

CABINET 18 JANUARY 2021

MEMBER QUESTION TIME

1. Question from Cllr Ed Bird

“Regarding the regulation 19 pre-submission draft of the Shropshire Local Plan 2016-2038, I would like to reiterate the points made in the letter addressed to Edward West, Principal Planning Policy Officer at Shropshire council, from Shifnal Town Council, and ask the Cabinet, that given the current COVID restrictions and limited accessibility to documents for large groups of the population that the Council reconsider the consultation period. I would also draw attention to the Town Council’s previous responses to the consultation, which I support, which oppose the high housing growth figures for Shifnal, and the serious concerns that myself and a large number of residents have around the use of Green Belt in which Shifnal is clearly situated. Residents have already seen new housing estates developed recently in Shifnal, and have expressed the view that they wish Shifnal to retain its current character.”

The Council are particularly mindful of ensuring that everyone has a fair opportunity to engage with the Local Plan process, including as part of the current Regulation 19 consultation into the Local Plan which began on 18th December. On this basis it has been appropriate for the Council to review the consultation procedure in light of the new lockdown restrictions which came into force on 5th January, and in particular in light of the closure or more limited access to library services.

In line with the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and national legislation, the Council considers that electronic means of communication will continue to be the primarily method of engagement on planning matters, including on statutory consultations such as the current Local Plan consultation.

However, whilst the availability of consultation material in libraries is not required at this stage of plan preparation under the temporary amendments made to Regulation 35 of the Town and Country (Local Planning) (England) Act 2012, Shropshire Council nevertheless has sought to make copies available at our network of libraries for the duration of the current seven week consultation into the Regulation 19 Draft of the Local Plan. With this in mind a review of the consultation arrangements has been undertaken to ensure that those without the ability to view and comment on the consultation documents electronically can still have a fair opportunity to engage in this process.

It has been agreed that immediately, the Council will offer on a limited basis, paper copies of all or part of the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Plan document on request. This provision will be targeted only to those who do not have access to the internet. Information about this provision is being made available at library branches and will be sent to all Parish and Town Councils, with a view for this information to be displayed on physical parish noticeboards where practical. A Press release will also be circulated. The Council will continue to keep under review whether any further action is required to support the current consultation in light of the current lockdown restrictions.

The current consultation allows residents and other consultees to comment on the Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan on 'soundness' and legal compliance issues. All duly made comments made to the Council will be considered. Whilst the Council only has limited scope to make minor modifications to the Plan at this stage of the process, when the Council proceeds to the submission of the Plan to the Government – scheduled for April subject to full Council approval – all the responses made to the Regulation 19 consultation will be sent to the Planning Inspectorate to inform the Examination in Public. It is this Examination process where more significant changes to the Plan, known as Main Modifications, can be made should the Planning Inspector consider them necessary to make the Plan sound.

2. Question from Cllr David Vasmer

In a recent article in the Shropshire Star the Leader of the Council said that “traffic in the Loop will be reduced by 30%” if the North West Relief Road is built. But traffic predictions for all roads within Shrewsbury’s Loop show there would be no reductions apart from Smithfield Road. What is the source of the Leader’s 30% figure?

Significantly reducing the amount of unnecessary traffic crossing the town centre, and thereby reducing congestion to create space to support sustainable modes of transport, remains a clear objective of the North West Relief Road (NWRR) and the ambition of the Big Town Plan. The forecast levels of traffic reduction are based on a strategic traffic model which has been independently reviewed and accepted by the Department for Transport and Highways England. The traffic model is refined throughout the project development and the latest update will be presented within the planning application, due to be submitted in February, thus the picture changes as the design is refined up to the Planning submission.

The public consultation for the NWRR, held in early 2020, included details of the roads where traffic levels would change most significantly following opening of the new road. This identified that Smithfield Road would see one of the most significant reductions, with traffic forecast to reduce by 27%. This was consistent with previous modelling which had identified Smithfield Road as the main beneficiary of the NWRR which has been a catalyst for bringing forward a new vision for Shrewsbury.

The NWRR planning application will include more information for more routes and based on the latest update of the traffic model. Typically, the traffic model is used to assess the impact on individual routes or roads, as there can be significant variation of benefit across a geographical area. However, Shrewsbury town centre has limited points of access and the forecast traffic reductions are summarised below, varying from a reduction of 38% to a notional increase of 1%.

		Morning Peak Hours	Afternoon Peak Hours
Road Name	Direction	% change following NWRR opening	% change following NWRR opening
Welsh Bridge	Inbound	-17%	-38%
Welsh Bridge	Outbound	-25%	-22%
Welsh Bridge	Total	-21%	-28%
Castle Gates	Inbound	-18%	-14%
Chester Street	Outbound	-21%	-15%
Castle Foregate Gyratory	Total	-20%	-14%
English Bridge	Inbound	1%	-1%
English Bridge	Outbound	-1%	-3%
English Bridge	Total	0%	-2%

This magnitude of traffic reduction in the town centre presents a significant opportunity to encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport for residents or visitors to the town.