

**CABINET**  
**4 DECEMBER 2024**  
**RESPONSES TO MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**Alex Wagner**

Pressure on Shropshire Council's finances is reducing critical support to vulnerable people. Would the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care advise how Shrewsbury rough sleepers, who require specialised medical services, can currently access the resources they need, as their dedicated weekly Medical clinic ceased at the end of October 2024?

Response

Shropshire Council accesses central government funding in regard to Rough Sleepers called 'RSI 5'. This funding is awarded via a bid process. The last bid process was for 3 years, and this comes to an end March 2025. Part of this funding was being used to fund GPs to hold a surgery in the Ark and meet with and support rough sleepers. Unfortunately, when the Ark changed their model to a referral basis only, a much smaller number of people began accessing the service and at times the GP did not have anyone to see. The decision was made to change the use of the funding to enable the rough sleeper team to support individuals to access a GP close to them. This meant the funding no longer only focussed on those rough sleepers in Shrewsbury but could be used for everyone across the county. It also meant a stronger emphasis was placed on supporting independence as rough sleepers were encouraged to register at a local GP surgery and then attend when they needed to. Please be assured that if a rough sleeper needs to access a GP, they will be supported to do this regardless of whether the GP surgery is set up in the Ark or not. The Rough Sleeper Team currently operates Outreach across the county, ensuring daily support for anyone who is having to sleep on the streets. We have also recently enacted SWEP which is where we have to open facilities for rough sleepers when the temperature drops below 0.

**Julian Dean**

Since Shropshire Council declared a climate emergency, what additional offsetting measures (beyond any identified in existing arrangement such as those to do with recycling) have been identified that can demonstrably offset the council's greenhouse gas emissions and what emissions, in tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e, have been offset that would not otherwise have been offset? What has this cost over this same period?

Response

As a recommendation of the Northern Planning Committee in February 2024, which gave intent to award Full Planning Permission, subject to conditions (and the completion of required Section 106 agreements), this matter, on issue of Full Planning Notice, will be dealt with by Condition 41.

This places a requirement on Shropshire Council Highways (as Applicant), to produce a robust Carbon Assessment Plan (CAP) prior to the commencement of works, for the

consideration and agreement of the Local Planning Authority. Within this plan will be detailed assessments of the projects forecast impacts, and a comprehensive Management Plan that lays out specifically how the scheme's residual impact will be offset through a hierarchy of measures that prioritises delivery of these locally in Shropshire. This approach will fully align with the Councils stated Climate Emergency, and the management of the NWRRs impact will be owned by the project itself, as opposed to being an additional burden on the Councils wider carbon management approach.

The current estimate of the NWRR residual carbon impact is 55,900 tCO<sub>2</sub> by 2050. On issue of Full Planning Notice, the project will deliver the required CAP and resolved Management Plan. This will be placed in the public domain, and then monitored, assessed and validated by the Local Planning Authority as the project completes construction and the road comes into use.

As regards information around the wider work of the Councils Climate Team, then I would refer you to the most recent Climate Strategy Progress Report:

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/28625/climate-strategy-2023-progress-report.pdf>

## **Rosemary Dartnall**

*Shropshire Council's determination to go ahead with the NWRR project has long presented a threat to the council. In recent months Conservative portfolio holders have repeatedly relied on vague uttered funding promises and continued with spending, even exceeding delegated sums approved by council. Despite requests from opposition councillors to pause the project until clarity about funding was available, tens of millions of pounds have been spent.*

*This week has shown the external auditors Grant Thornton, warn of recklessness in the council's approach to this financially and environmentally expensive project, classifying NWRR governance as high risk to the council. And, yesterday a shocking new report was added to the planning portal. This report corrects the projected 62 year life carbon for the proposed road – it is no longer 49,000 tonnes – but has increased by more than 50% to just under 77,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The report makes clear any attempt at mitigation for the carbon emitted cannot be achieved by 2030 and a new deadline of 2050 is suggested. The cost of mitigation has soared from £1.4m to £8.4m: an extra £7m of capital casually notified via a planning report. This project is out of control, governed outside ideal standards of democracy and should be paused immediately.*

*Will the portfolio holder confirm he will take immediate action to halt all spending and all activity related to the NWRR until this environmentally and financially extortionate project can be transparently assessed by elected members on behalf of the residents they represent?*

## Response

I need to be really clear that the spend on this project to date has used money from grants or income and there has been no negative effect on any other services that council taxpayers have paid for. At this stage the only significant financial risk presented to this council would be in the event that the council itself withdrew support for the scheme as that funding would

then need to be repaid from the council's revenue fund. The prime reason we have been circumspect in sharing working budget costs is simply to protect the integrity of our competitive tender award process. Put simply if you were to have your driveway at home resurfaced you would not tell the companies bidding what you were prepared to pay. Likewise, we are keen to secure the maximum amount of grant possible from government to support this vital project.

The reason the NWRR continues to be developed as a key priority scheme is not simply because the administration of the Council recognises the benefits, it is because business and people tell us this scheme is important to them. In that sense I think those that oppose this critical scheme in support of their own ideologies are in the minority and are out of step with the future infrastructure needs of Shrewsbury and Shropshire as a whole. Shrewsbury is the thriving successful heart of our wonderful county, and it is disappointing that some people want to hold the town back, hold business growth back and prevent our local road network having the future resilience it needs.

Addressing some of the details, all spend is also undertaken within the ongoing delegations given to the project by Members through Full Council oversight. Internal and external scrutiny of the project has been understandably high, and it is important to stress that, the Grant Thornton report referred to, did not raise any priority matters for further action by the Council. All recommendations have now been addressed and the project continues to be delivered in line with the Councils required governance and oversight procedures.

As mentioned previously, the matter of the carbon impact of the project has been appropriately reevaluated, responsibly, in line with Full Business Case guidance issued earlier this year. A full and robust Carbon Management Plan will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for their approval prior to the commencement of works, and the project will then be subject to the oversight and monitoring of the Local Planning Authority as it progresses into delivery and future use. This will ensure that the project meets all of its required carbon targets around planning condition requirements, and therefore the wider carbon commitments of the council.

### **Bernie Bentick**

Shropshire Council declared a climate emergency 2019 and in December 2020 a Corporate Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan was adopted, aiming for Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2030.

It is therefore shocking that Shropshire Council's Trees Department decided to fell a healthy mature Oak tree on a public grass verge in Meole Village on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024, without notice, which I consider to be an act of environmental vandalism.

After incredulous Meole neighbours and I asked for an explanation, we were told that a Trees Officer ordered the felling of the native Oak tree on Washford Road, in preference to an adjacent (foreign) Sweet Chestnut tree, when there was said to be insufficient space between them, after repeated requests by a single resident to fell the Oak. The only residents consulted about the felling were those few whose properties were directly behind the grass verge and there was no consultation with the wider Meole Village residents, local Community Groups or myself as Councillor, which I and Meole residents consider completely unacceptable.

Will the Portfolio Holder commit to a full investigation, with the aim of preventing a recurrence of healthy indigenous trees being felled, without consultation with residents of the affected Electoral Ward, local Community Groups and the local Councillor?

Will the Portfolio Holder also please instruct the replacement of the Oak by another Oak this winter, at a site to be agreed with residents, in Meole Village?

### Response

The oak tree on Washford Road was located on highway land. Whilst it was felled this October, the decision to do so was taken by the Highway Officer, as the relevant asset manager in this instance, based on the advice of the Arboricultural Officer in November 2023. Shrewsbury Town Council initially attempted to fell the tree in March, but this was delayed until October due to the discovery of nesting birds.

In response to requests received by Cllr Bentick and residents the Tree Team Leader, who is the Council's senior arboriculturist, has conducted a detailed investigation of the records held by his team and has provided a full explanation of the decision to fell this tree. It has also been reviewed by the Service Manager at the request of the Chief Executive. In summary, the resident who lived closest to the tree had been raising enquiries with the Council about it since 2015. It was not a protected tree (i.e. subject to a Tree Preservation Order or located within a Conservation Area), so there was no requirement to notify the Local Planning Authority and undertake the associated consultations. Likewise, at the time the Highway Officer took the decision to fell the tree they were under no obligation to undertake any other consultations, although as a courtesy officers did consult with the owners of those properties that backed on to the land and no objections were raised at the time.

The decision to fell the oak was taken because, in the professional opinion of the Arboricultural Officer, which has now been confirmed by their manager, the adjacent sweet chestnut tree was the optimal specimen. It was also considered to be justified given the suburban nature of the site. Officers also ensured that the tree was not felled until compensatory planting had taken place, including the planting of a number of orchard trees funded through the Coronation Living Heritage Fund which the Council's Tree Team secured and administered.

It is considered by senior officers that the officers who took the decision to fell the oak tree were acting in good faith to resolve the long running issues that a resident was raising. However, it is acknowledged that the decision has subsequently proved controversial with other residents and Cllr Bentick. Therefore, as a gesture of goodwill the Tree Team Leader will be able to supply a new oak tree to be planted at an appropriate location in the village of Cllr Bentick's and residents choosing.