

# Report 8 to Whixall Parish Council

## by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers – July 2022

*Dear All* – Please find below our eighth written report as your Shropshire County Councillors.

**We have had two full Shropshire Council meetings** since Whixall Parish Council met:

**Full Shropshire Council Meeting 1**....took place on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022 in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND, our first occasion to be there since our election in May 2021!

The Agenda had items on it about:

1. **Matters relating to this being the Annual Meeting** such as Election of Chairman, Vice Chairman and the Constitution of Committees and Allocation of Seats to Political Groups.

We have been allocated to:

**Peter:**

- [People Overview Scrutiny Committee](#) (Total of 10 seats from 6 conservative/2 Lib Dem/1 Labour/1Independent)
- [Strategic Licensing Scrutiny Committee](#) (Total of 15 seats from 8 Conservative/3 Lib Dem/2 Labour/1 Independent/1Green)

**Edward:**

- [Northern Planning Committee](#) (Total of 11 seats from 6 Conservative/2 Lib Dem/1 Labour/1Independent/1Green)
- [Standards Committee](#). (Total of 9 seats from 5 Conservative/1Lib Dem/1Labour/1Independent/1Green)
- [Strategic Licensing Scrutiny Committee](#) (Total of 15 seats from 8 Conservative/3 Lib Dem/2 Labour/1 Independent/1Green)
- [substitute on Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) (Total of 10 seats from 6 Conservative/2 Lib Dem/1Labour/1 Independent)

For information it seems we continue to serve on the following Panel and Outside Bodies:

- [General Appeals Panel](#) and also the [Housing Review Panel](#) (16 seats)
- Outside Bodies - [Helicopter Noise Liaison Group](#) (6 Seats)

2. **The Appointment of Mr Tim Collard** as the new Monitoring Officer.
3. **The Shropshire Plan** - a key strategic document for SC! Following a period of public consultation and subsequent review the Council adopted this as the first step in transforming the Council around its vision.
4. **Star Housing Management arrangements** – Council gave approval to extend the Management Agreement between Shropshire Council and Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing (“STAR”) for a 10-year term once all necessary works to facilitate this have been completed and any Regulatory consent has been obtained.
5. **Delivery of Temporary Accommodation Programme** – Council gave approval for a more flexible approach to delivering temporary accommodation by:
  - a) varying the detail of the acquisition of dwellings to provide one bedroom units of dispersed temporary accommodation
  - b) permitting, as an interim measure, the Council to enter into short-term leases of private accommodation

**There were also some Motions presented**, namely:

1. **The Transport and Developments Supplementary Planning Document (or SPD)** – [it was eventually agreed](#) that this should be examined when the Local Plan has been adopted, despite many feeling that insufficient speed was being made to encourage measures that would improve the take-up of Active Travel (walking and cycling) and public transport, such as through the planning development process.
2. **Going back to the Committee System as opposed to the Cabinet System now being used to govern the democratic process in Shropshire Council** by having a review to examine the effectiveness of each. [This motion was rejected.](#)
3. **To improve the ways that SC is helping mitigate ‘Fuel Poverty’** and in particular to become a member of the ‘End Fuel Poverty Coalition’. [This was rejected](#) in the light of the administration at SC feeling it is working hard to do all the things suggested in this motion.

4. **To deliver better health services with regard to standards of health care and improved ambulance service provision.** This was keenly debated with the administration suggesting amendments but these were rejected and so [the motion fell](#).
5. **Regarding Shropshire's Public Transport System.** This was another keenly debated motion with the view being commonly held that that it was 'good in parts'. Cllr Cecilia Motley (Cabinet Member with responsibility for this portfolio) expressed the view of all that she was very disappointed by the rejected funding application by HM Government in their 'Bus Back Better' proposals. However, she said all was not lost and the Government Minister whom she was speaking with had said that 'Shropshire is to be the pilot for a large integrated public transport system'. She also said that SC are going to have 'all member' briefing sessions very shortly to allow all Councillors to collectively develop proposals that improve the current transport provision in the county. With these undertakings [Councillors allowed this motion to fall](#).
6. **Ambulance Service Provision in the county.** An amendment put forward by the Cabinet was agreed to this proposal about Cabinet continuing to work with the joint Chairs of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (HOSC) to lobby Government to put sanctions in place where cooperation from health services is poor, that HOSC Officer support is now prioritised/timeline drawn up for an appointment to show its importance and that SC lobbies the Health Minister for extra funding to aid both recruitment, career pathways and discharge of patients from hospital, so easing A&E and Ambulance Service difficulties. [This motion was agreed](#).
7. **River dangers and making them safer.** There has been yet more loss of life recently in Shrewsbury because individuals have accidentally fallen into the river Severn, for which sorrow was publicly expressed on behalf of the Cabinet by Cllr Dean Carroll (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Assets). Amendments were proposed by Cllr Carroll to this original motion by Cllr David Vasmer but these were not acceptable to the Liberal Democrats so when it came to a vote [this motion was then rejected](#). However Cllr Carroll then did add that some of the amendments he was proposing to amend the motion with, such as some additional fencing in critical places alongside river paths, provision of ladders by some steep banks, an additional promotional 'river safety' campaign and a review held about river safety that would report back to a meeting of SC, would now be looked into as this was clearly an important safety issue for Shropshire Council.

**Full Shropshire Council Meeting 2....**took place on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022, again in the Council Chamber at Shirehall, Shrewsbury. SY2 6ND.

**Following Public Questions** on such varied topics as the length of time traffic lights allow people to cross roads, Shropshire bus services, Ambulance response times, Standards in Public Life review and Shropshire County Pension fund related to investments in fossil fuels and the need to cancel the North West Relief Road to help me decarbonisation targets.....there were **a series of reports for the Council to receive**. These were on:

- **New member for Highley following a recent By-Election** – Cllr Williams -Lib Dem
- **Financial Outturn for 2021/22 for SC** – better than expected at outturn, small surplus of £1.5m but hard decisions are ahead
- **SC's Workforce Strategy** -Been accepted at Cabinet...all in all is good news story. Agreed with 3 abstentions.
- **Report back of the Climate and Ecology Bill Task and Finish Group** - accepted unanimously
- **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Digital, Data and Insight and Built Housing** – SC is the best performing LA for delivering this in a rural area. Now have 98% coverage. New coverage map to be sent out and updated advice provided for the public. Accepted unanimously.

**Then following some constitutional adjustments 5 motions were considered:**

1. **Motion 1. Because there has been so many dangerous accidents of late, this sought to improve road safety on the A41 by several measures....**road traffic engineers report to refresh road markings/renew signage, lobby the PCC for active speed enforcement and average speed cameras along the entire road length, lobby the DFT for larger capital monies for junction widening, visibility splays and surface improvements and work with Emergency Services to get more real time KSI data so better road safety decisions can be taken. There was quite a debate about this as there are many dangerous stretches of road within the county (eg A53/A49 and A5) and Cllr Carroll (Portfolio Holder) then spoke to reassure councillors that SC was committed to 'improving road safety wherever'. It was realised that we needed to improve safety and the A41 was a good starting point. This [motion was then passed unanimously](#).

2. **Motion 2 was about the construction of a new access bridge to the proposed innovation park in Oswestry** by the Green group who felt it was a non-compliant piece of infrastructure. They wanted the Cabinet to call for a new and more aesthetically pleasing bridge that was fully compliant with LTN 1/20 standards for cycling provision and accessibility. After a short debate when put to the vote this [motion was rejected](#).
3. **Motion 3 was about asking registered social landlords operating in Shropshire to give more time for relatives to clear properties in social or affordable housing following the death of their 'loved one'** before handing the property back to their housing association. In addition it asked for the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to consider legislating or updating guidance to the sector on this subject to consider a minimum four week period following the death of a tenant who lived alone. This was further amended during the debate to include asking for a rent reprieve for this period as well. This [motion was passed unanimously](#).
4. **Motion 4 from the Liberal Democrat group asked for the Community Overview Committee to be asked to look at how a 'community lottery' could be run and so help smaller groups who are helping residents of all ages in Shropshire.** This was amended in debate to bring this forward to a cross-party scrutiny committee work programme with no commitments. There was some serious concern about there being a troubled relationship with the gambling industry by the External Lottery Manager who would manage the lottery on SC's behalf, but despite this when put to the vote this [motion, with these revisions, was accepted](#).
5. **Motion 5 was supported by the Liberal Democrat group and was to ask that SC write to the DfT asking for a doubling of support under the rural fuel duty relief scheme to 10p per litre and to ask for the scheme to be expanded to include a wider area, including rural Shropshire.** Dean Carroll (Portfolio holder) agreed with this and said it should be on postcode areas and as a cross-party application to the DfT. Following a short debate [this motion was accepted unanimously](#).

**Questions to Cabinet from Members then followed.** This concerned:

- a) **Asking whether the proposed Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Hub, if it goes ahead, would have SC increase the bus services for patients and staff** for the areas affected, as well as improve active travel (walking and cycling) to the new hub- the answer being that the bus infrastructure and active travel plans would be looked at and additional support given.
- b) **Asking whether SC's parking strategy would be reviewed this year** – the answer being that a paper for this to kick-start take place, along with the necessary resources, are currently being 'priced up' to move this needed review forward.
- c) **Asking about the numbers of street lights needing to be converted to LED ones and whether this would be achieved by the end of this financial year, as well as the energy costs for the last 7 financial years** - the answer being that 12,707 lanterns remain to be converted to LED out of 19,959 assets and the target date for completing this is March 2024 for the Salix LED lantern conversion project. It was explained that there has been a shortage in the supply of steel columns .

**A report for the Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority was then received** followed by some reports being presented to deal with following exclusion of the press and public because of the sensitive nature of them.

## **Shropshire Council Briefing/Development Sessions:**

We have attended two sessions:

### **1] on Public Transport on 26/5/22**

This was a very intensive and helpful meeting on what Shropshire Council is planning to do in the light of not securing any central government funding under 'Bus Back Better' as part of the Government's much heralded 'Levelling Up' agenda. Conversations have been going on by SC Cabinet members and Officers with central government to brief them on the nature of rural transport issues that they were seemingly not fully cognisant of when allocating this last round of funding. Knowing this, Shropshire Council are being encouraged to submit a further transport bid in Round 2 of Levelling Up Funding...known as LUFBid2. To help pull the Shropshire case/bid together that covers different delivery models, franchising and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) a 'Task and Finish' cross-party group of Councillors is being put together to work on this, and I (ET) have allowed my name to go forward to Cecilia Motley (SC Cabinet Portfolio holder for transport) for selection for this.

If you'd like to know details of any/all of this briefing session then do ask. There is a powerpoint available for this briefing.

**2] A Member Development Session: Built Environment Services Contract** – 10/6/22 for ET. This was to brief on SC's reasoning for going out to find a new contract for helping maintain our Highways. Members seriously questioned officers about these highway matters and suggested ideas for two levels of approach the strategic (needing a contract) and bringing more minor works back 'in house' again to follow up on the success that the reformed drainage team is having across the county.

### **Public Transport Working Group:**

ET was invited to attend in a representative capacity for the Independent Group the first meeting of this cross-party group on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> July organised by Portfolio Holder for Transport Cecilia Motley. It was a very helpful briefing of the state of play of all aspects of our bus transport system in Shropshire ranging from the commercial operators to those volunteering in the 'Community Transport' sector. It built upon the briefing Councillors were given on 25/5/22 referred to above. We are clearly facing a perfect storm of falling numbers of users post Covid, fuel price hikes made more difficult by our relatively sparsely distributed population of 330,000 across 1250 sq miles (second largest in-land rural county, bordering Wales) in the Shropshire Bus Market and our operating model has to change. In Shropshire's current network 80% has subsidised services compared to 20% commercial services and without intervention this differential will grow at Shropshire Council's expense....which it cannot either afford or allow. This is why a further transport bid in Round 2 of Levelling Up Funding...known as LUFbid2 is being prepared where Shropshire Council Officers and Councillors intend to take the lead and reverse this problematic situation by putting together a scheme that will on this second occasion, attract Government 'seed funding' for this important and far reaching initiative to put back a holistic public transport scheme across our county that will in turn help drive our local economy forward. A second meeting is now being planned within the next few weeks to further this planning.

### **Shropshire Councils' Local Government Association Finance Peer Review:**

This took place during 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> June and ET was asked to attend an interview with other SC's other 'opposition group' leaders to help with this appraisal of how our finances are managed. I think the aim for all of us as Shropshire Councillors is that this review will help us make better use of SC's spending power as well as find the 'longed-for' financial savings to fill in the funding gap by putting more challenge and transparency in the financial governance of our systems!

### **Shropshire Council Committees:**

Between us we have sat on three committees since our last Whixall Parish Council meeting:

I. [People Overview Scrutiny Committee meeting - 23/05/2022 \(PB\)](#)

**Main point discussed** was an update on work to deliver the written statement of action following the joint Ofsted/CQC inspection of services for children with a special education need or disability (SEND). The committee was also given an update on preparations for a further inspection of the local authority and its partners.

**Recommendations agreed** were to:

- note the report and appendices
- seek assurance that the SEND Partnership is working towards the objectives of its written statement of action
- identify any areas of concern for the portfolio holder

II. [Northern Area Planning Committee - 24-5-22 \(ET\)](#) when 3 applications in the Shrewsbury area were discussed and 21/6/22 when members had a site visit to Bayston Hill in the morning followed by full discussion about this and another at Pipe Gate, Market Drayton in the afternoon, that concluded with a vote agreeing to support planning officers recommendations. In addition there were 6 application for placing advertising signage for SC on roundabouts, three of which were refused on the grounds of public safety.

III. [Strategic Licensing Committee – 22/6/22 \(ET+PB\)](#) when documents for public reviews of:

- Hackney Carriage Fare Card
- Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2023 to 2027
- Street Trading Policy 2023 to 2028

were all fully discussed and agreed to.

### **Regarding Whixall Parish:**

This seems to have been a 'quiet' period and there is little to report.

**Discussion about the future of Wem Economic Forum** – We have now had two meetings between ourselves, Wem Town Council (Clerk and Deputy Mayor), Wem Rural Parish Council (Clerk and Chairman), Peter and myself to follow up one on 3<sup>rd</sup> May on ‘Teams’ with four Shropshire Council Officers. The result is that we are getting a clearer idea of how we see the way forward in attracting businesses into Wem, as well as supporting existing ones!, but that this does need the regular help of Shropshire Council in securing funding, developing initiatives and ensuring more joined-up thinking in SC’s forward planning for this area. We now plan to have a further meeting with SC officers to share this thinking.

**Wem Area Climate Action Forum** – This group has now held two first face to face meetings since before the Covid Pandemic forced lockdowns. They took place on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> May and Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July in the Lower Hall of Wem Baptist Church in Chapel Street. They have proved a very positive and full meetings. They began with an important discussion letting everyone know the outcome of meetings that representatives had had with Community Resource (Previously known as Shropshire RCC) on 4/5/2022. This covered such matters as WACAF developing a more formal structure by having a constitution, affiliating to an umbrella like-minded groups such as the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership (SCAP) for advice, etc and considering a re-application to the Charity Commission application for achieving Charitable Status. They have then discussed the progress being made on a range of projects varying from Biodiversity Training, Wildflower planting, level crossing signage and tree plantings to buildings mapping in Wem. However, setting up a constitution and charitable status are their key priorities in getting WACAF to have a more sustainable future and become more effective in seeking funding. Progress in these areas will be followed up at their next meeting starting at 7.00pm on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September at Wem Baptist Church.

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

**Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Celebrations – Thur 2<sup>nd</sup>- Sun 5<sup>th</sup> June 2022** – After all the effort, as you know, a great four days of Celebrations took place in town that still looks good with all the flags flying along the High Street and hanging baskets giving needed added colour for all to enjoy. If you are interested in seeing the Jubilee Service at the Parish Church on 5th June, a recording was made. Please click on the video link to watch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLd31Od7>

A review meeting has taken place the minutes of which will be issued separately to this report. It details what was thought to have gone well as well as give advice for any future events of this sort. Thank you to all the many people and groups that came together to make it the brilliant and memorable community occasion that it was, as well as Town Clerk (Penny O’Hagan) and Projects Assistant (Mandy Roberts) who helped co-ordinate everything.

Our apologies for this longer than usual report! Hopefully this brings you up to date on matters for another month. However, if there are things not covered here that you would like to raise, then let us know.

Kindest regards,

*Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers*