

**CABINET 16/02/22**  
**Public Questions**

<b>Question from:</b>	Ian Matthews	
<b>Subject:</b>	Development of Town Centre & Surrounds/NWRR	
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Ed Potter	Approved
<p>What definite and established plans does the council have for the development of the town centre and surrounds of Shrewsbury immediately following the completion of the North West Relief Road, assuming this project goes ahead, and if no such plans exist with the Cabinet give an assurance that a plan will be published prior to the approval of the North Wet Relief Road.</p> <p><b>The Council's strategic growth aspirations for Shrewsbury are captured in the emerging Local Plan Review for the period 2016-2038, which is currently subject to independent Examination. Specifically, policy S16.1 of the draft Local Plan states that:</b></p> <p><b>"Shrewsbury is the Strategic Centre for Shropshire and the primary focus for new development in the County. Recognising this role, and building upon the priority established in the Big Town Plan to achieve balanced growth, between 2016 and 2038 around 8,625 dwellings will be delivered and around 100 hectares of employment land will be made available for development, to provide choice and competition in the market".</b></p> <p><b>Policy S16 fully acknowledges that wider strategies, masterplans and development proposals will need to be taken into account in the delivery of these strategic objectives. These include the Big Town Plan and its associated masterplan documents, which are considered to be material considerations in decision making. Policy S16 also make specific reference to the delivery of the proposed North West Relief Road (NWRR), which the Plan supports in principle.</b></p> <p><b>With specific regard to development opportunities created by the development of the NWRR, it is not considered that the development of the town's overall proposed housing and employment requirements to 2038, as well as wider developments in the town centre, are directly reliant upon the delivery of the NWRR. Indeed, the rationale for the delivery of the NWRR is not predicated on the delivery of additional housing and employment development in and around the town, rather its cost/benefit analysis (as accepted by DfT within the Outline Business case) is based on monetising local improvements in journey time reliability, air quality, modal shift and road accident reductions within the town as a whole. Similarly, whilst the NWRR is considered to have a potentially contributory impact on reducing traffic within the town centre, the BTP does not consider it to be a dependency for this to happen. A movement and public realm strategy is due to commence shortly and this work will bring forward proposals and scenarios, cognisant of the complementary opportunities that the NWRR offers to the BTP, without it being seen as an interdependency.</b></p> <p><b>However, clearly the NWRR is a significant infrastructure proposals and therefore it is appropriate for the draft Local Plan to recognise and build upon these opportunities. Firstly, it is recognised that in seeking to allocate land to the West of Ellesmere Road – SHR173 – for 450 dwellings, the draft Plan states that the delivery of this site is directly dependent upon the construction of the NWRR. The Draft Local Plan also recognises that there may be 'windfall' commercial opportunities created by between the line of the road and the existing urban area</b></p>		

which could come forward following the completion of the road, although these are not identified as specific site allocations in the draft Plan.

In summary, there is no single plan that directly responds to the development of the town centre and the surrounds of Shrewsbury, immediately following the completion of the NWRR. Rather, the NWRR is a material consideration in the context of strategies and plans as illustrated, but not exclusively, by those mentioned above. These plans provide assurance that the implications and opportunities resulting from significant infrastructure proposals, such as the NWRR, are robustly considered.

<b>Question from:</b>	Save Our Shirehall	
<b>Subject:</b>	Shirehall	
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Dean Carroll Ed Potter Gwilym Butler	Approved

Save Our Shirehall are collectively concerned about the decisions being made during this Cabinet meeting and next week's Full Council meeting. The decisions being made, have the possibility to change the face of Shrewsbury and Shropshire forever, and not necessarily for the better. A decision one way could result in Shropshire losing a second Shirehall, an icon of 1960's post-war architecture, a building that is not only important for the people of Shropshire but also the hundreds of Shropshire Council staff that were based there pre-March 2020. We ask the following questions:

#### **RESPONSE FROM GWILYM BUTLER**

1. Has Shropshire Council staff wellbeing been adequately considered in this commitment to the continuation of pandemic style working, with sustained preference to work from home and the possible loss of vital office space at Shirehall?

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us all that we can work differently, and, in many ways, it has helped services be more flexible and colleagues to better balance their home and work commitments. However, we acknowledge that this new way of working doesn't suit every employee. All staff, including those 'occasional office users' have access to all of our admin buildings across the county, for teams to come together, catch ups with line managers and to support wellbeing. No member of staff has been told to work from home.

We are committed as an organisation to the health, wellbeing and resilience of our employees and as such have invested in a suite of wellbeing interventions to support the workforce over the last 18 months.

#### **RESPONSE FROM DEAN CARROLL**

2. What is the most recent financial assessment of refurbishment for the Shirehall?

No further detailed work was undertaken in terms of feasibility for the refurbishment of the Shirehall post the key decisions taken at the Council meeting of 16 July 2020. In the report it advised that in the Stage 2 financial business case was prepared by Rider Levett Bucknell (RLB) which identified an estimated cost of £24.1m, this was on the basis of refurbishing the Shirehall, which was presented to full Council in December 2018. Due to inflation and

**comparable scope of works (previous cost excluded some works such as fenestration, asbestos, etc.), likely to be in excess of £30-34m.**

3. How will the demolition of Shirehall, construction of the Smithfield Riverside Development and new housing estate on the Shirehall site meet Shropshire Council's commitment to Net Zero by 2030?

To quote Lord Deben in a BBC online article [October 2021] "We need to think differently," he said. "It's not acceptable to pull buildings down like this. We have to learn to make do and mend."

**Continue to consider alternative uses for Shirehall for use by others such as education, residential, commercial uses, but to date no viable option or interested party has been identified. Adaptability and suitability for future uses with prohibitive refurbishment and ongoing life-cycle costs have prevented refurbishment option coming forward. Similarly, not economic or suitably adaptable for Council needs moving forward, so regrettably vacating the site, however, with the opportunity to bring forward new low carbon development that unlocks wider economic benefit in the town centre. Shropshire Council decisions now routinely consider carbon performance as an integral part of the decision-making process. In the case of Shirehall, there are a range of complex and overlapping issues to consider which include changes to the pattern of staff working and the embodied and operational carbon costs of upgrading buildings as well as redeveloping and replacing them.**

#### **RESPONSE FROM ED POTTER**

4. When and in what form will a full traffic assessment be made public for the Smithfield Riverside Development?

**A full suite of traffic assessments will be undertaken as the projects proceed, both to manage the intervening construction periods and the longer term traffic management, post implementation. These will be required by the planning process, however, they will be undertaken and continually appraised and reviewed as part of the iterative design process. A movement and public realm strategy has recently been commissioned and this will further inform the location of all public transport interventions, as well as walking, cycling and parking in and around the town centre. The commission explicitly aims to address health and wellbeing, climate change and air quality imperatives, and includes for extensive stakeholder and public engagement, that will ensure we reach out to all interested parties across the county.**

<b>Question from:</b>	Simon Mulloy	
<b>Subject:</b>	Affordable Housing	
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Ed Potter	Approved
In response to my public question at the 13th January Cabinet meeting, the Leader of the Council replied:		
<i>"I am happy to add that my record demonstrates that I am a strong advocate of affordable housing and have been vocal in my disappointment at the proposed reductions in affordable housing by developers and the officers will tell you that I am keen we hold as firm a line as is practically possible in this matter."</i>		

To this you added:

*"I can reassure everyone that provision of affordable housing is a priority for this Council."*

Despite these claims, in a further email response to me, of 11th February, the Leader declined to get involved with my concern that it appeared that the Council's own independent viability consultant had reduced the affordable housing contribution on a scheme by circa £360,000 in an apparent contradiction to what the applicant believed they could afford, this on top of a discounted rate already provided for the scheme. You of course, as portfolio holder, have failed to respond to that issue at all.

Just last week it would appear that there has been another 'miscalculation' of the affordable housing on a scheme by the Council's very own development company with an undersupply of around 66%.

Given the above, and the numerous other failings of the planning department, isn't it about time that you got a grip of your portfolio and started addressing the litany of failures in what many consider is a 'not fit for purpose' planning department, and provided results instead of rhetoric before pursuing grandiose 'Monopoly' type development schemes in Shrewsbury, which you seem to see as a higher priority than ensuring that the appropriate amount of affordable housing is provided by developers in Shropshire?

**Mr Mulloys views and comments are noted. Cabinet and Officers have responded many times to his concerns about the lack of affordable housing on developments and Mr Mulloy does not wish to accept the position that officers and members of the planning committee have to work within the planning system that operates in this country. That includes the viability of a site being taken into account when assessing the planning merits of a scheme. If this results in a reduction of affordable housing through a robust assessment of the scheme, then that has to be accepted. Mr Mulloy refers to an application on committee last week that was assessed against national and local policies. The vacant building credits was introduced by the Government and we are required to take them into account. This results in a reduction in the required levels that can legitimately be requested.**

**This Council is committed to provide the right level of affordable housing and there are many different approaches being taken. The planning process is not the only mechanism. However, as portfolio holder, I continue to work closely with officers and members to ensure that we explore every avenue possible to achieve the right homes in the right place at affordable levels for our communities.**

Question from:	Simon Mulloy	
Subject:	Pecuniary Interests	
Portfolio Holder:	Lezley Picton	Approved
You seem to me to have a strange relationship with the facts when it comes to declaring your pecuniary interests. Apparently you rely on selectively misquoted LGA guidance to not declare assets on your Council's register of interests, but have declared those same interests on your LEP		

register of interests after being reported for not doing so by a member of the public. The LEP would now appear to have a more accurate register of your interests than Shropshire Council.

On the 26th September 2021 you wrote this about your business interests:

*"I genuinely think it is important that such issues are scrutinised to ensure the highest possible standards of local government are maintained".*

And on the 1st October 2021 you wrote:

*" I am confident that I have disclosed everything required by the Code of Conduct"*

The above comment was made before you had to amend your LEP register of interests because of inaccuracy, and as you represent Shropshire Council on the LEP Board, then the Council's Code of Conduct applies to you when attending meetings of the LEP which is set out in Part 5 of the Council's Constitution:

***"This Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a councillor which may include when...Your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a councillor"***

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/documents/s29060/Part5CodesandProtocols.doc.pdf>

A good Leader leads by example so will you be offering an apology to the residents of Shropshire for your apparent reluctance to fully declare your pecuniary interests and will you amend your Shropshire Council register of interests in line with that of the LEP, or consider resigning to ensure the highest possible standards of local government are maintained?

**I would like to respond by stating that I find the suggestion that I have “a strange relationship with the facts when declaring [my] pecuniary interests” offensive and totally unwarranted. I have registered the interests that I am required to do both with the Council and now with the LEP. They have different requirements, both of which I have complied with. I can absolutely assure you once again that I am extremely conscious of the need to declare any conflicts of interest and, having been appointed by this Council as its Leader for the next four years, have every intention of fulfilling that mandate.**