

COUNCIL 17TH DECEMBER 2020
MEMBER QUESTION REPORT

Question from Councillor Dave Tremellen

When does Council intend bringing the Shrewsbury shopping centre investment back “on shore” as promised at the time the acquisition was made using Jersey Property Unit Trusts in January 2018?

Response from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration

COUNCILLOR STEVE CHARMLEY

Council approved the recommendations detailed in the “Shopping Centres Holding Structures Review” paper (Council 19th December 2019) and officers are working to that remit. Work is being undertaken to obtain and assess further advice and guidance and to determine the optimal time for implementation of the restructure. Members will be updated as this progresses on request.

Question from Councillor Dave Tremellen

In the light of Shropshire Council Cabinet’s considering relocating its operating centre to a replacement property based within the Shrewsbury Shopping Centre, how does it justify a relocation to a building it does not, ultimately, own outright and which it cannot guarantee its tenure in, unlike Shirehall which it owns outright and can guarantee to occupy however circumstances change?

Response from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration

COUNCILLOR STEVE CHARMLEY

The way the Council is working is changing and the reliance on administrative assets and how they operate is being actively considered further to the previous decision making at Cabinet. The new ways of working are being developed and a comprehensive review of the best option is well underway. This will consider a number of key areas including such aspects as maintenance, operating costs, climate change, flexible environments, tenure and colocation with partners. Officers have been tasked with bringing back further recommendations and will be targeting an appropriate future meeting.

Question from Councillor David Vasmer

Whilst welcoming the recent re-opening of the Community Tree Scheme I would like ask a series of questions relating to the original scheme which opened on Wednesday 7th October and closed on Thursday 8th October after 10,000 trees were

allocated to land owners in a bid to help the Council reach carbon neutral status by 2030:

- a. Could you supply an anonymised list of the successful applicants, the first three letters of their postcode and the number of trees allocated to each one?
- b. How many on the above list are community groups?
- c. How many applicants were unsuccessful when the first scheme was launched in October and how many of these were community groups?
- d. Were any checks made to ensure that wealthy landowners did not benefit?
- e. Could a map be produced showing the locations where all the 10,000 trees are being planted?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Services and Climate Change and the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services

COUNCILLOR DEAN CARROLL and COUNCILLOR GWILYM BUTLER

a. A spreadsheet (Appendix 1) with an anonymised list of successful applications for the original round of this year's tree scheme is attached – there were 64 of them, receiving a total of 12,360 tree and hedgerow transplants. The spreadsheet includes the type and number of trees and hedging received, the first three letters of their postcode and the grid reference or co-ordinates of where the trees are being planted. Tab 2 on the spreadsheet gives a more detailed breakdown of the types and numbers of trees in the various planting mixes offered and the total numbers of each.

b. Those applications that are from community groups and other 'non-individual' applicants are highlighted yellow in the 'category' section of the spreadsheet. There are 9 of them. However, this is probably not the full picture as this information was extracted from the description on the application form of why they wanted the trees and the aims of their planting; there might have been a number who didn't include the local group they were affiliated with or who are private individuals who were notified by one of the groups and applied as individuals. I would say that our re-opening of the scheme appears to have more entries relating to various groups/green projects. This is probably because we made sure to notify them ahead of re-opening, to give them a chance to make applications before the scheme was re-opened to all on our website. We should also have more information on who was responsible for planting trees in the future; our 'Record your tree planting' map (see e) below) captures whether the application is made on behalf of a community group or project.

c. There were 13 unsuccessful applicants when the original tree scheme closed in October, and as far as we know all of these were individuals, none were community groups. Those applications that were refused were all due to them being invalid ie not meeting the objectives and criteria of the scheme, rather than the supply of trees running out (the scheme was closely monitored and closed in time to avoid oversubscribing).

d. No checks on the wealth of the applicants were made prior to delivery of the scheme. The scheme is and always has been open to all, providing the proposed

tree planting meets the objectives and criteria of the scheme. This is made clear on our web site and application form, from which the following extracts are taken for information:

e. Working with the GIS Team, we have been able to create an interactive map to show where the trees have been planted. It is a requirement that successful applicants consent to the planting details being included on the map, as per our website:

'Finally, as an exciting new feature, successful applicants must be prepared to show the location and planting details of their trees on an interactive map of Shropshire, to provide a permanent and growing record (forgive the pun) of where trees have been planted around the county. Personal identifying details won't be revealed on the map, although we will need your contact details to correspond with you regarding the scheme. Ideally, we hope to include a facility enabling people to upload photographs of their trees at the planting stage, and then subsequently to show how they're developing over time.'

It is very early days, so only a few records have been entered to date, but the following link takes you to the page from which you can access the tree planting map. It can be used to record all tree planting activity in Shropshire (not funded through other grant aid such as Forestry Commission or agri-environment schemes), whether through the Tree Scheme or otherwise. We hope in time to develop it to also act as a register of potential land and sites for planting and potentially to bring together those that have land for planting with those volunteering to supply or plant trees, as well as simply record where trees have been planted:

<https://apps.esriuk.com/app/questionwhere/51/view/ddb12ff7eff740daaef3cf638e26c858/index.html#>

Question from Councillor David Vasmer

Regarding the current re-opened Community Tree Scheme, how many trees are being made available and how many trees have been distributed so far? Has there been any changes to the priorities for the distribution of trees since October and how many trees does the Council plan to make available in future years?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Services and Climate Change and the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services

COUNCILLOR DEAN CARROLL and COUNCILLOR GWILYM BUTLER

Funding has been secured through a new Trees Outside Woods (TOW) project with DEFRA and other partners to supply an additional 20,000 tree and hedgerow transplants this planting season (to be delivered before the planting season closes in February 2021). As of Tuesday 1st December we have had applications totalling 17,360 trees. I would point out that these have not been screened as yet and a (probably small) proportion of them will be refused, as per the original scheme in October this year.

The only change in the second round of the scheme, based on applications received in the first round, is that we have halved the amount of hedging that people are allowed to apply for, because we are trying to encourage tree planting and small scale woodland creation, rather than run a hedgerow creation project.

This Council remains committed to planting a tree for every resident of Shropshire and that will require support to continue and expand the Community Tree Scheme in future years. The DEFRA TOW project funding will contribute further for at least one more year and additional funding beyond that will need to be secured either internally or externally. The aspiration is that the number of trees available in future years will exceed the number provided this year.

Question from Councillor David Vasmer

In a meeting of the Place Overview Committee on 5th November this year Councillors were told that the Council was protected from any overspend on the North West Road because it had entered into an agreement with contractors, Balfour Beatty. An argument was made that the Council would work closely with the contractor in a pre-construction phase and thus securing an incentive for the contractor not to overspend. I am worried that the Council may have already entered into an agreement with Balfour Beatty to build the North West Road. Is that correct? If not, what is the nature of the agreement with Balfour Beatty?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

COUNCILLOR STEVE DAVENPORT

The principle of involving a contractor at the design stage is well established industry practice that aims to minimise construction and cost risk and maximise efficiencies through good design. The Council has progressed from the (no charge) Feasibility Stage with Balfour Beatty into the formal and contracted Pre-Construction Stage. This is in line with the SCAPE framework options available to the Council at this time to develop project certainty further (Balfour Beatty being the single SCAPE framework supplier). SCAPE is a procurement framework that the Council had already gained access to as an available procurement route prior to the commencement of the NWRR project.

The Pre Construction stage is being undertaken through a fixed cost, maximum value, £1.9m contract, approved through the previous delegation to the Director of Place at the point of Council assent to Large Local Majors Programme Entry. The cost of this contract is within the agreed programme financial forecasts and is accommodated by the programme timeline. The Pre-Construction stage is designed to get contractor involvement to assist the schemes development to the final design by informing with knowledge of specialist techniques and materials, to identify opportunities for construction efficiencies and provide a sense check to costings and programming.

There is no requirement to then proceed to a full Construction contract through SCAPE as part of this progression, and the project board, Executive Board and Full Council will be advised on the preferred construction procurement route in due

course at the point of Full Business Case submission to DfT. The decision to pursue a chosen procurement option at that time will be informed by the assessment of risk (financial costs / overrun, deliverability and programme requirements etc.) at that time, and may also include full open market tender alongside other options in order to ensure value for money is being obtained.

The NWRR Full Business Case is currently due for consideration by Council Winter 2021 and further updates on its progress will be given in due course

Question from Councillor Tracey Huffer and Andy Boddington

Covid-19 testing centres are vital to our response to the current pandemic. They help protect individuals. They inform us about the rate of infection across Shropshire. We are concerned that it is difficult to get a Covid-19 test in the rural south of the county without travelling a considerable distance. We are concerned that official guidance asks people not to travel but local arrangements require people to travel long distances for tests. It is a 56 mile round trip by road from central Ludlow to the Shrewsbury London Road test centre. It costs around £60 for a taxi fare.

- 1) Where are the current testing centres located?
 - 2) What support is offered for people without transport to get to these centres?
 - 4) How soon are test results available after testing at these centres?
 - 5) We understand that a mobile testing unit is in operation. How is its location decided? What would happen if there were urgent needs for testing in, say, Ludlow and Whitchurch on the same day?
 - 6) Will anyone who cannot or does not wish to travel receive a postal test or will this be restricted to people with specific symptoms?
 - 7) What are the postal arrangements for postal test? For example, are they delivered on Sundays? How are tests returned from people who cannot leave home because they are self-isolating or for other reasons?
 - 8) How long does it take for postal tests to arrive and how long after posting the test kit back do the results get communicated?
 - 9) What arrangements are in place for people who need to be tested at home?
- We recognise that the data needed to answer these questions may not always be available at a local level. Regional or national data could substitute where necessary.

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Services and Climate Change

COUNCILLOR DEAN CARROLL

1. Where are the current testing centres located?
 - There is a regional testing site located in Ironbridge
 - There are two semi-permanent Local Testing Sites in Shrewsbury:
 - o London Road Car Park, Shrewsbury, SY2 6PG
 - o Beatrice Street Car Park, Oswestry, SY11 1QW
 - There is currently one Mobile Unit allocated to Shropshire which rotates around the County depending on local need. This has nominally between Craven Arms, Whitchurch and Market Drayton. The current dates are:
 - o Whitchurch – 14th Dec – 19th Dec

- o Ludlow site TBC 20th – 28th Dec
- o Market Drayton 29th December to 4th Jan
- Shropshire have one more Local Testing Site which we are looking to place in the South West of the County. A number of locations in the South East have been assessed as not suitable but further locations are being currently surveyed.
- Additional sites have been identified across the County to move mobile testing sites to in the event of an outbreak.
- Residents of Shropshire also able to access testing in other neighbouring areas if this is more convenient

2. What support is offered for people without transport to get to these centres?

- Local testing sites are walk in centres, near to town centres so those without transport can walk into the sites, parking is available nearby for those who do drive. For those without transport, postal testing has also been made available. In an outbreak situation, mobile testing will be brought into local areas and the local testing team from Shropshire Community Trust will support testing staff at workplaces, in localities or in peoples homes if needed.

3. How soon are test results available after testing at these centres?

This is currently up to 48 -72 hours, however the majority of results are returned between 24-48 hours

4. We understand that a mobile testing unit is in operation. How is its location decided? What would happen if there were urgent needs for testing in, say, Ludlow and Whitchurch on the same day?

- The location of the units are based on need, they rotated around the County to increase access to testing sites. Location also depends on suitability of the site.
- Should there be a need in different parts of the County, we can call on our local testing service in the event of a small outbreak or ask the regional team to deploy an additional MTU to Shropshire, this will depend on availability.

5. Will anyone who cannot or does not wish to travel receive a postal test or will this be restricted to people with specific symptoms?

- Anyone with the three main COVID symptoms can order a postal test online through 119 or book into a local testing site, within Shropshire or outside of the County

6. What are the postal arrangements for postal test? For example, are they delivered on Sundays? How are tests returned from people who cannot leave home because they are self-isolating or for other reasons?

- Tests can be ordered online 24/7. These are collected and delivered by Royal Mail. Completed test kits are collected from priority postboxes or from homes as part of the government programme.

<https://www.royalmail.com/priority-postboxes>. Kits are collected 7 days a week, before 4pm from priority postboxes across the Country and also from home addresses. Delivery of test kits is 6 days a week.

7. How long does it take for postal tests to arrive and how long after posting the test kit back do the results get communicated?
 - Up to 72 hours
8. What arrangements are in place for people who need to be tested at home?
 - This is via the postal system or in an outbreak situation could be through our local Testing Team at Shropshire Community Trust.