

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
Meeting of Council
Held at Livesey House, 7 St Johns Hill Shrewsbury at
6pm on Monday 27 January 2025

PRESENT

Councillors D Vasmer (Mayor), E Addams, B Bentick, M Davies, J Dean, P Gillam, K Halliday, C Lemon, P Moseley, A Mosley, K Pardy, A Phillips, A Wagner (Deputy Mayor), B Wall & R Wilson.

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager), Danny Powell (Acting Operations Manager), Ruth Jones (Officer Manager) and Max Ball (Communications Officer).

64/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be received from Councillors Bentick, Green & Pardy

65/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Shropshire Councillors	Twin hatted members declared personal interests in matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council
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66/24 MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

The minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 11 November 2024 were submitted as circulated and read.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Full Meeting of Council held on 11 November 2024 be approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

67/24 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising to report from the Town Clerk.

68/24 ANNOUNCEMENTS

68.1 MAYORAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Mayor reported that he had attended numerous events as Mayor following the last Council meeting. Most recently was Carols in the Square which had an incredible attendance. The Deputy Mayor paid tribute to the Town Council officers for the success of the Shrewsbury Celebration event on Wednesday 22 January which showcased the successful year Shrewsbury had in 2024.

68.2 TOWN CLERK ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements from the Town Clerk at this meeting.

69/24 PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

The Town Clerk reported that standing orders had been followed in seeking questions ahead of the meeting, but she had accepted questions up until 4pm on the day of this meeting.

A comment had been received from Mike Streetly (Chair of Better Shrewsbury Transport) calling for an inquiry into management of the North West Relief Road project.

“Better Shrewsbury Transport supports the motion presented to Shrewsbury Town Council on 27 Jan 2025 calling for an inquiry into the management of the project promoting the proposed North West Relief Road (NWRR). We have provided some additional information below in support of this position.

Additional Notes

Programme: *The timescale for the project presented to council in May 2019 immediately after the Department for Transport (DfT) award of £54.4M suggested that the road would be open in spring 2023. It is now January 2025 and there is not even a firm date for submission of the Full Business Case to Council. If approved, the FBC then needs to be submitted to DfT who have said they need at least three months to consider it. Given that construction work in the spring/summer is highly restricted due to the need to protect nesting birds, it therefore seems unlikely that any significant construction work could start until at least the autumn. Shropshire Council has provided no information about the impact that such a further delay would have on the programme or costs.*

Failure of Governance and Oversight: *The Shrewsbury North West Relief Road – Governance and Performance Management Arrangements were presented to Place Overview Committee on 18 July 2019. The recent external audit outlines how these governance procedures were not implemented, and the inquiry should examine why this was the case and what lessons can be learned.*

Oxon Link Road and Marches LEP: *The Full Business Case that is to be presented to DfT does not cover the Oxon Link Road (OLR). Urgent clarification is needed as to whether/when Shropshire Council intends to present a Full Business Case for the OLR. Will this comply with the DfT’s specifications?*

Shropshire Council presented an outline business case for the OLR in 2015 suggesting the OLR would be open in Sept 2020. That was the basis of a grant of £4.2M towards the project from the Marches LEP that year. This timeline was delayed by two and half years by Shropshire Council’s decision to withdraw the OLR planning application and combine the NWRR and OLR projects. After becoming frustrated by poor communication by Shropshire Council and further delays to the project, the LEP Board voted to ‘clawback’ the £4.2M grant in August 2023. This was averted by a last-minute commitment by Shropshire Council that the planning application would be approved by 31st Oct 2023 and that a ‘refreshed’ business case should be presented to the LEP Board.

The inquiry should consider the impact the pressure of the 31 October deadline had on discussions between the Executive, the Applicant and the Local Planning Authority (LPA) at that time and on the decisions made by the LPA. It should also consider the overall behaviour of the project team towards Marches LEP, an important funding partner. This should include

the extensive criticism of the business case 'refresh' by Better Shrewsbury Transport and the council's reaction to that criticism which, instead of addressing the serious weaknesses identified in the council's document, chose to disparage those criticising them.

Failure to properly consider alternatives: *Shropshire Council has not properly considered alternatives to the NWRR for over 20 years. This is despite the fact that, even in 2003, it was clear that by far the highest priority for the majority of respondents was improvements to public transport and provision for people walking/using bicycles. Despite this failure, only last month the councillor responsible for the project claimed that "Put simply, doing nothing is not an option. Equally, there is no other realistic alternative that costs less, produces less carbon, and still delivers the benefits that the NWRR will see." The absence of evidence for the effectiveness of such measures is purely down to the council's failure to look at them seriously. It is widely acknowledged that investment in sustainable and active travel is more cost effective than building new roads.*

Lack of transparency about motivation for the road: *From the start Shropshire Council has been determined to push this project forward despite the evidence that it would not be effective in significantly or permanently reducing traffic in the town centre. It seems more likely that the motivation for this proposed new road is linked to the potential to develop new housing in north west Shrewsbury.*

Lack of candour and transparency in dealing with the public: *The project seems to have been conceived in darkness and the project team appear to have been determined to keep it that way. This means that so-called 'public consultation' exercises were not balanced towards eliciting the public's true priorities and the widespread opposition to the road has been continually presented as the voice of a "small vocal minority". The project team has selectively released unrepresentative information about traffic reductions and have unreasonably withheld critical environmental information from the local residents, campaigners and a local business on many occasions such that numerous appeals have had to be made (successfully) to the Information Commissioner's Office. This has wasted many hours of everyone's time, including overstretched council officers. The council's approach to engagement with the public should be reviewed by the inquiry.*

Ignoring the Environment Agency's concerns: *In February 2006 Shropshire County Council was advised about the Environment Agency's concerns about the risks a new road would pose to the town's water supplies in a report about potential routes for the NWRR. However, the report goes on to say, "but our consultants advise that this would not preclude construction of these routes". The Environment Agency re-iterated its concerns in responses to both the planning application for the OLR and at regular intervals through the current planning process. Throughout this process Shropshire Council has criticised the Environment Agency for the resultant delays to the project rather than acknowledge its own failure to address these concerns which are still outstanding. The inquiry should examine the council's behaviour towards this statutory consultee and should also assess the quality and objectivity of the advice it has received on these matters.*

Failure of NWRR to deliver key objectives

Tackling climate change: *From the start the council has claimed that the road would result in fewer carbon emissions from people driving around Shrewsbury as car journeys would become more efficient. For instance, the May 2019 report to council following DfT award suggested that contributing to a reduction in greenhouse gases was both a high level and a*

specific objective of the road. Two of the eight objectives for the road listed in the 2019 Scoping Report for the Environmental Assessment relate to reducing CO₂ emissions.

The 2021 carbon impact report indicated that the road would meet these objectives by saying that, although there would be a large amount of greenhouse gas emissions associated with building the road, these would be gradually reduced by the subsequent savings (albeit that it would take several centuries to do so). However, the 2024 carbon reports show that, far from reducing emissions from drivers in Shrewsbury, the new road will actually increase them. This means that not only will there be a big hit in Shropshire's emissions on building the road but that, instead of the situation improving afterwards, it will keep on getting worse through 2030, 2050 and beyond.

The applicant has committed Shropshire Council to 'owning' these emissions, but the LPA has said that the lack of any quantified or costed mitigation means that the council will have to abandon its commitment to reaching net zero by 2030. In signing off these reports, the LPA and Northern Planning Committee have disregarded this important finding.

Air quality: Another key objective of the proposed new road was improvement of air quality benefits. However, recent air quality modelling by Shropshire Council shows that, once the current changes to the station gyratory are in place, any further improvements from the NWRR are minimal compared to the cost and what could be achieved by other means. The way that the council has ignored the failure of the project to achieve these key objectives should be considered by the inquiry.

Bringing Shropshire into disrepute: *The poor management of the project and its potential impacts on the environment have brought Shropshire to national attention for all the wrong reasons:*

- *"Council accidentally backs £95m extra cost for relief road after 'typo' in report" [The Independent](#)*
- *"Activists fight to save 550-year-old oak threatened by new Shrewsbury road" [The Guardian](#)*
- *"The fight to save Darwin's 550-year-old oak from a bypass" [The Times](#)*
- *"Shrewsbury Relief Road: Water pollution action required" [BBC](#)*
- *"Under-threat Darwin Oak in Shrewsbury is up for UK tree of the Year" [Shropshire Star](#)*
- *"Darwin Oak petition presented to parliament with 100,000 signatures" [Hansard](#)*
- *"Carbon bomb' warning adds to relief road woes" [Highways Magazine](#)*

The inquiry should consider the negative impact the management of the project has had on Shrewsbury and Shropshire and how this might best be counteracted in future."

70/24 MOTIONS FROM MEMBERS

North West Relief Road Inquiry – Presented by Councillor Rob Wilson

This Council Notes

1) The original cost of the North West Relief Road was £71m in 2019 and, on this basis, the Government pledged funding of £54m with a clear warning that any cost increases would be the responsibility of Shropshire Council. That meant the total cost to Shropshire Council at that time was estimated at £17m.

2) In 2021 on the basis of the Outline Business Case the cost of the NWRR was estimated at £81m meaning that the cost to Shropshire Council had now risen to £27m

3) Before Christmas Shropshire's External Auditor confirmed that the cost of the NWRR had now gone up to £178m and Shropshire Council's contribution to £124m

4) The Environment Agency were never happy about the route of the road since a major roundabout junction was placed directly over ground from which much of Shrewsbury's water is drawn and have therefore been very reluctant to support the application because the spillage of any toxic substance would make the ground water unusable while piling work could also damage the town's water supply.

5) The NWRR will be a major contributor to the release of carbon which was underestimated when the road was first planned. Recently Shropshire Council has been forced to admit that the contribution has more than doubled from 26,711 tonnes of carbon to 55,904. Originally it had been estimated that the scheme's impact could be mitigated by 2030 but now Shropshire has asked the Northern Planning Committee to revise a condition so that it has until 2050 to offset the road's emissions.

6) A further £17m of spending was approved in February 2024 and it has been reported that over £21m has already been spent on the road before work has even started

7) That Shropshire Council has commissioned utility diversion work before the NWRR has secured a decision planning notice or a commitment from the Government for extra funding.

This Council Notes

1) Shropshire Council has failed to hit numerous deadlines so that a road that was originally planned for completion next year has not been started

2) Recently Shropshire Council's External Auditor was highly critical of Shropshire Council for failing to make plans in the event of the Road being cancelled and for failing to oversee the planning and preparations for the Road properly.

This Council Demands that an Inquiry be appointed by Shropshire Council to

- (i) Investigate the poor management of the North West Relief Road and;
- (ii) Make recommendations about how capital projects can be better managed in the future.

In promoting the motion, Councillors Wilson reported on the Town Council's continued objection to the scheme. He questioned how Shropshire Council could continue to afford to build the road, yet they still carried on. They had already committed to £30m of funding, to be matched with £50m of Government funding, but the road was likely to cost £180m.

Councillor Wilson reported on the criticism of Shropshire Council's Auditors, which had been considered by the Council's Internal Audit Committee. The report questioned the viability of prudential borrowing for any shortfall. There was in effect no Plan B and that the elephant in

the room of spiralling costs need to be addressed. Inevitably the project will be cancelled and failings will need to be addressed.

The Mayor reported on a number of requests to amend the motion and members agreed to consider amendments ahead of any debate.

Councillor Phillips' Amendment

Councillor Phillips commented that he could not support this motion in its current form.

Firstly, this motion appeared to have a contradiction at the heart of it. At point 7 it decried Shropshire Council for commissioning utility diversion work, which was commonplace in project management and a way of preventing delays in projects down the line, before the NWRR had secured a decision planning notice. However, it then stated at Note 1 to criticise Shropshire Council for delays, noting it had failed to hit numerous deadlines. Shropshire Council could be forgiven for thinking “dammed if you do and dammed if you don’t”.

That said, the motion did have some merit. Its focus on carbon costs was something that all major capital projects should take into account, if they were to achieve not only the economic growth that it so desperately needed to fund the schools, hospitals and other services our generation relied on, but in a way which protected the environment and future generations.

The Council should be looking at all capital projects in Shropshire, not just the NWRR, and ask how they can unlock economic growth and green growth. Councillor Phillips therefore proposed tabling a new motion, which deleted the rest of the motion, just keeping Demands 1 and 2 and modify them to:

1. That an inquiry is appointed by Shropshire Council to investigate how capital projects can be best managed to drive economic growth in a way that is supportive of the Government's net zero targets
2. Make recommendations about how capital projects can be better managed by all Councils, including STC, in the future.

The amendment was not supported by Councillor Wilson.

There being a seconder, the amendment was put to the vote. Councillors voted against the amendment.

Councillor Dartnall's Amendment

Councillor Dartnall requested the following amendment which was accepted by Councillor Wilson:

Add at the end of point 5) - This puts Shropshire Council in contravention of its own policy to reach carbon net zero by 2030.

Resolution:

- (i) To Amend point (i) to show: Investigate the poor performance of Shropshire Council's administration in decision making
- (ii) To Remove point (ii)

Councillor Lemon's Amendment

Councillor Lemon requested the following amendment which was accepted by Councillor Wilson:

In addition to points (i) and (ii), add the following:

- (iii) To Consider and report on reasons for the findings of the External Auditors Report in full
- (iv) To consider and report on whether there was sufficient scrutiny and challenge within the Council and whether there had been effective separation of powers between Shropshire Council as scheme backer and Shropshire Council as planning authority.
- (v) To consider whether alternative options had been appropriately considered, both with regard to traffic mitigations for the town – especially given the additional travel demands likely to result in the South East of Shrewsbury from planned development in the Draft Local Plan, and with regard to the possibility of Government funding not being forthcoming.

Members proceeded to debate the amended motion.

Councillor Dartnall commented further that Shropshire Council had no other examples of such a "Terrible Road project" as the North West Relief Road. Rather than being transparent and open, the officers involved in the project had been deliberately opaque. They were seeing different regimes who had worked on the project and the result was a litany of failure and opacity.

Councillor Dean commented that he was shocked at how quickly auditor reports had disappeared from the news. There had been no communications or apologies about any mistakes in the project and they needed to know what was going on. There was no adequate risk management plan whereby central government would fund the project when Shropshire Council cannot. There were also concerns that the Shropshire Council planning committee had ignored the council policy for carbon neutrality. At no stage had they looked at sustainable alternatives. Currently there had been a misuse of resources which did not tackle the issues the town were facing and there should be an investigation into the project.

Councillor Halliday commented that these were examples of poor governance. A lot of the basics were not being covered including keeping minutes at meetings and flouting of auditors reporting. This was a large sum of public money which could have gone into something else such as care houses or affordable housing. They were now seeing a huge amount of money being spent on a road that was unlikely to happen.

Councillor Dartnall further commented that the scale of governance of this project was right at the heart of Shropshire Council's existence and if the project did not get the funding from central government, it could bankrupt Shropshire Council and bring to an end the Council's fiscal stability.

RESOLVED

That this Council Demands that an Inquiry be appointed by Shropshire Council to

- (i) Investigate the poor performance of Shropshire Council's administration in decision making**

- (ii) Consider and report on reasons for the findings of the External Auditors Report in full.**
- (iii) Consider and report on whether there was sufficient scrutiny and challenge within the Council and whether there has been effective separation of powers between Shropshire Council as scheme backer and Shropshire Council as planning authority.**
- (iv) Consider whether alternative options have been appropriately considered, both with regard to traffic mitigations for the town – especially given the additional travel demands likely to result in the South East of Shrewsbury from planned development in the Draft Local Plan, and with regard to the possibility of Government funding not being forthcoming.**

71/24 BUDGET 2025/26

71.1 UPDATE FROM THE BUDGET CONSULTATION

The Town Clerk updated members on the results of the budget consultation where there had been 1037 responses received over a 17-day period.

Following the meeting of Finance & General Purposes, the survey was promoted using paid social at a cost of £100 over 5 days generating 717 link clicks and reaching 11,307 people at a cost of 14p per click.

The survey confirmed that over 65% of the public believed that Shrewsbury Town Council were best placed to take on local services.

Key points to pull from the survey were areas of concern; Litter, dirty streets and overflowing bins were most commonly mentioned in the responses.

92% of responders supported the proposal from Shrewsbury Town Council to develop a team to enhance standards across the town, with 63% of residents supporting the council tax increase of £15 per year or 30p per week.

The Town Clerk commented that the low agreement that the Town Council always puts the interests of Shrewsbury first at the start of the survey was a possible indicator that the Town Council needed to be more active in promoting what good work it did.

Councillor Dean congratulated Shrewsbury Town Council officers for their work on the survey. The results highlighted how important local decision making was for the residents of Shrewsbury. Volunteering was hugely welcome in the campaign to Step Up but not in place of proper services. He enquired as to whether the survey asked responders how old they were? The Town clerk responded stating that this information was not collected from those who filled in the survey.

Councillor Dartnall asked if the survey could exclude responses from those outside of Shrewsbury? The Town clerk responded that this could potentially be done but it would take a lot more time to prepare the results.

Councillor Mosley stated that the results showed that there was significant support for the Town Council. The service they provided represented good value for money and the Town Council should pat themselves on the back.

Councillor Wagner stated that they were seeing a transition where services from Shropshire Council were not there and there was no easy way of bringing them back. The Town Council needed to make a success of the stepping up Campaign and that potentially it could be very novel that the public were able to report on issues and speak to councillor officers when they couldn't do before.

Councillor Phillips commented that the report provided a good evidence base to make decisions. The thought clouds were potentially KPIs which could be used in a years' time. "We listened to you, we measured and here is what we have done".

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the response to the survey be noted;**
- (ii) That the increase of £529,690 for the Stepping up Campaign be incorporated into the 2025/26 budget.**

71.2 BUDGET 2025/26

The Head of Resources (RFO) presented the budget for 2025/2026. The budget needed to be agreed, and precept requirement submitted to Shropshire Council's S151 officer by no later than 31 January 2025.

The draft budget was presented to Finance & General Purposes Committee on 20 January where they had spent the majority of the meeting looking and discussing in detail the forecast outturn which helped form the basis of the budget for the next year 2025/26 with assumptions made and applied.

The budget followed the usual format for this meeting by cost centres as opposed to nominal analysis for each expense heading.

The Town Council were forecasting a £97,856 surplus for the current year. This was only a forecast but there would be a surplus generated which could be utilised before year end for unbudgeted capital expenditure such as investment in anti-terrorist barriers or additional allocation at year end for earmarked projects. This surplus arose from delays in recruitment of officers and would not carry forward in the budget, so could not be used to fund the budget increase as alternative to raising the precept.

The budget was hard to compare with 2023/24 because the Service Level Agreement no longer included the maintenance of Meole Brace Golf Course. Total costs had increased due to inflation to £4,394,930 excluding the Stepping Up Fund, leading to an inflationary increase of 2% to the precept being necessary. The Stepping Up fund of £525,690 had necessitated a 29% precept increase.

Income streams had increased overall to £4,924,172 but this incorporated the additional precept for Stepping Up fund, which in real terms was less than last year for reductions in Service Level Agreement to Shropshire Council and lower interest. To balance and provide the Stepping Up Fund, the precept must increase from £1,770,089 to £2,389,594 to balance out at a small (£448) deficit, covered by general reserves.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the forecast out-turn for the 2024/25 Financial Year as presented be accepted;**
- ii) That a Revenue expenditure budget of £4,924,620 be set against a Revenue Income budget of £4,924,174 with the deficit of £448 being taken from General Reserves;**
- (iii) That a Precept be levied against the Taxpayers of Shrewsbury of £2,389,594 equating to a Band D Levy of 87.04. This included a 29% percent increase to cover the Stepping Up Fund**
- (iv) That the proposed Fees & Charges as agreed by both the Finance & General Purpose Committee and the Recreation & Leisure Committee be approved.**

72/24 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purpose Committee held on 2 December 2024, 6 January 2025 and 20 January 2025 were circulated as read.

Councillor Mosley reported on Min 60/24 of previous minutes and updated members about the planned development of the Dana footpath commenting that no further action had been taken despite best efforts. The Town Council had agreed to support this with £20,000 of funding allocated to ensuring that the path was developed. After lobbying the Shropshire Horticultural Society, they had now agreed the Heads of Terms for a Lease with Shropshire Council, but it required a payment of £10,000. The Town Council had agreed to pay the fee. There was also the requirement to proceed with seeking various permissions which would incur professional fees. Councillor Mosley wished to see all stakeholders together for an urgent meeting including those who owned the Dana Prison and the walls around it to determine a project timeline which he hoped could be completed within 6 months.

Councillor Phillips supported Councillor Mosley's proposal.

All Members were in favour.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the minutes of the Finance & General Purpose Committee meeting held on 2 December 2024, 6 January 2025 and 20 January 2025 be received and adopted;**
- (ii) That the Dana Project be pursued as a matter of urgency.**

73/24 RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE (MINUTES ENCLOSED)

The Minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee held on 6 November 2024 and 15 January 2025 were circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting held on 6 November 2024 and 15 January 2025 be received and adopted.

74/24 PLANNING COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 19 November and 10 December 2024 were submitted as circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 19 November and 10 December 2024 be received and adopted.

75/24 CLIMATE EMERGENCY & NATURE RECOVERY COMMITTEE (MINUTES ENCLOSED)

The minutes of the Climate Emergency & Nature Recovery Committee meeting held on 16 January 2025 were submitted as circulated as read.

Councillor Dean commented that the meeting was well attended with two of the youth councillors also attending.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Climate Emergency & Nature Recovery Committee meeting held on 16 January 2025 be received and adopted.

76/24 WORKING GROUPS

76.1 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WORKING GROUP

The minutes of the Service Level Agreement Working Group meeting held on 21 November, 5 December 2024 and 9 January 2025 were circulated as read.

Councillor Mosley commented that the Stepping Up campaign was discussed at the SLA meeting in January. Stakeholders spoke about existing work that was being done by the Town Council alongside potential work that may be required by the Town Council in future. The disappointment about losing the contract to look after the golf course was communicated.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Service Level Agreement Working Group meeting held on 21 November, 5 December 2024 and 9 January 2025 be received and adopted.

76.2 CLEAN RIVER WORKING GROUP

The minutes of the Clean River Working Group meeting held on 25 November 2024 were circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Clean River Working Group meeting held on 25 November 2024 be received and adopted.

76.3 CITY OF SANCTUARY WORKING GROUP

The minutes of the City of Sanctuary Working Group meeting held on 19 November 2024 were circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the City of Sanctuary Working Group meeting held on 19 November 2024 be received and adopted.

76.4 JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Joint Consultative Committee meeting held on 2 October 2024 were circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Joint Consultative Committee held on 2 October 2024 be received and adopted.

76.5 YOUTH COUNCIL

The minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 11 July, 30 September & 28 November 2024 were circulated as read.

Councillor Addams acknowledged and asked members to pay respects on the 80th anniversary of the Auschwitz Liberation.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 11 July, 30 September & 28 November 2024 were circulated as read.

77/24 CLOSING REMARKS

The Mayor thanked members and staff for their attendance and closed the meeting.