CABINET 1 JUNE 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

1. Question from Mr Rob Wilson

I welcome the announcements made in the media to limit traffic in our town centres to allow them to reopen whilst allowing shoppers to maintain social distancing.

However, this does not enable people of all ages and abilities to use walking and cycling to travel to the town centres. What is Shropshire Council doing to maintain the increased levels of walking and cycling in our community streets, specifically, rapidly implementing the government policy of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods?

What is Shropshire Council doing to enable people to make walking and cycling their prime modes of transport into our town centres from the surrounding suburbs, specially installing protected cycle lanes along arterial routes?

Why is Shropshire Council not consulting widely with the public to identify where the impediments to walking and cycling are in our local communities by using a free online application such as Commonplace?

Response:

Shropshire Council is working across all key market towns to support social distancing / public safety and the walking and cycling agenda. Plans are already being developed to support town centres via cycle routes, one way systems and temporary widening of footpaths or temporary road closures that will allow safer walking and cycling , further the decision that the out of town carparks will remain free of charge in June (all car parks have been free since March) will hopefully incentivise use of these cars parks and support in reducing car usage direct into towns . This work is still being developed and numerous visits to towns have been undertaken with local representatives, Business Improvement Districts and/or Chamber of Commerce to develop these plans. As this work grows theses plans will be available on the councils website, with its developing action plan.

The council is, and has had to work at pace on this initiative, guidance from government is being received daily and this has to be translated into action on the ground, and it has only been in the last week that direct funding from government to support this initiative was received. That said the council had already begun to plan and act on this agenda. The government's decision to announce that June 15th will allow more retail business to open is pertinent, and initial work to make town centres safe, to encourage footfall and support the local economy of Shropshire is the key focus of work, once the initial "make safe " response has been undertaken, then longer term plans derived from   a more considered and then consulted response can be publicised. Thus, please be assured that the long term opportunity to improve our town centres and visitors experience is not lost, however the immediate response is to make safe and encourage use for the vibrancy and longevity of our town centres.

2. Question from Mr Peter Welch

I have a question regarding the decision to forge ahead with the North West Relief Road.

I do not support the building of this road for a number of reasons and I am asking the council to respond to my concerns.

1. Building new roads brings more traffic in to areas, not less. This has been show to be the case in many studies. Therefore this road will increase the county's pollution levels, not decrease them. Especially as Shropshire is already one of the highest CO2 emitting counties in the country.

Response:

Traffic between areas to the north and west of Shrewsbury has to pass through the town centre, rat run through unsuitable roads west of the town or take the significantly longer route around the A5 / A49 bypass. As a result, there are unacceptably high levels of traffic including heavy vehicles on residential roads approaching the town centre and within the centre itself where there is only limited highway capacity. This leads to problems of congestion, delays and journey unreliability for road users, and problems of noise, poor air quality, emissions, and reduced accessibility, public transport services are also affected by congestion.

The North West Relief Road is intended to support the following specific objectives for

Shrewsbury:

 • To improve connectivity and accessibility between the north and west of Shrewsbury for

all modes of transport

• To reduce traffic congestion in Shrewsbury town centre

• To reduce traffic congestion on the A5 / A49 bypass

• To reduce traffic congestion on the north and west approaches to the town

• To improve the reliability of journey times and reduce unforeseen delays

• To improve the efficiency of Shrewsbury's transport network for all modes of transport

• To improve the resilience of Shrewsbury's transport network

• To reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on roads in Shrewsbury

• To improve air quality, especially in the built-up areas of Shrewsbury

• To reduce net emissions of CO2 and other greenhouse gases from vehicles using the highway network

• To facilitate the Shrewsbury West Sustainable Urban Extension

• To enhance the benefits of Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package

• To support Shrewsbury's Big Town Plan

2. If the main aim is to reduce pollution within Shrewsbury, then there are many other solutions: car free pedestrian areas, 20 mph limits throughout, improved park and ride facilities. Why aren't these and other solutions being promoted?

Response:

Alternatives to building a relief road have been considered, including improvements to bus services, improvements to Park and Ride, improvements to the walking and cycling networks and demand management, such as road pricing. However, the results showed that these means alone would not produce the benefits equal to those which could be achieved by building the NWRR.

This does not mean of course that these measures cannot be considered as part of the wider measures within the town over and above the delivery of the NWRR, against the background reductions in traffic on completion of the road.

Alternative routes for the relief road have also been considered before the council made its selection of the preferred route.

3. I do not live in Shrewsbury, but where I live has seen a 50% cut in bus services in the last year, and my area is not the only one to have suffered in this way. This directly increases the traffic throughout Shropshire and adds to pollution levels. Money needs to be spent on public transport, electrifying the fleet, rather than on projects such as road building which themselves add more carbon to the atmosphere and then still more through the increasing number of cars.

Response:

Public Transport is a key part of sustainable transport solutions and this has been underlined by the Councils

continued financial support for public Transport despite the significant financial challenges that that it has faced.

The Department for Transport recently announced a number of funding initiatives for which the Council are currently drawing up expressions of interest to enhance the Shropshire public transport network, these include;

- Funding for electrifying the Shrewsbury bus fleet and the wider Shropshire bus network where appropriate.
- Funding to provide rural mobility transport solutions to reduce the need for longer journeys, providing for greater access to local services
- We were recently successful in our initial bid for funding to enhance part of the current public transport network to encourage passenger growth

In addition, we are currently in the process of drafting a new Park & Ride Strategy for Shrewsbury which will provide for a "Next Generational Transport System" complimenting active travel within the Town. Whilst at the same time

the Council are also exploring opportunities to electrify their own vehicle fleet and provide greater opportunities for staff to access alternative fuel technology for work and personal use.

4. One thing the current pandemic has demonstrated, is that we need to stop abusing and destroying the natural environment. Road building cuts down trees and destroys existing natural habitats. It is not enough to say that trees will be replanted; it takes years for trees to reach maturity and be able to sequester the amount of carbon that the lost mature trees were able to absorb.

Response:

An Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) is being compiled. This will accompany the Planning Application and will focus on the following:

• Set the legal framework;

• Document the consultation process;

• Consider the alternatives to the Proposed Scheme;

• Establish the baseline environmental conditions at the Site and within the surrounding area;

• Identify likely significant effects during the design process so that some effects can be avoided, prevented, reduced or, if possible, offset prior to the assessments within the ES;

• Identify potential impacts associated with the Proposed Scheme in relation to the following topics: Air Quality, Agriculture and Soils Resources, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Geology and Soils, Historic Environment, Landscape and Visual, Major Accidents and Disasters, Materials and Waste, Noise and Vibration, Population and Health and Road Drainage and Water Environment;

• Identify suitable essential mitigation measures to avoid, prevent, reduce or, if possible, offset the identified potential impacts on the environment and identify the likely significant residual effects following the implementation of these measures;

• Identify monitoring measures where likely significant residual effects are identified; and

• Identify, predict and qualitatively assess the cumulative effects of the Proposed Scheme including those associated with the other identified committed developments and those associated with the inter-action between the above-mentioned environmental topics.

The scope of the EIA has been determined through consultation with statutory and non-statutory environmental bodies during the EIA Scoping Stage and full details can be found at:

https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/onlineapplications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=Q0YK55TD08C00