

COUNCIL 2 MARCH 2023

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question from Mr Mike Streetly

In response to my question to Shropshire Council regarding the budget for the North West Relief Road (NWRR), on 2 March 2023 councillor Marshall stated that the spend to date, post Outline Business Case (OBC), was £16.5M and that that figure was within the currently agreed spending profile for the project.

I note that the post funding report to council on 16 May 2019 stated that the maximum spend on the NWRR project up to the point at which final DfT approval was received would be £15M. The report also states that the council received £942,875 from the LLM in 2016 to fund the OBC suggesting a total budget including OBC of ~£16M. I also note that in August 2022 the council stated that the total spend at that point was £18.1M with a further £2.3M to be spent.

To clarify this could the council please say what the total spend on the combined NWRR project (including the OBC) is to date and what it anticipates the total spend being if it progresses to the point at which it is ready for approval by DfT.

Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder Highways and Regulatory Services

The current spend to date on the NWRR (including the Marches LEP funded Oxon Link Road), post OBC is £22.3m, which is within the cost profile agreed for the project with DfT and the Marches LEP. The OBC was funded separately by DfT, prior to programme entry, at £942,875. The current expenditure forecast to DfT approval of the full Business case is circa £23.3m, which is also within the agreed project cost forecast with funders and the council.

Question from John Lill

Launching the IPCC Synthesis Report last week, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, said: "This report is a clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every timeframe. Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once."

Does Shropshire Council share this sense of urgency regarding the climate emergency and, in light of this, does the council plan to work to restrict or prevent developments that result in an increase in greenhouse gases wherever it can?

Response from Councillor Ian Nellins, Portfolio Holder Climate Change, Environment and Transport

The draft Local Plan, currently at Examination, reflects and responds to the Climate Emergency and the need to transition to a zero-carbon economy. The draft Local Plan seeks to do this by a number of means including: planning development in areas which reducing the need for people to travel and maximising their ability to make trips by sustainable means of transport; integrating or supporting on and off site delivery of renewable and low carbon energy; maximising carbon sequestration; and adapting the impacts of Climate change. One specific example the Council are proposing through policy to require where one or more new dwellings are created that 10% of the predicted energy needs of that development are met from on-site renewable and low carbon energy sources. The Council must of course ensure that proposals for enhancing delivery of housing remains viable and is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Question from Dr Natasha Harlow

Shropshire Council prides itself on being one of the more forward thinking councils in the UK, putting climate considerations at the heart of governance. This awareness needs to include every aspect of council activities, including the provision of food. I believe Shropshire is well placed to show leadership by setting an example to the wider community regarding awareness of the climate impact of the food we eat. Other councils, for example Oxfordshire, Cambridge City, and Exeter City, have committed to serve only plant-based food at their internal events.

Therefore, given the climate emergency and our stated aim to reduce emissions, will Shropshire Council commit to serving fully plant-based fare at all future internal events that are catered, as other councils have done? Even if this only applies to refreshments at a very small number of events per year, it will be a small step that sends a powerful message. This is the logical, and necessary next step after having declared a climate emergency. It will help normalise plant-based eating, which according to an Oxford University study is the single most effective thing an individual can do to reduce their environmental impact.

We are currently in a cost of living crisis. Meat and dairy products are almost always the most expensive part of a meal - wholefood plant-based meals made with real ingredients are considerably cheaper. By doing the right thing for the planet, and promoting eating for good health, the council can also encourage residents to save money on food.

Response from Councillor Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder Growth, Regeneration and Housing

Shropshire Council considers that it is important to support the local food and drink producers which are so vital to the Shropshire economy. Locally produced food, whether of animal or vegetable origin, has numerous benefits to the local economy and the environment as it is a significant reduction in terms of food miles and the carbon footprint as opposed to imported foodstuffs. It is also important to consider the freedom of choice of individuals to make their own dietary choices and it is not for Shropshire Council to enforce those choices but to make sure that all dietary preferences are catered for.

Question from Dr Jamie Russell

There are currently 5,452 comments on the North West Road planning application with 5,219 objections and 218 in support. I believe this is a new record for public comments on a Shropshire planning application. Objections have been received from four local town councils (including Shrewsbury, which the road will supposedly benefit), eight county businesses, ten transport campaign groups, and eight environmental campaign groups.

With this in mind, I would like to ask:

1. Does the administration agree with the Portfolio Holder for Highways when he says that the objections from the public, multiple Shropshire town councils, national bodies like Cycling UK and the Woodland Trust, and statutory bodies like the Environment Agency are just the reaction of 'a vocal minority'?
2. Given the level of concern over the plans, which have been through several major revisions since 2019, will the council commit to a new round of public consultation before the application is submitted to planning?

Thank you

Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder Highways and Regulatory Services

Public consultation has been carried out at a number of stages during the determination of the planning application and all comments will be considered and taken into account. The number of objections does not weigh in the planning balance, it is whether any of the objections raise material planning matters.

Question from Rita Makin

In recent years, there seems to be an increase in dog fouling on pavements, grass verges and public places around Shrewsbury.

It is an offence to not pick up after your dog, so please can you tell me how many fines have been issued in the last three years?

Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder Highways and Regulatory Services

The council understands the nuisance caused by inconsiderate dog owners in not cleaning up after their animals. We are currently working internally on a suite of new measures that cover many of these issues, currently our focus has been on stray dogs, which I am delighted to say, the announcement of our preferred supplier of this service will be announced shortly.

To prosecute for dog fouling is an extremely complex issue, which relies on catching the offender in the act, so unfortunately, we have had no successful prosecutions in the past 3 years. As the Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services, I feel this is not acceptable as it still continues and I am therefore working with officers to formulate a strategy that will involve education, prevention and then ultimately prosecution. Rest assured this is very high on my list of priorities

Question from Debbie Feasey on behalf of the residents of Underdale

On 28/09/22 Shropshire Council gave notice that “prior approval” was not required for the erection of a 16m 5G Telecomms Mast on Robertson Way directly overlooking homes on Eden Close and Oswell Road in Underdale.

What other sites were considered but discounted?

Could you detail the distance from residential properties and any analysis showing the current location as the most appropriate site for a 16m mast?

Do you think it is appropriate to have a 16-metre mast so close to people’s homes? Was the impact of this mast on residents’ mental health, wellbeing, and the value of their properties considered?

Did Shropshire Council benefit directly or indirectly from its decision on 28th September? Why were the residents not consulted since this is clearly in breach of the “Code of Practice for Wireless Network Development”?

In the Council’s Development Management Report on this mast, Section 8.2 Human Rights, it states that “Article 8 gives the right to respect for private and family life and First Protocol Article 1 allows for the peaceful enjoyment of possessions.” How is a 16metre mast so close to homes providing peaceful enjoyment of possessions?

In the same report section 8.2, it states that “First Protocol Article 1 requires that the desires of landowners must be balanced against the impact on residents”. Will the Council apologise for its failure to properly consider the impact on residents and mitigate its mistake by getting CK Hutchison Networks (UK) Ltd to remove the mast to a more suitable location?

Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder Highways and Regulatory Services

The applicant indicated that 8 sites were considered, the reasons why these were not suitable were in the prior notification document. The site was considered by officers in relation to current planning guidance.

This application had to be assessed under a prior approval procedure, this legislation only allows the local planning authority to consider the likely impacts in relation to siting and appearance, it cannot consider property prices.

The applicant is required to carry out a pre-development consultation, it is understood they consulted with the local school and Shrewsbury Town Council. When the prior notification was received, the council informed both the local member and the Town Council, neither the Town Council nor the Local member lodged any objections to the scheme.

It is considered that the proposal will have no detrimental impacts on residents Human Rights and complies with recognised industry regulations to mobile masts and health concerns. Telecoms companies under the New Roads and Streets act 1991, have the right to carry out street works without prior consent of the Highways authority.

The application was by a separate operator and I confirm the local planning authority would not benefit in any way. With digital connectivity, it is a difficult balance to provide that much called for connectivity and find suitable locations for the necessary equipment.

A combination of the need for digital connectivity, no objections from the Town council or Local member and planning policy weighted the decision to approve the application