

MEMBER QUESTIONS
COUNCIL 18 JULY 2024

Question from Councillor Simon Harris

River Severn: Water Quality

2023 saw (according to data provided by The Rivers Trust) continuing over spills of sewage (partially treated / untreated) in to our rivers; though disappointingly the quality of the water / sewage being released and spilt is not monitored by the Water Companies that are responsible for these releases / spills.

In response to a Motion regarding river water quality (and the possible application, by the Council, of the Grampian Principles) supported at Full Council in January 2022 a Task & Finish Group was established.

The Group developed several practical actions (defined in the recommendations as 'hard' recommendations) aimed at using the Council's role eg in the Planning process, to work towards an improvement in river water quality and specifically a reduction in the sewage pollution that is released.

Can the portfolio holder advise which, if any, of these recommendations have been 'actioned'?

Can the portfolio holder also advise whether, in the light of a recent successful Freedom of Information request regarding Northumberland Water, the Council will now make a Freedom of Information request requiring Severn Trent Water to advise how many releases (overspills) they have permitted in 2023 on days when there was no rainfall ie days when the sewage treatment plants should not have been overwhelmed?

For the record the Task & Finish Group has requested this information from Severn Trent Water but the request was declined.

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

Let me begin by stating that The River Water Quality Task and Finish group was a good piece of Overview and Scrutiny Work that demonstrated how cross-political working by members can deliver robust evidence-based recommendations. We recognise that this a topic that concerns many people and the energy and focus of the work of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group demonstrated this.

We accepted the recommendations that were made because we did, and continue to support them, and we saw how the Council could contribute to their delivery. We are following through on the recommendations, albeit in the context of competing pressures on scarce resources. We should also recognise that the

recommendations cover a wide range of differing Portfolio Holder's remits, and whilst I'm very happy to take the lead on responding to these particular questions today, I do want to acknowledge the leading roles that Cllr Dan Morris as Portfolio Holder for Highways and Cllr Chris Schofield the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services play in this.

The Council does have productive working relationships with STW and I am pleased to be able to confirm progress in such areas as diverting rainwater and highways run-off away from waterways in the Clun Catchment. We are also working on the development of wider strategic initiatives, not just with STW but the Natural England and Environment Agency. In a big picture sense we are shaping future strategies across the wider catchment through the River Severn Partnership and the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme. Can I also take the opportunity to congratulate the River Severn Partnership for being recognised as a leading partnership nationally having recently won both awards from the LGC for Best Public/Public Partnership and MJ award for Innovation in Partnerships.

There is particular focus on pursuing opportunities to reduce incidents of flooding, which should mean that Water Treatment Companies don't need to release sewage into waterways as a result of treatment works and infrastructure being overwhelmed through agricultural run-off. We all welcome the achievement of Bathing Water Status for locations on the River Severn in Shrewsbury and the River Teme in Ludlow. This is a positive start and we would like to see more sites be given this status but know that this drives increased monitoring and testing.

Work is underway to progress the recommendations relating to the conditions that can be applied through our Planning Policies locally to help to ensure that the infrastructure and treatment capacity is in place before new developments are joined to the network. We do need to complete the adoption of the Local Plan to release officer capacity to look at this work in more detail.

We also remain committed to encouraging and enabling more frequent monitoring and testing, whether by the Environment Agency or by citizen scientists who can test to the standards required and help ensure that what is happening below the water's surface is visible.

I understand that the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is planning to commit it's whole meeting on the 14 November to following up on the progress and plans to deliver the River Water Quality Task and Finish group recommendations, and to also take account of the strategic partner developments. I am looking forward to what I am sure will be a thorough, constructively challenging, and progressive meeting on this topic which I know is a priority for us as members and the communities we represent.

Question from Councillor Roy Aldcroft

Greenfields Sports Pitches Market Drayton

For over 10 years there has been suggestions of building developments at Greenfields and moving the sports facilities to a new location. This clearly hasn't happened and due to the uncertainty of the future of Greenfields there has been no investment in facilities. Greenfields is the home of Market Drayton Town FC, Market Drayton RFC, Market Drayton Tennis Club, Market Drayton Tigers (Youth Football) and Men's Sheds. The site is now suffering from over use and the condition of facilities and infrastructure is a major concern. Market Drayton has the 3rd largest population in our authority area. It's a growing population and includes a high percentage of young residents.

Can the PH give an update on what plans are being developed to improve Sports facilities in Market Drayton?

Response from Councillor Rob Macey, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Digital

Shropshire Council has confirmed that Greenfields Sports Ground won't be relocated, or the site marketed, for at least 10 years. Therefore, our focus is now on improving the existing facilities at Greenfields to ensure they are fit for purpose. Funding has been made available for a feasibility study, and a team of consultants has been appointed to undertake this work. The outcome will be a range of fully costed options for facility improvements as well as an overall master plan. This work will take 3 months to complete, during which the consultants will speak to all clubs and organisations that use Greenfields. Engagement events will take place to share the findings with interested parties.

Once the feasibility work is complete and a preferred option identified, the Council will support applications for external funding and the necessary planning permission. This project is wholly reliant on external funding. One source of funding we will explore is Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This funding is linked to new housing development, and projects seeking CIL funding generated by houses built in Market Drayton must be considered against other priorities in the Place Plan area.

The emerging Local Plan, in Draft Policy S11.1, includes that:

"The relocation of Market Drayton Sports facilities from its current site on Greenfields Lane to land at Longford Turning, identified on the Policies Map, to enable the delivery of new facilities to at least equitable standard, is a central objective of the Strategy[...]Should the relocation of the sports facilities to land at Longford Turning prove to be unviable, appropriate consideration will be given to alternative sites on land adjoining the A53 to deliver the proposed relocation[...]The proposal will therefore need to enable sufficient improvements to the pedestrian, cycle and vehicle accessibility into the proposed relocation site, including the construction of a public footway and cycleway along the northern edge of the site and improved traffic management, sufficient to enable access to both the residential allocation and the proposed future sports facilities on land to the north.

The broad location of the proposed site at Longford Turning is identified on the Policies Map, but importantly this is NOT an allocation of that land, as the council did not undertake a formal consideration of alternative options for this purpose. Rather, we are enabling the strategy begun by the now aborted Neighbourhood Plan, which identified Longford Turning as the preferred relocation site.

The position in relation to the Local Plan is that:

- The principle of relocation remains a strategic objective for Shropshire Council, supporting improvements to sporting provision for the town and its hinterland.
- This is now a longer term priority, over ten years away, and therefore the Council should seek improvements to the current provision in the short to medium term, in partnership with the Town Council and Market Drayton Sports Association.
- The Local Plan, which runs to 2038, does not place a timeframe on relocation, therefore there is no conflict with the revised timeframe set out by the Council;
- The Council's evidence shows that the relocation to the Longford Turning site is feasible in relation to the site's scale, orientation and location.
- The current Greenfields site is not allocated for development in the Local Plan. However, being sited within the Development Boundary it is a potential opportunity for a housing 'windfall' site in the future, subject to planning permission, should relocation take place. The Local Plan is not reliant upon this to meet the housing requirement for the town to 2038.

The Council is currently working with the Grove School to open up their playing fields for community use to address some of the overplay issue at Greenfields. Positive conversations have been had with the school, Market Drayton Rugby Club and Market Drayton Tigers FC about using the pitches from the start of the 24/25 Football and Rugby season. We are also talking to the school about building an astroturf pitch on the school site, to benefit both students and the wider community. We have commissioned Notts Sport to undertake a feasibility study and cost this. The construction of an astroturf pitch will be reliant external funding.

Given the complexity of work planned in Market Drayton from a sport and physical activity perspective we have established an 'Active Market Drayton' group to look at the health and wellbeing of people living in Market Drayton. This group has only recently been set up but includes representatives from Shropshire Council, Market Drayton Town Council, Market Drayton Sports Association, Energize The Active Partnership for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and The Grove School. Additional organisations will be invited to join the group over the next few months.

Question from Councillor Christian Lea

Pyrolysis Plant

Shropshire Council resolved to invest £2m in a Pyrolysis Plant in order to produce Biochar. Locations for the site of the plant being considered were reported as , Bridgnorth, Ludlow or Shrewsbury.

It was later resolved to enter into a Joint Venture (JV) with a third party, to the tune of £500K so that the project could be accelerated.

Can the PH please:

- Update council on the progress with this investment?
- Confirm that the JV is on track or are there any risks that council should be aware of?
- Confirm that the original plan for a Shropshire based plant is still being planned for, and not being forgotten about due to the JV?

Response from Councillor Ian Nellins, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Environment and Transport and Councillor Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Assets

I am pleased to share that substantial progress has been made on both the JV project, named Biodynamic Carbon (BDC), and the Council Run Biochar (CRB) project. The overarching Programme Board meets weekly and covers both projects, ensuring that they are kept on track and that any identified risks are carefully managed.

50% shares of BDC have been issued to Shropshire Council and two council directors have been appointed to the board of BDC, sitting alongside two directors from our partner Carbon Hill (the other 50% shareholder). Carbon Hill is already a well-established company which has been producing biochar for use on their farm in Powys with impressive results since 2021.

A great deal of work has gone into setting the company up and the first drawdown of the loan £245,000 has been completed. It means that BDC is now fully established and funded and the order for the pyrolysis equipment has been confirmed and manufacturing of the equipment is underway.

A further progress payment is scheduled to be made on 22 July with the final payment being made on 2 September, totalling £500,000, when the equipment is fully completed, installed, commissioned and in operation.

Governance in place for the JV which includes a monthly steering group, quarterly board meeting and a half yearly financial review. A report to Cabinet will also be provided after every quarterly board meeting.

The CRB project has been run in parallel with the BDC project and a procurement process to seek to award a contract for the design, procurement, construction, commissioning, operation and maintenance of a biomass "Pyrolysis Plant" is now underway.

We have already had a promising start and initial responses indicate that there are multiple companies interested in participating in the tender process. We plan to consider these tender applications at the beginning of October.

Our preferred site for the CRB is now designated as Ludlow. This is due to difficulties in agreeing a change of use with the freeholder for the Bridgnorth site and also that part of the site in Ludlow which was formerly leased has now been vacated and has become available.

To ensure we keep to our timescales, a pre-planning application was submitted in May 2024 for both our Ludlow and Bridgnorth sites.

It is expected that both projects can be delivered within the approved budget of £2m.

These projects provide us with an innovative and sustainable way to reduce net carbon emissions and create value from waste, while also supporting local businesses and communities.

It's exciting - we are the first council in the UK to do this, but it is a scalable and replicable model that can be applied to other locations and has already attracted interest from other councils in the UK and companies internationally.

If the change of use issues at the Bridgnorth site can be overcome in the future and the initial project is a success, the site at Bridgnorth could be considered for a future second project.

Question from Councillor Brian Williams

A recent well-researched article in the Daily Telegraph detailed the following methods of repairing potholes.

- A. A company called Roadmole makes a remote controlled machine that cuts circular sections out of the road surface round potholes rather than the usual squares whose corners can become weak points for water seepage.
- B. Stoke-on-Trent City Council are using a JCB “pothole pro” which can fix a pothole in eight minutes at a cost of £30.
- C. The Nu-phalt Thermal Road Repair machine heats up a damaged patch of the road to recycle existing macadam to ensure that it bonds better with the new patch.
- D. The Kiely Multipatcher, which needs only one person to operate it, combines a pothole repair with small-scale surface dressing.

Will the portfolio holder undertake research to examine whether any of these methods could be cost-effective on Shropshire’s roads?

Response from Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways

The service is very focused on innovation and value for money interventions, with Shropshire being at the forefront of and viewed as one of the most forward-thinking rural highway authorities in the UK.

The exceptionally wet winter has had an unprecedented impact on the network, with many Councils across the UK reporting a significant increase in the number of potholes. Shropshire's innovative mixed economy delivery model for Highways has shielded the county from the worst of this impact. In April 2024 we repaired 3,192 potholes, which is a **29% increase** on April 2023 with similar resources. The number of potholes identified on inspection in April 2024 was 7,577, a **66% increase** on April 2023. This highlights the challenge we have, but also the amount of work our teams are delivering to try and keep pace with the demands being placed on the service.

Innovation is not difficult to find, with many companies offering new solutions to the challenges of the network. All networks present unique characteristics and it is frequently only when the innovation is trialled locally that the shortcomings and strengths are better understood. Good journalism can provide an interesting perspective but there is so much more to consider. In terms of the specific questions:

- a) Roadmole was reviewed and did not provide a good value as our existing 'find and fix' solution. 'Find and fix' teams now repair over 60% of defects on the network at a lower cost.
- b) The JCB Pothole Pro has been trailed in Shropshire and did not perform as well as the Multevo Multihog, which is now utilised widely across the county. The JCB Pothole Pro is also a very large piece of equipment which would not be suitable

for the majority of our narrow roads. The cost of £30 is also very misleading, this is does not include the full cost as Stoke City Council purchased the equipment at a significant Capital cost from a manufacturer (JCB) that is based in Stoke on Trent. The average benchmarked repair cost per defect across the Country is around £75.00.

- c) Shropshire Council has trialed thermal road repairs on numerous occasions as the technology has developed and Shropshire delivered a programme of work in the last financial year. The outcome of these trials remains inconclusive.
- d) Shropshire Council owns and operates two Jet patchers, called Roadmaster. Roadmaster is very similar process to the Kiely Multi-patcher.

The service remains focused on innovation and will have representatives at the LCRIG Innovation & Learning Festival this week.

Question from Councillor Roger Evans

As a result of the recent General Election a new government has been elected.

We note that in recent publications a number of claims were made, These include.

- Planning Permission has been given for the North West Relief Road. Can you please confirm is this true and if it is when was that issued.
- A statement was made that £153m had been secured and that a firm commitment had been made stating that the then government would pay in full, the cost to build this Relief Road. Can you confirm if this is true and if it is when did council receive notification of this commitment.

Given the increased precarious state of this council's finances, the Liberal Democrat Group ask that the present Conservative administration agree to declaring a moratorium be put into effect regarding any more work and spending involved with the construction of the North West Relief Road. This to remain in place until official confirmation is received concerning what the actual commitment our Government towards its cost is.

Response from Councillor Dan Morris, Portfolio Holder for Highways

- *Planning Permission has been given for the North West Relief Road. Can you please confirm is this true and if it is when was that issued.*

A resolution to grant planning permission has been given by the planning committee. This is subject to the completion of the Section 106 agreement. When this is in place, the planning decision to approve the scheme will be issued.

The grant of planning permission is not a guarantee or commitment that the development will go ahead. It is for the Council, thereafter, to decide whether it wishes to proceed with the development.

- *A statement was made that £153m had been secured and that a firm commitment had been made stating that the then government would pay in full, the cost to build this Relief Road. Can you confirm if this is true and if it is when did council receive notification of this commitment.*

This response is based on the assumption that the statement referenced was made by the office of the former Shrewsbury and Atcham MP. The Council can outline the current financial commitments in place for the North West Relief Road as being; £54.4m through DfT (as part of the Large Local Majors Programme), £4.2m through the former Marches LEP under the Growth Deal Programme. As publicly stated throughout the lifetime of the project, as part of the Outline Business Case submissions to both funders, the remaining balance of local match funding remained an obligation for the council itself. The level of this local match funding requirement will only be fully established following the current open market procurement process for a Main Contractor. The output from this process will then be part of the full scheme cost considered by Council in Autumn 2024 as part of the Full Business Case. As such, the council cannot comment on any estimates made by a third party.

In October 2023 the then Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper MP said publicly, that the government would 'fully fund' the scheme. We remain in regular contact with the Department for Transport (DfT) in order to clarify this position, and have been given no reason to date to believe that Government support for a potentially enhanced funding allocation (over its existing contracted OBC commitment) to the NWRR has changed. The council will of course also be developing alternative funding scenarios in parallel with this process as may be required, to ensure that its commitment to the road can be carried through to completion.

Question from Councillor Ruth Houghton

Due to phosphate levels in the River Clun, housing development has not been possible in the catchment area of the River Clun for a number of years. This includes development in Bishop's Castle where effluent from the Sewerage works is discharged into the River Kemp which joins the River Clun.

There are now local concerns that proposals are being developed that effluent from the Bishop's Castle Sewerage works be transferred from the River Kemp and discharged into the River Onny instead. The River Onny is a major tributary of the River Teme, which has recently been awarded bathing water quality status, and is also a river used for the fishing of Trout, Chubb and Grayling. Salmon Parr has also been observed in the River Onny

Does the portfolio holder agree that it would be unacceptable to discharge effluent into a river that is currently in near pristine condition and if so how will Shropshire Council ensure that the River Onny is protected under these circumstances.

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

The Council has established the Strategic Clun Liaison Group to bring together Severn Trent Water, the Environment Agency and Natural England to coordinate discussions and align management of water quality within the Clun catchment. Through this forum Severn Trent Water has shared plans for the water company to meet a ministerial direction to upgrade all sewage works serving >250 people in Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to technical achievable limits. The preferred option put forward by Severn Trent Water was the Bishops Castle transfer. This was progressed by Severn Trent Water in the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) update for their 5 year business plan (AMP8) in November last year, for agreement with DEFRA. This was agreed by Defra and we understand the proposal was planned for delivery in 26/27. However, recent meetings with the Environment Agency mean the scheme has been put back to 2030 to allow time for Severn Trent Water to work closely with the Environment Agency on potential impacts relating to flow. Whilst the Council remains fully engaged with partners through the Clun Strategic Liaison Group, the impacts of the proposal are being fully assessed by the Environment Agency as the regulatory leads and joint working between Severn Trent Water, Natural England and the Environment Agency is underway to understand impacts and delivery requirements to protect environmental quality and meet regulatory standards.