

Report 21 to Whixall Parish Council

by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall + Edward Towers – February 2024

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

Full Shropshire Council Meeting has not met since September. The next planned meeting is on Thursday 29th February in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND.

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 Climate and Carbon Advisory Board:

As reported last month the latest meeting was held on Wednesday 29th November on Teams for ET as the Independent Member on the Board. The next meeting of the full Advisory Board is planned for Spring 2024. However before this an 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 that ET plans to attend as it provides a great opportunity to see renewable energy, battery storage and hydrogen technologies in action.

Shropshire Local Plan Member Group: This Cross-Party Group (of which ET is part) met on a Teams meeting on Thursday 1st February and received an update on how far the Inspectors had got in examining the plans SC had put to them in September 2021. We are still at Stage 1....which is examining the process by which the Plan was put together but after all the to-ing and fro-ing where clarifications were sought and responded by both Inspectors and SC the latest one was received at SC in January 2024. Now these (hopefully!) final questions are being answered by SC regarding:

- Black Country housing quota contributions that SC is being asked to absorb into our Plan
- Housing Requirement updates needed in line with 5%,10% and 15% uplifts based on 2020 assessment of Local Housing Need to identify reasonable options
- Employment Land Requirement updates

Once done, Cabinet will again consider and be asked to approve these revisions/clarifications....the there will be a 6 week public consultation, a consideration of the findings and then a move from this Stage 1 to Stage 2 that looks at the suggested Sites Allocated using hearing sessions....hopefully during the Summer of 2024, then any modifications suggested being consulted on...before an Inspectors Report in Winter 2024 and all with a view to this new Plan being ready for adoption in Spring 2025. However, the actual timescales here all depend on the Planning Inspectors....so nothing is as yet 'set in stone'!

We then considered the Reforms that the Government is making to the 'Plan Making Process' which desires that they be simpler, faster to prepare and more accessible! Whilst SC is generally supportive of the over-arching principles that seeks to remain plan-led...there are some areas of significant concern, namely:

- Proposals to do new-style local plans in just 30 months (including a 6 month examination!) could lead to rushed decisions, reduce aspirations and undermine good plan-making
- Potential reliance on digital forms of engagement – but these need to compliment traditional forms of engagement!
- Removal of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)

However we were told that all these 'reforms' do NOT affect the current on-going examination of the draft Shropshire Local Plan.

We then went on to discuss the Revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that was announced in December 2023. Key changes include:

- **Housing Land Supply...**
 - no longer need to demonstrate a 5 year land supply if Local Plan is less than 5 years old
 - The buffer of the 5-year housing land supply will only be required where delivery test indicates it was less than 85% of the requirement (there would be a 20% Buffer in this situation)
 - Local Authorities such as Shropshire would only have to show a 4 year land supply.
- **Housing Need...**
 - Greater emphasis that Government's standard methodology for calculating housing need is the 'advisory starting point' and can be deviated from where there are exceptional circumstances.
 - Confirmation that this starting point will be reviewed following publication of the 2021 Census-based household projections in 2025
 - Emphasis on the importance meeting the housing needs of older people.

- **Design...**
 - Greater focus on the importance of high-quality design
 - Significant weight should be given to the importance of energy efficiency when considering adaptations to existing buildings
- **Site Assessment**....need to consider the availability of agricultural land for food production when deciding most appropriate sites for development
- **Green Belt**....Local authorities not required to review their Green Belt boundaries during plan-making but can still choose to do so 'where exceptional circumstances' justify it.....and a recognition the 'over-densification' to meet housing needs may be inappropriate.
- **Affordable Housing**....greater emphasis on community-led housing and self-build and custom build housing.
- **Wind Power**...previous amendments extended the ability to identify appropriate areas for this to include Supplementary Planning Documents. Also clarifies the level of community support required.
- **Transitional Arrangements**....make it clear that the new NPPF changes do not affect the current examination of the draft Shropshire Local Plan.

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:** 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:

The only one we have been involved in recently are:

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

As reported last month 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. This T+F group is looking into these changes and see how they affect us here in Shropshire.

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

PB also (as a member of the Developer Contributions Task and Finish Group) attended a further meeting at the end of January where a presentation was given by Eddie West (SC's Planned Policy & Strategy Manager) on Strategic Infrastructure Network covering Shropshire up to 2050. The attached slides show the nature and extent of this planning.



Draft Slides Joint
DMT Workshop HD.

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....see comments that follow.**
- Healthier Weight Strategy
- Sports Village Transformation
- **Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library – RAAC....see comments made on the last page.**
- Cambrian Railway Building Oswestry - Request for Capital Funding to Match UKSPF Grant Offer

As regards the matter of the larger Wem development applications being made to give a contribution to the work of the **RAMSAR Site at Colemere**....PB and ET and Cllr Chris Schofield (SC Portfolio holder for Planning and Regulatory Services) had a meeting on 2nd February with Eddie West (SC's Planned Policy & Strategy Manager)....he's been busy with us this last month!!....to discuss the RAMSAR Contributions that all parishes who have developments within the 11.7 km 'zone of influence' of Colemere are required to contribute too. We learnt that this is a requirement placed upon planners/developers by the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) for these areas called Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Applications have to meet the requirements of HRA's if their developments are within the Zone of Influence. It is money that is required on top of CIL /Section 106 monies required by SC for local infrastructure, etc. If it wasn't required, no more money would then be forthcoming to a town/parish for other green projects that they may have in mind – so we can't divert this money to any other local 'green projects'. This could be available under Bio Net Gain (BNG) requirements coming into force on 12/2/24....or Section 106 agreements. This puts the matter in a different light, although we may want to look into how 11.7 km was arrived at when Brown Moss's Zone is only 3.3km!

As part of this Cabinet meeting's agenda you'll note the Car Parking Charges were discussed and approved! For Wem this would mean 20p extra per hour after the 15 mins parking for free, extension of parking fee times from 6pm to 8pmand for

the first time....half price charging on Sundays. Whilst we know that SC has to find a lot of money for it's next year's budget, this has raised a storm of protest across the County. The decision has since been called in in the permitted time allowed and so **it is going to the Economic and Environment Scrutiny meeting on 19th February at 2.00pm in Shirehall.** As it happens we were objecting 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!

One letter written by a local resident to SC that summarises local feeling reads:

'I have read the proposed car parking charges approved by the Cabinet to increase the cost in Shropshire. I am appalled that once again you are proposing to introduce a charge for Sundays and Bank Holidays.

Wem is a small town with all the small shops and businesses, except for the Coop supermarket, run by independent owners. Our town should never have been included in those who have to pay to park but it was the will of the ruling party that it should be included. Wem, unlike the other towns in North Shropshire, does not have a viable Tourist attraction, like the Canals or the Meres, or National enterprises to encourage people to shop here. It is reliant on very hard working independent traders to keep the economy viable.

To charge for parking on a Sunday is a charge on people who attend one of the 4 Wem urban churches . There are no shops or businesses open on a Sunday except for the Coop and the majority of those who park on the main car park are those who are attending Sunday Worship. Why has this not been taken into account and discussed as happened the first time car parking charges were introduced, in I believe 2018?

I would like a detailed breakdown of how much it will cost to alter the existing machines to the new charges and how much it will cost for officers to be employed (at Double time I presume) to monitor the car park. I would also like to know what the car parking income is for Wem's car parks.

I really think you need to reconsider introducing these new charges as Wem is a town that tries to help itself and is being penalised for doing this. The town is so close to Shrewsbury's out of town stores that it puts the existing business at a disadvantage.

This was recognised by the West Midlands Regional Assembly, Advantage West Midlands, Shropshire County Council and North Shropshire District Council in the 1980's and 90's. Nothing has changed except that more of the local services, e.g. Wem Town Hall Community Trust, the Swimming Pool and Sports facilities rely on grants from the Wem Town Council community charge payers. Examples of the local Town Council and Urban residents helping themselves.

Kind regards.....'

As we said this decision has now been 'called in', so if you feel similarly then please do write in expressing your feelings. You may say that instead of increased charges SC should be looking at Band 7 parking that would then help alleviate parking problems in our side streets close to the Town Centre.(If you need more detail/background then please see us about this). It is an important matter. Yes, we should all pay our share, but car parking charges (added or not!) are not the way here. Wem's Economy is in a difficult place being as we are squeezed between Whitchurch and Shrewsbury larger centres, shops, etc. We really need this extra consideration by SC.....at least whilst we get back on our feet!

Shropshire County Council Cabinet's plans to change car park charging in the area can read about it here -

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2024/01/cabinet-agrees-parking-charge-changes/>

Please feel free to contact any or all of the following people, politely stating your concerns and desire that Wem be exempt.

- Dan Morris – Shropshire Council Portfolio holder for Highways - Dan.Morris@shropshire.gov.uk
- Andy Begley – Chief Executive of Shropshire Council - Andy.Begley@shropshire.gov.uk
- Andy Wilde – Head of Highways - andy.wilde@shropshire.gov.uk
- Lezley Picton – SC Leader of the Council - Lezley.Picton@shropshire.gov.uk
- Mark Barrow – Shropshire Council Director of Place - Mark.Barrow@shropshire.gov.uk

And now....because this matter has been 'called in' to scrutiny....

- Joyce Barrow – Chair of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee – joyce.barrow@shropshire.gov.uk

....and of course other members of the committee can be found on the SC website and written to as well.

We have now been written to advise the following:

*'The Chair of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is aware of the likely high level of interest in the Parking Tariff call-in being **considered by that committee on the afternoon of Monday 19 February.** She would like to provide those who want to make representations on the topic the opportunity to do so by sharing them in writing, in the first instance.*

All written representations will be collated and included as an appendix to the covering note for the Committee meeting. For representations to be included in the appendix and published before the meeting, please could they be sent to democracy@shropshire.gov.uk by noon on Thursday 15 February. Written representations received following this and up until noon on Monday 19 February will be circulated at the committee meeting.'

We cannot emphasise to strongly the importance of this 'CALL IN' as regards the impact it will have on Wem. Please do write to any/all of the above places....copying them in. **We need to make a BIG NOISE about this issue. As we see this, it is not a party political issue...but one of justice and common sense. 'One size doesn't fit all' towns in our county, however hard our County's collective economic outlook might be. Wem has taken more than its fair share of 'hits' in the name of sharing the economic pain.** Wem used to have a full car park daily before parking charges were introduced in 2018, this will just make things even harder for our economy. We are not one of the larger towns, have had services withdrawn steadily....and now this imposition! It would be helpful if anyone wishes to write that they read the 'call in notices by the Labour and Lib Dem groups and write with these facts in mind....see below. We've also added the proposal from SC that the Cabinet agreed to and the procedure that will be used for this Committee in dealing with this Call In.

- [Appendix 1a Call In of Decision by the Labour Group.pdf](#)Call In Notice from the Labour Group
- https://shropshirecouncil-my.sharepoint.com/personal/sarah_townsend_shropshire_gov_uk/Documents/Desktop/Appendix 1BCall In Notice from the Lib Dems
- <https://sw16modgov/documents/s36953/Appendix2%20Cabinet%20Report%20Appendices.pdf>the paper with the proposal from Highways/Andy Wilde/Dan Morris
- <https://sw16modgov/documents/s36954/Appendix%204%20call-in%20procedure%20at%20committee.pdf>the way the Committee will hear the Call In.

Shropshire Council Committees:

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for ET on Monday 29th January .

This meeting began with 3 questions from Members that were about:

1. **Delays in transfer of patients from ambulances to Shropshire's Emergency Departments and admission** to hospital beds continue to cause misery, deterioration and deaths. So, how many Emergency Department deaths were there in 2023 and what steps have been taken to deal with this appalling loss of lives, how many deaths were reported to Shropshire's Coroner over the last 3 years and how many and what was the content of any Regulation 28 Notices served on SATH? What urgent steps have been taken to reduce these delays, when a national study suggested increased mortality in patients waiting more than 5 hours in crowded conditions in the Emergency Department for a bed and what was the outcome of the meeting with the Health Secretary?
2. **SATH receiving £21 million to help with 'winter pressures' and industrial action has mostly affected the number of elective procedures and routine clinic appointments and investigations.** How then has the anticipated deficit grown so quickly from £57 million to £130,000 million by the end of the current financial year, representing 14% of its budget, and what measures will be taken to deal with this?
3. **How has Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICS implemented the NHS Emeritus scheme,** announced by Amanda Pritchard, NHSE Chief Executive in June 2023, and which has brought doctors back into clinical practice?

Written answers were supplied for these questions that can be sent you upon request.

The meeting then went on to consider the following four main items on the agenda:

- a) **To review the Primary Care Access and Recovery Programme.** A presentation was given by Gareth Robinson, Director of Delivery and Transformation, NHS Shropshire Telford and Wrekin....and the powerpoint from this can also be circulated to any who would like it. [It is rather a large data file to attach to this monthly report, but contains lots of very useful information!]
- b) **Update from the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)**
- c) **Update from the Health and Wellbeing Board.** This was given by Rachel Robinson, the Co-Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- d) **Update on the Rural Proofing in Health and Care Report.** The meeting was informed that Cabinet had saw the report on 17/1/24, it was well received and a response is being prepared....and that the People Overview Scrutiny Committee had approved recommendation 7 on 24th January. It was now being presented to the Joint HOSC committee on 27/2/24 to see if they also approve it.

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for PB on Monday 24th January .

In addition the opening formal agenda items this committee discussed two other main items:

- a) **Report of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Rural Proofing in Health and Care.** They received the key findings and recommendations of the report.....[which ET was part of and can now send you if you'd like a copy]...and approved Recommendation 7 that was being asked of this Committee.
- b) **Report of the Focussed Visit to Shropshire's Children's Services.** The committee were given an update on the findings of the Ofsted inspection and next steps following publication of the Inspection Report in January 2024. (Please see PB if you'd like further details about this report)

Standards Sub Committee – ET had a meeting of this sub-committee on 20th December in Shirehall 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

This has now closed and there has been a very big response to it. Lezley Picton (Leader of SC) said

'Thank you for your support to share our 2024/25 budget consultation. We have had a record number of responses, with over 1,000 people sharing their thoughts on our budget plans and helping us to understand the priorities of our communities. The public are all too aware of the financial challenge facing local councils all over the country and we have been honest about the impact for us in Shropshire. We have always said that there would be difficult decisions to come, and the feedback we have received will help to inform these.'

We have reached a crucial point where our number one priority must now be to become a financially sustainable organisation. Demand pressure has built beyond our expectations and, as the picture for 2024/25 becomes ever more clear, we know that our budget gap is now even greater than £50m.

We must be bold and decisive in our next steps. This includes making decisions that we never wanted to make and we know that this will have a significant impact for our communities. This will mean some of our services will be considerably reduced and some will stop altogether. We must review every service so that we reduce our spending and manage our demand. This means we will become a smaller organisation with fewer people. We will prioritise services that support the most vulnerable people in Shropshire and deliver these in the most efficient way we can.

At the moment, we are working through consultation feedback and refining the details of our plans. More details will be published as part of the Cabinet paper agendas on 13 February and significant changes will also require public consultation. In the meantime, we are continuing our conversations with DLUHC and I have joined forces with other council leaders and MPs to urge Government to address the situation nationally and take action. For now, we must shift our entire focus to becoming a financially sustainable organisation. '

Regarding Whixall Parish, our activity has been:

- a) Continuing to look over the planning applications and giving general advice to residents.
- b) To keep pressing for SC's help with the re-surfacing of a flooding problem in Hollinswood that we have been monitoring, as well as the two other ones that we reported on elsewhere in Whixall that we reported on last month.
- c) Continuing to look over the planning applications (that you also see each meeting!) and giving general advice to residents where we are requested.

In addition we have had your Clerk draw out attention to another matter of concern for many Whixall residents, that of cattle/sheep out on the roads. The resident concerned told us these are ***'dangerous daily occurrence of sheep wandering about on the public highway, actually narrow country lanes.... in Whixall? Two nights ago I almost hit this group, asleep in the road (location given).'*** The informant said.. ***'This issue dates back years, maybe 10 or more'***. This matter will probably be discussed (again?) at your Parish Council, but we will also aim to follow up with Shropshire Council to see what support/solutions they can offer.

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

1. There is nothing further to add to the following matters since our January report. Matters are as they were then, so please refer back to this report:
 - a) **The White Horse in Wem and Wem Civic Society.**
(The Civic Society has their next meeting is on the evening of Tuesday 20th February is on the 'Wem Hoard'. Do attend if you can.)
 - b) **The pilot project between Shropshire Council and Wem Economic Forum/Town Council/Wem Rural Parish Council**
 - c) **Friends of Whitchurch Road Cemetery.**
(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)
 - d) **North Salop Wheelers ('Wheelers')**
2. **Wem Area Climate Action (WACA)** - The group met most recently for a very full business meeting on 22nd January 2024 at Wem Senior Club, starting at 7.15pm and all are welcome. If you'd like more details of this meeting Councillor Len Staines (Secretary to WACA and WRPC Rep to WACA) can share them for any interested.
3. **The Wemian** – At last the eagerly awaited first copies of the re-launched Wemian have been sent out starting with the Winter Edition this last week. This is very welcome news and it has been missed over the last couple of years as can be seen from news feeds posted on local Community Facebook pages. Our thanks to all involved. It is another sign of things beginning to pick up in our area.

4. Whitchurch Library and Registrar Services Closure

We have been looking into this matter and seeing what help Wem maybe able to offer Shropshire Council and Whitchurch in particular. We were mentioning this at the end of last year to Lezley Picton and other Shropshire Council leaders and were advised to wait until a structural report was completed. This has now been published, been in the media/press and discussed in at least one public meeting in Whitchurch. Our view has been, is it not possible that we in Wem Library/town can pick up registration services, for the short term at least and maybe help SC in other ways to provide a service here in Central North Shropshire. That what we were doing in the days of NSDC...and then to East and West of North Shropshire too. It's why Wem was chosen to have Edinburgh House as NSDC's HQ, as it was so central. This made such a difference to our local economy and has been really sadly missed since 2009 by many here. The closure of Whitchurch Civic Centre affects ourselves in Wem as well as those resident in Whitchurch and our overlapping hinterland. Our residents have more recently been having to travel up to Whitchurch because of closures here in town. It was argued we are our close in distance and have direct travel connections by train, bus and road, so surely we must be considered as part of the solution and that things can be reversed (for a while at least!) and Whitchurch residents can travel down to Wem, as they did for NSDC matters.

We were able to meet on Thursday 8th February with two Senior SC Officers to ask them to have Wem in mind as they plan a way out of this Civic Centre closure for Whitchurch. We want to work together with Whitchurch and being given the chance to explore possibilities for solutions and ways we in Wem can assist Whitchurch and central North Shropshire. However, we learnt that phone calls, home visits to those unable to travel and new on-line digital means of registration are in the advanced planning stages of the Government's thinking for the whole country. This means that even Whitchurch Registration Offices have an uncertain future as the numbers using it were dropping, even before the Civic Centre was forced to close. So, it seems we have drawn a blank here....but they know once again that Wem and area must not be forgotten

- 5. Community Connectors Meeting on Thursday 8th February** – This is building on the new initiative that is going on around Shropshire for Social Prescribing through GP Medical Practices/Referrals. The Wem Swimming and Lifestyle Centre is now offering this help since the start of the 2024. It is something that we have wanted to see for at least 10 years!! This special afternoon was held in the Scout and Guide hut. It was an opportunity to hear a bit more about social prescribing, hear from different volunteer groups in the area and see the Swimming and Lifestyle Centre. Louise Woolcock (our local Social Prescribing Development Officer (North Shropshire)) would love to hear from other local groups as these meetings (this was the first!....another here in the Autumn ?!) are all about making connections and networking across health and wellbeing services. It is not just for Wem Swimming and Lifestyle Centre (WSLC) it's for other groups to link into as well.

Our apologies for the lateness of this month's report....life has been full as you can see! However, when you have looked over it do ask us for the additional information if this would help you. Also, if there are things you now wish to draw to our attention or ask about, then do say.

Kindest regards *and all good wishes*,

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers

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

Date: 13th February 2024