eligible for free school meals is reducing and is noted in many schools.

The income levels at which claims can be made has not been increased since 2018. In Shropshire Children in KS2 and higher at present cease to be entitled to a universal free school meal. From KS2 onwards in Shropshire, pupils are only entitled to a free school meal:-

- If you're on universal credit then the household earnings threshold is £7400
- If you work and claim other benefits like child tax credits or working tax credits, then the threshold is £16190.

The trigger level for wages is so low - household income must be below £22,700/annum.

As of 2023, the UK national minimum wage for workers aged 23 and over is £10.42 per hour, which equates to around £21,630 per year if working full-time hours. From April 1st, 2024, the UK national minimum wage for workers over 23 will rise to £11.44. There is still, in many people’s minds a stigma attached to claiming these, the school does not hear much from parents who miss out when applying. For every child who is entitled to a free school meal the school they attend get extra income. The Primary School gets £1,455 and Secondary School an extra £1035.

In England, every child in Key Stage 1 is automatically eligible for a free school meal, but the school loses out by not getting the extra income if the parent does not also fill in a claim form asking their child to also be registered as being eligible for a free school meal. If registered, as detailed above, the school would receive an extra £1,455.00. In the majority of England, the universal free school meal ceases from when the child enters Key Stage 2, Other areas in the UK adopt different rules and many extend this to later years.

Consequently he proposed that **‘we on Shropshire Council note the above and the extra benefit for both the child and the school when they can eat a healthy midday meal and the Council asks both the Leader and the Chief Executive to write to all our MPs and the Department of Education urging them to:-**

- **bring the offer of the universal free meal in England to both KS1 and KS2 pupils.**
- **increase the income eligibility level so it is at least equivalent to the national minimum wage for workers over the age of 23.**
- **Ask the Department of Education to work with the DWP to commence automatic enrolment of children entitled to free school meals when the appropriate benefit trigger applies.**

And to arrange a Shropshire Council publicity campaign urging those eligible to fill in and submit a free school meal claim as soon as possible and so enable the children’s chosen school to receive the additional income that is on offer from government.’

In reply Cllr Picton said that as Cllr Evans had worked with the Conservative group and modified his original motion to that above, this was a motion that they could support. The motion was voted upon and was accepted unanimously.

➤ Then followed Questions from 4 Members

- a) **Question from Councillor Duncan Kerr: ‘what proportion of cases of children being made subject of a Child Protection Plan domestic abuse was a significant contributing parental factor for the last 3 years’...to which Kirstie Hurst-Knight (Portfolio Holder for Children and Education) gave an extensive reply that we can share with you upon request if you need this information.**
- b) **Question from Councillor Ruth Houghton: Does the Council have a time frame for the implementation of mitigation measures that will address the environmental issues in the River Clun and it’s catchment area?**which was responded to by **Councillor Ian Nellins, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Environment and Transport and Councillor Chris Schofield, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services, that we can share with you upon request if this information is needed.**

c) Question from Councillor Julian Dean: I am concerned about the efficient use of very limited resources for supporting safer streets and making walking, wheeling and cycling more attractive options as modes of travel.

As examples; in July 2021 Shrewsbury's weekend High Street transport filtering was agreed for continuation 'until a further report has been considered by Cabinet [for] longer term arrangements'; Shrewsbury's New Street one-way scheme has gone through repeated temporary orders despite agreement that a permanent scheme should be brought forward; the 20mph zone for Porthill/Copthorne has seen several design iterations without a final scheme reaching the public for consultation despite Cabinet approval in June 2022. So,

- i. What proportion of the allocated grant funds for active travel - allocated as a direct result of the pandemic, or granted by Active Travel England since then – has been spent on consultancy design or associated fees?
- ii. What proportion of the funds has been spent on managing temporary measures?
- iii. How many of the schemes that have received in principle council or cabinet support have been implemented as a permanent scheme?
- iv. Does the portfolio holder consider the spending queried above to have been cost efficient?

Response from Councillor Dan Morris (Portfolio Holder for Highways). He said: Shropshire Council has invested significantly over the past three years to improve our active travel provision, this includes the development of the 7 LCWIPs for Shrewsbury, Oswestry/Gobowen, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Church Stretton, Market Drayton and Whitchurch. These are expected to be adopted this financial year. Also 6 school streets enforced with newly acquired moving traffic offence powers and a number of successful grants for active travel schemes such as the one along Bank Farm Road are being planned. In addition to this we have redesigned the school safety team bringing the work in house with the new team being appointed to support the delivery of sustainable travel in schools, with plans to expand to support business and residential areas over the coming years.

I accept that some of the schemes have taken longer than others to be permanently implemented such as the New Street and 20mph zones. Further to discussions between Cllr Dean and officers they explained the reasonings for these delays and these are as follows; The first experimental order for New Street was for a contraflow cycle route, after the 18month period it became clear through conversations with Active Travel England and colleagues this was not safe or appropriate, therefore rather than remove a scheme which residents supported, the Council decided to implemented a new experimental order to deliver a 20mph zone with a segregated cycle lane, as this was supported by residents and assessed as a safe option. Officers have progressed with the next stage of making the changes permanent, and once the designs are completed the engineering changes needed will be delivered. As the work is being funded through Active Travel England, they are required to approve all designs. The 20mph zones have now been designed, however the initial design standards applied meant that the costs of implementing the schemes exceeded the total grant funding received from Active Travel England. As both New Street and the two 20mph zones are to be funded through Active Travel England Fund 2, we have since asked for a lower specification to be drawn up to allow us to fund all projects if possible.

With regard to costs, I can confirm that Shropshire Council spends £115,000 annually on retaining its Active Travel support, and approx. £36,000 has been spent since the pandemic started on temporary measures on New Street. Of the money received in Active Travel Fund 2 the council have spent approx. £42,000 on the Frankwell 20mph zone, approx. £41,000 on the Low Traffic Neighbourhood in Copthorne (that was not supported by residents and therefore not implemented), £30,000 allocated on the feasibility and concept design work for Phase 1 of the Oswestry Cycle Network, and approx. £37,000 allocated on the designs and investigatory works for New Street.

d) Question from Councillor Roger Evans: What is happening with the promised 20mph outside schools plan?

Response from the Portfolio Holder where it was said that there had been a pause in the work due to 'resources'. However this was moving ahead now when 3 types of approach were to be used – signed only, 20mph zone put in and a variable 20mph zone....meaning that it would only be in place for certain periods of the day. A 'blanket approach/one size fits all' was not going to be used across Shropshire. There were 150 sites across the County involving 127 schools and a feasibility review would be done in each place...an ATC (Automated Traffic Count) for 7 days over 24 hours each day. Supporting data of highway conditions, traffic accidents counts would be added to this review – had been collected in 2021.

Further questions were asked to request that this data would be shared with each local member concerned as a prioritisation framework was drawn up for this programmes development. It was also asked whether the money for this was coming from the 'revenue budget' as well as the 'capital budget' and the answer given was that it would become part of the Highway Revenue budget.

➤ **The meeting concluded following a 'closed session' that discuss 3 topics.** These were about:

- a) Housing Supervisory Board: Shareholder report
- b) Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme: Housing First
- c) Shirehall Disposal and Decommissioning Strategy

Shropshire Council Member Briefing Sessions:

As there hasn't been a Parish Council meeting since 7th November there have been four briefing sessions to let you know about:

- 1) On **13th November PB and ET attended a Members Briefing about 'Crowdfund Shropshire'**. As we said in October's report it was actually launched for the County at Wem Town Hall. Just to remind you of some details about this.....

Crowdfund Shropshire is as a result of a business partnership with Spacehive and way of finding revenue funding to initiate projects in the voluntary sector. It could be a good way for some of our local groups to attract some funding – and we would urge you to find out more about it and then spread the word about it to any groups here that you think could benefit from it. HOWEVER...Some things to think about....it is for 'revenue funding' so far as we can see and if a project is successful and goes forward then that group has to find the ongoing financial means to do so! At its heart it seems to be providing 'seed funding' for the 'voluntary sector'. Have a look and see what you think. Is this a useful idea for some groups here?

We can send some more specific details about this scheme with some attached notes that we were given, as well as a powerpoint briefing. Do ask for these if you'd like to have them.

There is to be a second round of this offer in the new year, as the first round closed on 29th November.

- 2) On 27th/28th November there was a Teams Meeting about Pyrolysis Units and Biochar for PB and ET. This was to update Members, following on from the last meeting of the Full Council on 21st September, where the business case for a £2m of funding was approved for a demonstrator [pyrolysis unit](#). This will now be considered by Full Council at their next meeting in December 2023. Consequently, this was an opportunity to know more about the process of pyrolysis and the options being considered. It proved very interesting and informative. When the presentation notes/powerpoint, etc become available we can forward them to any who would like them. Sufficient to say this is innovative technology that Shropshire is investigating that will, if successful, help SC become Carbon Zero and so meet our Zero Climate Targets in the near future, as we seek to dispose of our waste in a 'climate sensitive' way. The other driver for this is that it will at the same time provide a source of revenue for SC going forwards as the Biochar is sold for use in many areas.....such as construction, insulation, adsorber in functional clothing, food packaging, waste water treatment, air cleaning, carbon electrodes in super-capacitors for energy storage, soil additive and so on. We are told demand for Biochar is outstripping supply and there is quite a considerable amount of optimism about this in SC as we find ourselves one of the leaders amongst Local Authorities nationally in this field. The phrase 'carbon is the new gold' has been said!!....and we all know that diamonds are really just another form of carbon!
- 3) On 9th January about the Shrewsbury Movement Strategy. This Strategy is a 10-year vision for transforming how people travel in and around Shrewsbury. It has since been approved by SC's Cabinet on 17 January, and there will now follow with an eight-week consultation due to begin on 26 January. This briefing was ahead of the strategy/Cabinet report being published later that day, to enable councillors to find out more and to ask any questions. The strategy has been developed by the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership and includes a raft of proposals to reduce through-traffic, improve public space and encourage people to spend longer in the town centre. The partnership is made up of Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council and Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID) . This 'Shrewsbury Moves' strategy follows the publication of the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Masterplan Vision in 2021.
- 4) **Winter Maintenance on 19th January.** This was led by Andy Wilde (SC's Head of Highways) and was to update us on this programme that SC are operating between 14th October and 1st April. He covered quite a lot of issues including Drainage, Grit Bins, Gritters, Footpaths now being gritted outside many schools, Farmers under contract for using their snow ploughs, flooding resilience...amongst other things. He made the point that his Highways budget (which we know is under pressure from other areas of Council spend and responsibility such as Adult Social Care and Education) is now operating more effectively at a lower cost than was the case in 2020, using better IT systems for managing staff, time and resources. This in turn has enabled him to redirect the in-house teams SC now have for 'drainage' and 'minor works' to start catching up on the back log we keep hearing about. 'Fix my Street' issues (that residents can all access if they have the internet) have been looked at and it is now entering phase 2 where following improvements to the system, we were assured, amongst other things residents will be given feedback saying how/when their complaint has been resolved. If anyone would like more information about these things please do ask us.

Shropshire Council Training/Development Sessions:

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

Shropshire Climate and Carbon Advisory Board:

The latest meeting was held on Wednesday 29th November on Teams for ET. It proved a very full agenda in the 90 minutes allocated for this. On the agenda was a **review and actions from our last meeting** on 21st July, a **Carbon Monitoring update** and a **discussion of the proposed Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan**.



We have attached links for being able to find out more of the details in these two topics for any who are interested. One thing we need to consider is how we not only control our 'Direct



Emissions' as SC (SCOPE 1) but also our Indirect SC Emissions (SCOPE 2) and then influence the 'Indirect Emissions' we cause through our supply chains (SCOPE 3) both 'upstream' through our purchasing, etc and 'downstream' through transportation, etc. Then there is the matter of SC's 'franchising' and 'investments'. Have a look at the powerpoint linked above, as it explains things a little more.

We finished by hearing/discussing the latest Climate and Carbon headlines. If you'd like a few more details from this meeting, I have them to hand upon request. One thing that was suggested was that we needed to bring all the 'Climate' groups that are now forming across Shropshire together in some form of Shropshire COP!...A scaled down version of COP 28 that is now happening in Dubai (Nov 30th- Dec12th) as we write this report! We'll see...

The minutes have now been produced and can be shared upon request....as this month's report is long enough! However under 'Any Other Business' it has been recorded that ET requested that a future meeting should provide an opportunity for a presentation and focussed discussion on the way in which the Council's Town and Country planning policies and regulatory decisions could be used to encourage carbon reduction and improved climate change resilience.

As regards when the Board next meets....A diary invitation has been sent for Shropshire Council elected members to attend a 2-3 hour long visit to Keele University's campus, starting on site at 12.00 on Tues 27 February 2024 to provide a great opportunity to see renewable energy, battery storage and hydrogen technologies in action.

The next meeting of the full Advisory Board is planned for Spring 2024.

The following groups:

- a) **Shropshire Local Plan Member Group:** Cross-Party Group (of which ET is part) has not met since the Teams meeting on Tuesday 21st November, that we reported on in our November report, so there is therefore nothing further to report this month.
- b) **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.
- c) **Public Transport Working Group:** Cross-Party Group (of which ET is part) also has still nothing more to report since we commented upon the DRT scheme launch now happening in the Hanwood area to one side of Shrewsbury in our November report. This pilot roll-out is continuing to be extended in this area I understand. The group met last on 8th June!

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. It seems from my enquiries that this group is now currently inactive!

B] River Water Quality Task and Finish Group for PB and ET. This report is now finalised and on the SC Cabinet agenda for consideration on the 13th December. We will let you know the outcome of this important report in due course. It covers a lot of ground and has involved a lot of work from all involved over the last few months of 2023.

NB. You may have seen that Severn Trent's works improvement to the Water Treatment premises just of Harris Croft in Wem is 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 has completed its work. This was presented to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) that commissioned this report on Monday 20th November. It was unanimously accepted and then was passed to Cabinet with the request that if it agreed with this it should be sent to Full Council so that its 14 recommendations can be adopted by them and so become Council policy. When this strategic report is published we'll also let you know where you can access it. A lot of hard work and hours this has been given to this over the last few months and it has been an exciting working group to be part of. I understand the Local Government association (LGA) is interested in this unique piece of work and may then want to consider it nationally!

The ones we have been involved in more recently are:

D] Developer Contributions Task and Finish Group – This met on 5th January 2024 to look at this issue.

The Government has introduced reforms to developer contributions. These include amendments to the Community Infrastructure Levy regulations, updated Planning Policy Guidance the role of Infrastructure Funding Statements and how CIL and Section 106 should work together. Members of the 'Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee' [E+E OSC] specifically mentioned social aspects of the impact of developments when they were discussing this topic, such as demand on GP Practices and schools. This T+F group is looking into these changes and see how they affect us here in Shropshire. They are aware of examples of demand being placed on already heavily utilised services, where the arising need of additional developments might have been better highlighted to inform the value and focus of developer contributions.

For example...New housing developments can increase demand on different services in local communities.

Contributions from developers towards the costs of introducing or expanding services are a key part of ensuring that communities can be and do remain sustainable.

- **Section 106 contributions** are specific to the development that they relate to.
- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** relates to the cumulative impact of developments.

For those who would like to see an outline of these changes we have been sent a powerpoint from a training day put on by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and Local Government Association, which we can share with you.

B] Transformation and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Task & Finish Group – has met on 5th and 12th January 2024.

Peter and I are invited to observe on-line as it meets.

This financial strategy began the process of ensuring that the Council's finances are aligned to the delivery of 'The Shropshire Plan', as agreed by Councillors in May 2022. It also builds upon the engagement of the Council with the Local Government Association (LGA) through its 'peer review' process. This was when SC invited colleagues from other councils to spend time with us reviewing our financial affairs – including our financial strategy, our budget approach, and our wider financial management across the whole Council. The review was unequivocal in its conclusions; the technical and professional resources the Council

has at its disposal are of a high standard and provide a sound foundation from which to meet the coming challenges. The review also emphasised that the approaches we have used in recent years were unlikely to secure the efficiency and effectiveness we know we need to meet our future challenges. It highlighted that we could make changes in several areas, including

- Confidence in our ability to deliver Member and resident aspirations.
- Clarity over the financial outlook in the short-, medium-, and long-term.
- A move from minimising to managing risk.
- A transparent approach to how we will secure sustainable finances, and the consequences of failing to do so.

Lastly, because it is clear that the wider economic outlook continues to be uncertain, SC is now adjusting plans accordingly... and taking the steps needed. The proposals for spending reductions set out in the strategy report are part of the proactive planning process. Consequently, the updated MTFs includes detailed revenue savings proposals - developed in alignment with the Shropshire Plan. The intention is to secure a sustainable budgetary position across the MTFs period. However, these savings also represent a significant challenge – and risk – in terms of their delivery....as we know from reports in or local press of how SC is trying to reduce costs by £51m in this current financial year!

This Task and Finish Group is scrutinising this ‘transformation’ strategy and checking if the needed savings and transformation are taking place. On the agenda for this meeting was asking our SC officers for a progress report on Working with (Price Waterhouse Cooper) PwC as our Transformation Partner. Key points/questions were gathered from the group having heard this presentation about the wider Transformation Programme and links with delivering the MTFs so that specific questions and areas of focus can be developed for the next sessions of this T+F group.

Shropshire Council Cabinet:

This met on 17th January, 2024 and had on it’s agenda the following items for decisions to be taken, that we thought you might wish to know were being considered:

- Rural Proofing in Health and Care - Report of the Health & Scrutiny Committee
- Alternative Budget Proposals 2024/25
- Shrewsbury Movement & Public Realm Strategy
- Parking Tariffs, Operations & Development
- Healthier Weight Strategy
- Sports Village Transformation
- Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library – RAAC
- Cambrian Railway Building Oswestry - Request for Capital Funding to Match UKSPF Grant Offer

Shropshire Council Committees:

People Overview Committee for PB on Wed 15th November. The main body of the agenda was devoted to:

- a) Children and Young People Mental Health Partnership – This was to review progress in delivering the work of the children and young people's mental health partnership. (see powerpoint using the link below).
<https://sw16modgov/documents/s36105/people%20scrutiny%20presentation%20-%20camhs%20Nov%202023.pdf>
- b) Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 2 - To scrutinise financial performance at quarter 2 and identify issues that may require further investigation by the overview and scrutiny committee.
- c) Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 - To scrutinise performance at quarter 2 and identify issues that may require further investigation by an overview and scrutiny committee.
- d) Prevention Strategy - maximising independence and demand management Task and Finish Group and to confirm how this topic should be progressed.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for ET on Monday 20th November. This was his first meeting on this committee following his move on from the Northern Planning Committee. The main body of the agenda was devoted to:

- a) Considering the Rural Proofing in Health and Care Task and Finish Group Report....which, as we have noted above had it’s 14 recommendations unanimously approved and is now being passed to Cabinet for their consideration.
- b) Given an update from the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) by SC’s Director of Public Health, Rachel Robinson
- c) Given an update from the Health and Wellbeing Board by Cllr Cecilia Motley
- d) Informed that the proposed Local Care and Transformation Programme (LCTP) Task and Finish Group had not launched yet, possibly because there had been too many T+F groups for Councillors to volunteer for at that time. It was considered that this is an important programme and a re-launch be considered now some other T+F groups had completed their reports.

This meeting agreed that Primary Care would be the focus of the Committee for its January session. In preparation for this it was agreed that the Committee would work together through a series of informal briefings ahead of that session to understand more about the work that is taking place in Primary Care.

The first of these briefings took place on 7th December and provided an introductory overview from Gareth Robinson (ICS Executive Director - Director of Delivery and Transformation) and his colleagues from the NHS. ET can share the powerpoint that was used in this briefing should you wish this. It gives a lot of data and information that you might find interesting regarding Primary Care here in Shropshire.

A second meeting with Gareth also took place to help brief members on 20th December and then a third one on 4th January between ourselves to enable us to reflect on the evidence that has been provided and decide on the lines of questioning ahead of the formal meeting of this Committee (HOSC) on the 29/01/24.

Standards Sub Committee – ET had a meeting of this sub-committee on **20th December** to consider two Code of Conduct concerns.

Strategic Licencing Committee – ET and PB attended a very short one item agenda meeting of this committee on **11th January** that was to decide what should be SC's policy as regards taxi drivers being allowed to display the Union/St George's flags in and on the taxis. It was quickly agreed that this should be allowed, with all but two members voting in favour - one against and one abstaining.

Shropshire Council budget consultation 18 Dec 2023 – 28 Jan 2024

You will be aware that SC is currently engaged in a Budget Consultation that it would like you and all our residents to take part in. Our Parish Clerk has circulated details about this. You can help encourage the public to take part

- Via the consultation website www.shropshire.gov.uk/budget24 – this is the preferred and most efficient way for people to give their views.
- The SC webpage includes a brief explanation of the Council's budget challenge and includes a link to the survey and a video to help explain some context
- There is an online toolkit of materials to help you promote the consultation with
 - o A poster you can print off to help promote the consultation to display prominently in your library/location
 - o A consultation graphic for use on digital display screens if you have these
 - o A social media graphic to use on your channels
- There is a PDF version of the survey for anybody who is unable to complete the online survey.
- If the form is handed back to you please could you scan this and send to TellUs@shropshire.gov.uk
- The **consultation runs from 18 December 2023 – 28 January 2024**

The views given will help to shape Shropshire Council's budget strategy and decisions towards the spending reductions it must make. This will play a key part in helping ensure that anyone who cannot access the consultation online at home is able to do so.

Regarding Whixall Parish, our activity has been:

- a) Continuing to look over the planning applications and giving general advice to residents.
- b) To deal with the re-surfacing of a flooding problem in Hollinswood that we have been monitoring.
- c) Then to try and help with further flooding concerns elsewhere in Whixall following contact from two other long established residents about the serious flooding across their property.

1] A farmer reported ***'We are experiencing massive issues with flooding this autumn as the Lord Hill Drain, into which our water goes, has not been maintained by land owners further downstream. This is resulting in the water overtopping the ditch onto our land. (photos attached). This is flooding my farm and the only way of getting the water off is now to pump it off'***. This is having severe implications for them of large costs, animals having to be moved to other farms, grass being killed and huge financial worries and mental stress to them and pensioner neighbours who are blocked in by this flooding and who are in poor health.

2] A second has concerns about a re-instated culvert (described as too small!) because of the filling in of a ditch. This has resulted in severe flooding again after a 10 or more year absence when the ditch was present.

We are in contact with Shropshire Council's Drainage Team who know about all 3 matters and who, although they have had their hands full across a lot of Shropshire with Storm Babet between the 18th – 21st October...and others since, will be following these matters up.

These are stressful issues for those who live in these areas of Whixall and it is important we bring them to the attention of the Parish Council so that they can support and advise Shropshire Council as they seek to look again into these flooding concerns, that I understand will in turn can affect those downstream in the Wem area if not properly/wisely dealt with. They need looking at again as they are not going away!

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

- 1. The White Horse in Wem and Wem Civic Society** – Unfortunately since it's purchase on 13th July by Shropshire Council there still has been no further action to report. We continue to press those in SC for actions to be taken. It was on the Agenda of Wem Civic Society when it met for its AGM in the Town Hall on 16th January and has since produced some vigorous comments on Wem's Facebook Community page! PB attended this meeting so can give a first-hand account of all that went on. The Chairman, Oliver Richardson, reported that 'a lot of good ideas came out', some of which are now on the Facebook page from people who could not get there....it was a particularly cold, frosty night! Nevertheless, there were 30 present, including many people who hadn't attended previously, so a good sign that is helpful as regards the future of this important Wem society. The work they do is demonstrated on many fronts such as:

- the representations they make to us as a Town Council on matters of concern
- the 'quarterly markets' they have helped introduce/organise here for many years now
- their monitoring of our town heritage
- promotion of green energy concerns, following our town 'declaration of a climate emergency' in Feb 2019
- and sharing their views on some of the heritage-related planning matters that come before us.

Their next meeting is on the evening of Tuesday 20th February is on the 'Wem Hoard'. Do attend if you can.

As it happened, after this meeting Peter and myself have been sent an update from Cllr Dean Carroll (SC Portfolio holder for Assets) who was a key figure in encouraging the purchase of the White Horse. He said:

'I now have some progress to report back to you both on the White Horse. Panels are to go on the metal grates over the windows and front door have now been designed and they are intended to be installed by the first week of February.

In terms of longer-term plans for the building, an officer working group has now been established and is working on a bid for funding from Historic England for additional surveys needed to assist with this. A briefing session is soon going to be arranged to bring us (PB and ET) fully up to date'.

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

We are now working through the 'Action Points' from a meeting PB and ET had with SC Officers on 5th December 2023. The first of these is to have a meeting between ourselves, WRPC and WTC Clerks and the Mayor of Wem and Chair of WRPC to review progress made during 2023 and where next for this project. 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 started doing in 2023) 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.

3. Friends of Whitchurch Road Cemetery – They had their latest meeting on 10th January when a whole variety of matters were discussed, including the management of grass cutting, stump grinding, repairs to a field gate and a notice board, as well as receiving a financial report. Another Coffee Morning is being planned to help raise funds and this is to be on Sat 20th February in the Methodist Church Hall from 9.30 – 12.00 Noon.

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.

Wem Area Climate Action (WACA) - This group held their latest business meeting on 20th November at Wem Senior Club. Amongst other matters discussed they discussed the forthcoming COP conference and linking this to their part of this year's Christmas Tree Festival in the Parish Church, Carbon Footprint issues, Incredible Edibles (at one side of Jubilee Square), Edinburgh House re-development concerns, Wildflower meadows in our WTC Play areas, and work being done with Thomas Adams School students. As you can see, they have a wide range of involvements in Wem. The group now has a constitution and just been awarded 'charity status' by the Charity Commission, so they can now begin to raise their profile as they seek funding for their projects. If you'd like more information about WACA, do ask.

Their next meeting is planned for 22nd January 2024 at Wem Senior Club, starting at 7.15pm and all are welcome.

- ## **4. The Wemian**
- We are looking forward to the re-launch of The Wemian later this month and know of articles that have been submitted for inclusion, so know it is eagerly anticipated by many and has been missed over the last couple of years.
- ## **5. North Salop Wheelers ('Wheelers')**
- We have no further news to report this month except that one of the two new buses with tail lifts for wheelchair users has now arrived. These expensive vehicles are being bought with the help of a charitable foundation. This is an extremely exciting development for them, as well as residents in this area. However, the concern continues to be a shortage of drivers if they are to extend the service they offer. If you know of any who might be interested in helping – even in a small way, do speak with our Mayor who is the Chair of Wheelers and can supply more information as to latest news, if requested.

Our apologies for the exceptional length of this report...it is probably our longest to date as we try and bring you up to speed on nearly 2.5 months of SC work!....., but we hope it proves interesting and helpful as you select the bits of information that you need to do your role in the community. As we have said previously, if there are things you now wish to draw to our attention or ask about, then do say.

Kindest regards and all good wishes for 2024,

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers

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

Date: 20th January 2024