

Wider Economic Benefits of the Proposed Shrewsbury North West Relief Road

In addition to the significant monetised transport economic benefits set out in the Outline Business Case for the Scheme and summarised in both the Transport Assessment and Planning Statement supporting the planning application, this note provides a qualitative summary of the economic benefits, both in relation to Shrewsbury and the wider region, that the development of the proposed Shrewsbury North West Relief Road (NWRR) would facilitate.

It is important to note that whilst the developments cited in this note are not wholly dependent upon the implementation of the NWRR, the scheme plays a crucial role in enabling development in the town.

According to the Shropshire Council Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019¹, Shropshire has become slightly more deprived since 2015 with an increase in the average score from 16.7 in 2015 to 17.2 in 2019, an increase of 0.5. Whilst Shropshire is the 174th most deprived local authority in England out of a total of 317 lower tier authorities (1 being the most deprived and 317 being the least deprived), this measure indicates Shropshire has become relatively more deprived compared to other areas since 2015. Shropshire Council's 'Population Snapshot 2019'² indicates that there are a lower number of 20-29 age group in Shropshire when compared to regional and national levels. This is also reflected in the evidence base for the Regulation 19: Pre-Submission Draft of the Shropshire Local Plan 2016 to 2038³ which states that *"the divergence between Shropshire and England's population age is evident, with Shropshire having a much greater proportion of people in all age groups above 50 years. In contrast England has a substantially higher proportion of population in all the younger age groups"*. This is indicative of 'brain drain' affecting Shropshire as skilled young people leave their home to find work elsewhere in the UK or further afield.

Average earnings in Shropshire - at £556 gross per week - are £29.20 below the regional average and £57 below the national average, and 12.5% of jobs were lost between 2015 and 2020 with a high proportion of the town centre jobs that remain being in low skilled, less productive economic sectors. In 2019 GVA per filled job stood at £40,341 in Shropshire, which is 20.5% less than in the West Midlands and 30.1% less than in the UK.

In response to these challenges, Shropshire Council's Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027⁴ provides a framework for economic development in the County. It aims to: *"Provide the right tools and support to facilitate businesses to invest in research and development, relocate to Shropshire or expand and grow in their physical locations and workforce."*

¹ <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/13678/snapshot-2019.pdf>

² <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/13920/population-snapshot-2019.pdf>

³ <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/21100/sd002-draft-shropshire-local-plan.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/25591/economic-growth-strategy-2022-2027.pdf>



Champion investment in wider infrastructure that underpins business investment, focused around town centres and high streets, business parks and growth corridors.

Provide appropriate housing, connectivity, networks and workplace progression through training and upskilling, so the county has the right workforce to enable economic growth and prosperity and grows its working age population.”

The Economic Development Strategy also recognises *“There is now a need to push for strategic infrastructure investment to take us to a new level where we are recognised nationally as a great place to do business, a place that enables our businesses to expand and grow, where businesses can relocate into the county or new businesses can easily set up”.*

One of the ambitions of the Strategy is to *“To be active in identifying and delivering opportunities for targeted investment locations and a “place-based” approach within the market towns. Putting people’s needs at the heart of housing, infrastructure, employment and local service provision to create sustainable, prosperous, growing communities”.* One objective of the Strategy is to *“Bring forward employment sites” with a potential intervention being “Appropriate supply of service and employment land; Growth corridors focus - A5, A49, A483, M54”.*

This place based approach to economic development in market towns is reflected in the Council’s Draft Local Plan which will provide the policy basis for delivery of the Council’s Economic Development Aspirations over the next 15 years. Albeit referencing the previous iteration of the Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021, the Draft Local Plan⁵ states *“The strategic approach also responds directly to the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire (2017-2021) and specifically reflects the objective to prioritise investment in strategic locations and growth zones along strategic corridors utilising existing road and rail connections. The strategic corridors are...c. Central Shropshire, focussed primarily on opportunities in Shrewsbury as the County Town and Strategic Centre.”*

The place-based policy for Shrewsbury Strategic Centre, set out in Policy S16.1 of the Draft Local Plan states that *“to foster economic development and reflect Shrewsbury’s strategic role as the main centre for employment in the County, a significant supply of employment land has been identified. New employment development will primarily be delivered through a combination of the saved SAMDev mixed-use and employment allocations and Local Plan mixed-use and employment allocations. Opportunities to enhance the existing high quality employment facilities within and on the edge of the town centre and business parks on the periphery of the town, including Battlefield Enterprise Park, Shrewsbury and Oxon Business Parks will be supported...The delivery of the North West Relief Road (NWRR) is supported in principle, and as such the proposed line of the road is identified on the Policies Map. Development opportunities between the proposed NWRR and the Development Boundary will be guided by Policy SP10. In this area it is recognised that windfall employment proposals on appropriate sites adjoining the development boundary will be supported in principle where they meet*



the requirements of Policies SP13 and SP14 and where suitable vehicular access can be provided”.

In recognition of its role as Strategic Centre of Shropshire and the primary focus for new development in the County, the Draft Local Plan goes on to state that *“Shrewsbury will be a major focus within Shropshire for the provision of infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the town and its wider catchment area, with current priorities set out in the Implementation Plan and Shrewsbury Place Plan. Opportunities for the following will be supported in principle: a. The reinforcement and enhancement of the local and strategic highway network through the delivery of measures supporting the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Strategy, the Big Town Plan Movement Strategy and the Shropshire Local Transport Plan, as well as any other highway and junction improvements required to support development and the proposed Shrewsbury North West Relief Road”.*

Policy DP28 of the Draft Local Plan also recognises that the *“subregional role of Shrewsbury is to be enhanced by the delivery of the North West Relief Road to extend the A53 around the north and west of Shrewsbury. This will complete the existing by-passes to reduce journey times around the town and to increase the connectivity of Shrewsbury in the strategic road network”.*

Allocation SHR173 (Land west of Ellesmere Road, Shrewsbury - 450 dwellings) is *“directly dependent on the approval and construction of the North West”.* The explanatory text accompanying Policy S16 also identifies *“the potential for additional windfall commercial development between the development boundary and the NWRR once constructed”* highlighting the potential of the scheme to unlock or improve access to housing and employment sites which will be key to Shropshire realising its economic development aspirations for the benefit of the wider public.

In January 2023, the Government awarded £18.7m of levelling up funding to support the regeneration of Shrewsbury town centre. The Shrewsbury Riverside Development, part of the Big Town Plan, comprises a mixed-use, low carbon waterside development, significantly improving Shrewsbury’s employment and productivity and attracting further private sector investment into the town. Taking advantage of the site’s riverside location, the programme will regenerate c1.2ha of brownfield land. This will create a mixed-use, low carbon development and will significantly improve Shrewsbury’s employment and investment opportunities for the town, but also wider county.

Associated transport, active travel, and public realm works near to the town’s gateway rail station will ensure this development programme is connected to and has maximum benefit for the town.

The redevelopment will tackle significant environmental and health and wellbeing challenges, including traffic congestion and air quality, poor accessibility to public transport and safe connectivity to the town centre.



The development includes public realm and active travel interventions aimed at improving resident and visitor safety, air quality and enjoyment of these areas through improved connectivity. In summary: 20% increase in footfall; 20% increase in cycling; 4 traffic management improvements to introduce two-way cycle infrastructure; reduced vehicle speeds; bus only provision and changes in direction of the traffic; 2.3 km of enhanced walking routes and cycleways; and a 21% reduction in NO₂ from 52.95µg/m³ to 41.8 µg/m³ in the Station area.

The Council estimates the Riverside Development will contribute net cumulative GVA of £425m / £303m (NPV) in addition to other significant wider social and economic impacts. It is considered vital to the economic prosperity of Shrewsbury and the wider region, predicted to attract 750,000 new visits a year, and substantially increasing investment and footfall for the benefit of existing businesses across the county as part of a wider £800 million investment in the town under the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan.

Implementation of the various public realm and active travel interventions which are key to the success of the development will further discourage and displace through traffic. Active travel connectivity improvements proposed as part of the scheme will encourage modal shift, but in and of themselves will not be sufficient. Shropshire has a high level of car ownership, with 84.2% of households having access to at least one car or van⁶. Without the North West Relief Road providing additional capacity and resilience for journeys between the north and south of the town, traffic from current routes through the town centre would be displaced on to the distributor ring road and the outer bypass resulting in extra traffic, further congestion and reducing the resilience of the network overall to unacceptable levels. For example, with the North West Relief Road in place, traffic travelling along The Mount, Smithfield Road and Chester Street, is predicted to see up to a 64% reduction in traffic flows in the PM peak compared to without the Scheme. But without the North West Relief Road this traffic would be displaced elsewhere.

An assessment of the likely highway network impacts of the draft Shropshire Local Plan development proposals outlined in the 'Reg 19 Pre-Submission Draft of the Shropshire Local Plan 2016 to 2038'⁷ found that "*The development proposals (i.e. sites allocated in the Local Plan at 2038) are also forecast to affect the performance of some of the A5 junctions which are already at or close to capacity in the baseline scenario. Preston Island, Bayston Hill (Dobbies) and Emstrey Island roundabouts are particularly impacted by the increased flows generated by the development traffic going to the proposed Land West of A49 employment site and further impacted by the displaced non-development traffic re-routing away from the Oteley Road corridor*". The assessment utilised the strategic transport model developed for the North West Relief Road (NWRR) produced in 2020 and as such made an assumption (without prejudice or pre-determination) that the North West Relief Road would be in place by 2038 alongside other identified development sites.

⁶ <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/22599/housing-strategy-2020-2025.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/21281/shrewsbury-highway-modelling-ev100.pdf>



The traffic forecast results presented in Chapter 3 and 4 of the assessment demonstrate that *“without any mitigation measures, the Local Plan proposal would increase the stress on the overall network performance”*. This conclusion was reached even in the event the North West Relief Road were to be granted planning permission and implemented, demonstrating that without it there will be a lack of necessary infrastructure to sustain the interventions proposed both as part of the Local Plan Review and Big Town Plan. On this basis, and in addition to the significant direct monetised transport economic benefits quantified in the Outline Business Case for the Scheme, it is considered that the North West Relief Road is an essential component of the town and wider region’s economic development, is in the public interest and thus represents wholly exceptional circumstances justifying the grant of planning permission.

