



Please ask for: Mrs H Ball

Tel. Direct: 01743 257650

My Ref: HB/01

E-mail: helen.ball@shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk

Sent via email – transportsecretary@dft.gov.uk

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Rd
London
SW1P 4DR

27 April 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Shropshire Council's North West Relief Road (NWRR) Project, Shrewsbury

Shrewsbury Town Council has on three separate occasions in the last year expressed, by a clear democratic majority, strong opposition to the NWRR proposed by Shropshire Council, which is to be partially funded by the Department for Transport. The planning application for the road was first submitted in March 2021 and initially was to be decided ahead of the May 2021 Elections; since this time we have been advised that the application will be considered by Shropshire Councils Planning Committee in September 2021, then December 2021 and recent updates suggest that it will be considered in December this year.

The Town Council stalled any commentary about the NWRR until after the Local Council Elections in May last year and it was clear that there is a groundswell of local opposition to these proposals, with a very strident local appetite for alternative solutions to transport and movement.

Shrewsbury Town Council does not accept that the case for the NWRR has been made despite senior officers and leaders being equivocal in advocating that construction of the road makes sound economic sense to the town and county as a whole; rather the Town Council sees the proposed road as damaging to the town and its residents, on the following grounds:

- Shropshire Council has yet to publish the Full Business Case for the NWRR. The latest estimate for its publication is December 2022. The current planning application relies on an out-of-date Outline Business Case from 2017 costing £80 million. Since 2017 construction costs have rocketed and the Climate Emergency has worsened.
- As we face the Climate Emergency, the NWRR project is described as part of a decarbonising strategy. Comparing projected annual operational savings of 359 tonnes/CO₂e with 48,000 tonnes/CO₂e in construction means it will take 120 years or more to show net emissions reduction. This is clearly not a viable decarbonisation strategy. Continuing with the new road will hamper Shrewsbury's aims for Net Zero Carbon.

- Construction of the NWRR will increase road usage overall in the medium term due to 'induced demand' which is now well-understood. Shropshire Council's own modelling predicts very worrying traffic volume increases between the north and centre of Shrewsbury once the road is operational. The so-called NW Relief Road is not expected, even by those who advocate for it, to relieve traffic pressure in Shrewsbury.
- Shrewsbury Town Council is committed to preserving and improving all of the town's natural assets and the NWRR will cause irredeemable damage to wildlife in several Sites of Special Scientific Interest, compromise biodiversity on the west margin of Shrewsbury and negatively change the local environment beyond recognition. The Environment Agency and Natural England have, through the planning process, expressed concern for the much-valued natural environment in the area of the road including grave concerns about potential contamination of the local water supply.
- The NWRR's planning application has received a record 4,500 public objections from Shropshire residents.
- Other Towns across the county have expressed their objections to the NWRR on much the same grounds as Shrewsbury Town Council. Whilst Shrewsbury is a strategic centre for the whole of Shropshire and beyond and connectivity with the county town is crucial to a wide population, less reliance on the car and more reliance on alternative travel needs to be addressed.

Shropshire Council has already spent, or committed to spend £15 million, on this project, without knowing the final cost, and therefore without clarification of the inevitable overspend for which Shropshire Council will be fully responsible. Comparison to recently costed new roads around England imply a final cost in the region of £120 - £130 million with £54.4 million secured from government funding, the shortfall could be as great as £75.6 million. We are seeing Shropshire Council putting on hold other major construction projects as costs spiral and their initial aspirations to service debt to bring about these projects are becoming unachievable.

We consider that building a new ring road segment is an out-dated, financially risky response to the transport problems Shrewsbury faces. The overriding transport need for our town is to reduce motor traffic volume and this can only be achieved via a modal shift: removing cars from the roads by improving public transport and creating safe walking and cycling routes, all of which will contribute to a modern, healthier, cleaner and more pleasant environment for all who live in, work in and visit our town.

We will only achieve a change in car use habits by providing integrated public transport and active travel solutions that are more convenient and safer to use than jumping in the car.

The NWRR is on the table at a time when Shrewsbury public transport is under immediate threat. Bus services have become increasingly sporadic in frequency of service with trips being cancelled with no warning. We are seeing bus providers withdrawing vital services both within the town and also between the town and its hinterland, that were until recently commercially viable. We have also been hugely disappointed that the bid Shropshire Council made to the Bus Service Improvement Plan to improve public transport across the county has not been successful and we are extremely worried there

is not a Plan B to address the need for a more integrated public transport network at the heart of discouraging car use.

Shrewsbury Town Council wishes to move forward and does not want this damaging road forced on the town. With that regard the Town Council is part of a joint project to look at Movement within the town and has commissioned Transport Consultants to look at this most crucial subject with a definitive remit of looking at what modern day connectivity look like.

We were also instrumental in preparing the Mini-Holland bid that Shropshire Council submitted on our behalf and we have been subsequently delighted that funding has been awarded for us to work with partners to collectively develop the feasibility work to seek additional funding. We were pleasantly surprised by the appetite for a modal shift in transport and movement when we sought stakeholder support.

The Town Council would call on you to review major schemes like this to determine long-term viability and ability to bring about lasting generational change.

In a rural county like Shropshire our biggest challenge is transport and movement between communities for economic, social and environmental reasons. It deprives the community of its ability to thrive and survive. In an era of Levelling Up, serious efforts need to be made to address these matters to ensure local resilience.

We would very much welcome discussions with your Department to see how we can collectively work to develop good transport solutions to Shrewsbury and Shropshire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Ball', with a horizontal line underneath.

Helen Ball BA (Hons) FSLCC
Town Clerk