

Public Questions
Council 12 December 2024

Question from Huw Edwards

I submit this question on behalf of a resident as an elected parish council official despite the fact that an officer of Shropshire Council states that “ whilst the interventions of local members and Town Councillors may be well intentioned, they are I’d suggest unhelpful and indeed counterproductive.” This attitude is unprofessional at best. Speaking truth to power may be uncomfortable but it is absolutely necessary.

Shropshire Council have statutory rights to enforce Section 143 notices under the Highways Act 1980. As this allows Shropshire Council to be the prosecution, judge and jury please explain the steps followed to ensure that these are only ever properly and legally applied especially as there is no right of appeal. Without strict adherence to formal process and legal standards these notices are a breach of human rights, democracy and natural justice. If such a notice was issued to a resident who is deemed to obstruct a highway citing evidences which cannot define a boundary, please explain how this can be justified under the terms of your own policy on Better Regulation and Enforcement, particularly in terms of accountability, transparency, proportionality and consistency. The resident has provided copies of the correct legal documents and qualified professional opinion which confirm the resident’s boundary is correct yet Shropshire Council refuse to accept their validity and require further legal advice on a fundamental aspect of property law which should have been reviewed prior to serving the S143 notice.

What will Shropshire Council do to resolve this issue?

Question from Julia Jones

Hunting with dogs was banned in England and Wales nearly 20 years ago. Despite this, it is still commonplace across Shropshire and the country as a whole under the guise of ‘trail’ hunting. Trail hunting is now widely recognised as a cover for illegal hunting, with organisations such as Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust and Malvern Hills Trust banning it in recent years. It has been banned in Scotland and the UK Government has recognised in its manifesto the need to end it in England and Wales too. Senior police officers, such as Temporary Acting Deputy Chief Constable Matt Longman, the National Police Chiefs Council lead on fox hunting crime have also recognised the widespread misuse of trail hunting. Longman has described illegal hunting as “prolific”, and trail hunting a “smokescreen”. Senior police officers have also extensively discussed the weaknesses of the current law and the difficulties that presents to proper enforcement of the law. While we wait for

action from the Government to strengthen the legislation, landowners, especially public landowners, hold a responsibility to ensure that their land is not being misused for illegal fox, stag and hare hunting. What is Shropshire Council doing to prevent the use of its land for illegal hunting, including trail hunting which is illegal hunting by deception?

Question from Paul Cawthorne

Many of my questions to the Council in the past about the viability of the proposed Shrewsbury North West Road proposal seem to have been treated rather dismissively without full consideration of their underlying prudence, as have the protests of hundreds of locals sceptical of the wisdom of continued spending on the controversial and insecure NWR proposal.

Now the Council's External Auditor has confirmed that the current cost of building the road is £178m, more than double the original, and that funding has not been secured. But our greatest present concern is that there seems to be no plan to deal with the road's cancellation, which seems scandalous given the lack of funding and the £ many millions that have already been spent. What has been called "the gross mismanagement" of the North West Road project could bankrupt the Council, according to an experienced local politician. Members of the public, whether they supported or opposed the Relief Road, will now be demanding some accountability, given cutbacks to support services for vulnerable local people that have happened while spending on this road project has continued.

Therefore will the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Cllr Dan Morris, and the Chairman of the Audit Committee, Cllr Brian Williams, resign?

Question from Susan Wedlock

On Boxing Day, the Ludlow Hunt is planning to meet publicly in the Town Square, Ludlow. The event is advertised locally & nationally. During the meet, the hunt will block the public-highway and public access routes. Shropshire Council has asked them to apply for a road closure. However, they have not applied, and now they may compromise public safety due to missing deadlines for closures. The Hunt occupies the Square (again without permission), and the only place the spectators can stand is in the road, as the pavements are too narrow. If the spectators block the road without a road closure, the event will be unsafe for everyone. Not everyone in the vicinity will be aware of the event or potential risks. There will be no traffic management plan, no access for emergency vehicles and no scrutiny of health and safety measures. Please confirm that Shropshire Council will apply the same standards to the Boxing Day event as they do to every other organisation who stage public events on Highway. Additionally, there is a Dog Control Order for Shropshire,

with no exemption for hounds. Please also confirm that hounds will not be allowed to roam without a lead, and that any faeces left by a dog owned by the hunt, and not cleared up, will be subject to a fine, like everybody else. Can you confirm you will not permit them to meet in the town without a road closure & adequate control measures.

Question from Mike Streetly

Could the portfolio holder for transport please explain why WSP have used a different methodology for assessing the carbon impacts of the NWRR when reporting this to the LPA (for the purposes of complying with planning condition 41) compared to what the Dept for Transport has specified in its latest guidance (Feb 2024)? The method used for the reports to the LPA yields user emissions of the proposed new road that are around 80% lower than the new DfT guidance. Does this signify that the NWRR team feel that the LPA doesn't need to be told that the latest (and presumably most accurate) methodology yields much higher emissions?

Question from Jamie Russell

In a recent interview with BBC Shropshire Cllr Dan Morris claimed that the council plans to use £136m of Local Transport Funding to pay for the funding shortfall of the North West Relief Road. When Shropshire's share of the LTF was announced in February, Cllr Ian Nellins said: 'We're awaiting details of how the funding can be spent, but first indications are that it will offer the opportunity to improve the county's roads, bus and rail services, and transport infrastructure, which is great news for the county.' At the same time, then roads minister Guy Opperman visited the village of Leebotwood in South Shropshire with Cllr Morris. The minister explained to the Shropshire Star that it would be up to the local council working alongside MPs to decide how to spend the money. He explained it could be on anything from pothole fixing to pedestrian crossings and said it was 'not for any other part of the local authority budgeting' before explicitly adding that it couldn't be diverted into the North West Relief Road. Could Cllr Morris please explain: 1. What has changed since February that makes him think the LTF can now be used for the NWRR? 2. What the impact on the revenue budget will be if the NWRR is built using LTF money, given that the LTF award is only £20m/pa from 2025 to 2032 meaning the council would need to borrow to fund the road.