

CABINET – 14 OCTOBER 2026

RESPONSES TO MEMBER QUESTIONS

1. Councillor Duncan Borrowman

As Cabinet will be aware, Shropshire is home to the 25-metre radio telescope at Knockin near Oswestry, one of seven telescopes that together form e-MERLIN, the UK's National Radio Astronomy Facility operated from Jodrell Bank Observatory. The telescope is a distinctive local landmark in North Shropshire, but it is also part of a world-leading scientific instrument supporting thousands of researchers worldwide and contributing to cutting-edge astronomical research.

The decision by the Science and Technology Facilities Council and UK Research and Innovation not to renew operational funding for the facility threatens not only the future role of the Knockin telescope within the national radio astronomy network but also the wider scientific capabilities of Jodrell Bank Observatory itself. The consequences extend beyond astronomy. The facility supports highly specialised scientific, engineering and technical expertise, contributes to the UK's space capabilities, and has demonstrated applications in areas such as satellite and space debris tracking. It is also an important educational resource, inspiring thousands of young people to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Given the significance of this infrastructure to Shropshire, can the Leader confirm that Cabinet supports efforts to secure a sustainable long-term future for e-MERLIN and the Knockin telescope, and will work with local MPs, Government, UKRI, STFC, the University of Manchester and other stakeholders to make the case for continued funding of this nationally important scientific asset?

Response:

Thank you for your question. The Council recognises the significant scientific, educational and economic value of e-MERLIN and the Knockin telescope, both nationally and to Shropshire.

The University of Manchester owns and operates the facility, while STFC has decided not to continue its operational funding beyond March 2028, within the wider national funding settlement.

The Council will make every reasonable effort within its areas of influence, working with local MPs, Government, the University, UKRI, STFC and other

stakeholders to support efforts to secure a sustainable long-term future for the facility.

2. Councillor Ben Jephcott

Who is responsible for organising litter collection from the verges beside the A5 and A49, in particular the stretches around Shrewsbury, and the Battlefield Link? If it is Shropshire Council, rather than National Highways on the A49 and A5, what plans do we have to ensure this essential task is carried out and on what schedule? When was the last full litter collection along these verges carried out? Why did it stop happening? How has the budgeting and planning for this essential activity changed over the last decade?

The amount of roadside litter including sign paraphernalia belonging to National Highways or their contractors has been escalating in recent years and is now causing real public concern. Litter was a real issue in 2025 for many members from all sides of this Council. We made clear that cleaning up our environment was a key priority. Shrewsbury Town Centre thanks to the devolution to the Town Council looks much better, but what is the plan to deal with main road verges, especially around the major towns where it is worst?

Response:

The Council recognises the importance of maintaining a clean and attractive highway network and will continue to target resources where they can have the greatest impact. This includes responding to identified hotspots, working with partners where responsibilities are shared, and seeking opportunities to improve efficiency and service outcomes within the resources available.

Shropshire Council is the designated Litter Authority and is responsible for litter collection on the A5 and A49 within the county. Maintaining these routes presents operational challenges, as litter collection often requires lane or road closures and traffic management to ensure the safety of both road users and staff.

Like many local authorities, the Council continues to operate within significant financial constraints and must balance available resources across a wide range of statutory and essential services. The specialist requirements associated with trunk road cleansing mean that these activities can be complex and costly to deliver.

Based on records currently available, the last recorded full cleanse of the live carriageway and associated verges took place in 2023. Since then, cleansing

activity has been undertaken where it can be completed safely and where intervention has been identified, as necessary.

The Council is currently engaging with National Highways to explore opportunities to improve the management of litter on these routes. Ideas under consideration include the provision of larger waste bins at lay-by locations, reviewing servicing frequencies, exploring the potential use of solar-powered smart bins with compaction technology, and considering wider initiatives aimed at reducing littering and addressing issues associated with unsecured loads.

While these discussions are at an early stage, the Council remains committed to working with National Highways and other partners to identify practical and sustainable solutions that help improve the cleanliness and appearance of Shropshire's strategic road network. Preventing litter from being deposited in the first place will be an important part of any long-term solution, alongside targeted cleansing activity where this can be undertaken safely and effectively.

3. Councillor Harry Hancock-Davies

Residents, parents & Harlescott Junior School have raised serious and continuous concerns about parking around Featherbed Lane, The Parks and the surrounding areas during school drop-off and pick-up times.

Vehicles are regularly parked partly on pavements, close to junctions and in locations which restrict access to residents' properties and obstruct public transport. During a visit to the school, I also witnessed the difficulties this creates for pedestrians, including parents pushing their disabled children in wheelchairs, as well as the wider concerns regarding the safety of children travelling to and from school.

The school and its Governors have raised the possibility of physical measures, including metal barriers being installed around the junction of The Parks, and there have also been previous requests for Civil Enforcement Officers to attend during the busiest periods. However, this does not seem to have materialised.

Given the continuing concerns of residents, parents and the school, can the Council confirm what action it proposes to take to improve safety around Harlescott Junior School and assess what physical measures could be introduced to prevent dangerous and obstructive parking? I would also ask that the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder and appropriate Council officers meet with me to discuss these concerns in further detail and consider what practical measures can be taken forward

Response:

Thank you for the question.

I fully recognise the concerns that residents, parents and the school have raised regarding parking and traffic conditions around Harlescott Junior School at school drop-off and pick-up times. Ensuring that children can travel to and from school safely is something that we take very seriously.

Members may recall that Featherbed Lane was the subject of a significant package of road safety improvements in 2022. Those works were specifically designed to improve safety for all road users and included measures identified through the council's assessment process. This included the introduction of a 20mph speed limit.

I also agree that traffic outside schools is a wider issue that affects many communities across Shropshire. The council is working hard to encourage and enable more children and families to walk, cycle and wheel to school wherever possible, helping to reduce congestion and improve safety around school gates.

I am particularly pleased that as part of their devolution deal Shrewsbury Town Council has recently undertaken work on Featherbed Lane to restore the footways to their full width. This is a welcome improvement which helps pedestrians and improves accessibility for those using wheelchairs, pushchairs and mobility aids.

In relation to further interventions, it is important that any additional measures are evidence-led and proportionate to the issues identified. Whilst physical measures such as pedestrian barriers can sometimes form part of a solution, they are not always the most effective answer and can, in some circumstances, create unintended consequences. For that reason, any proposals would need to be carefully assessed before decisions are made.

The issue of pavement parking is one that I know concerns residents across the county. Obstructive pavement parking can have a significant impact on pedestrians, particularly disabled people and families with young children. However, the council continues to await further detail from government on how local authorities will be empowered to enforce pavement parking restrictions directly. Until that position is clarified, our powers remain limited.

I am always happy to engage with local members, schools and local communities on ways that we can improve conditions around schools and support more

families to choose to walk, wheel or cycle to school. Officers will continue to consider concerns that are raised and assess whether any further measures are justified by the evidence available.

Finally, I would be very happy to meet with the local member and relevant officers to discuss the situation in more detail, hear the concerns that have been raised and explore what practical options may be available to further improve safety and encourage more children to walk to school and leave the car at home where possible.

4. Councillor Duncan Kerr

Cabinet reports and decisions on the 17th Jan 2018 and 11th April 2018 set-out the Council's strategy and prioritisation for assessing area of the County for the parking strategy framework including new resident's parking schemes.

The prioritisation approved was the following framework:

Phase 1 Shrewsbury

Phase 2 Ludlow

Phase 3 Bridgnorth

Phase 4 Oswestry

Phase 5 All other areas

Following the suspension of work in Bridgnorth work started in Oswestry in 2022 and I have several emails with Kevin Aitken and Harry Guest regarding its progress which seemed to stall.

Since the election in May 2025 I have heard nothing. As the prioritisation approved in 2018 is still, to my knowledge, Council policy I assumed that as soon as resources became available the work in Oswestry would be re-started.

However the response you gave at the Council meeting on the 24th September to a question for Cllr Halliday implied that rather than resourcing the continuation of the work in Oswestry you would be re-directing these resources to Shrewsbury which does not accord with the framework.

Can you confirm whether this is the case when was Council policy changed and what consultation was carried-out before-hand

Response:

The current administration is not departing from a Council decision. On the contrary, we are returning to the Council's adopted policy and seeking to progress work that has remained incomplete for many years.

The prioritisation framework approved in 2018 remains an important reference point, but it has only been implemented in Ludlow. Given that no schemes were delivered in the Phase 1 area, it would be difficult to argue that the Council has already completed the work identified for Shrewsbury and should simply move on. What we are doing is picking up and progressing the Council's adopted approach after a prolonged period in which very limited progress was made.

I would also note that priorities for work programmes must always be considered alongside available resources, current evidence of parking pressures, and operational requirements. Any decisions about the allocation of resources are being taken within that context and with the objective of delivering tangible outcomes for residents, rather than leaving approved decisions undelivered.

There were several reports, including those referred to by Councillor Kerr, covering the Parking Strategy, the implementation of the linear parking model, and associated residents' parking policies and prioritisation documents. The Council maintains a list of requests for residents' parking schemes, which continues to evolve as circumstances change in local areas.

The 2018 framework envisaged a programme of residents' parking implementation alongside wider parking strategy changes. Although Shrewsbury was identified as a Phase 1 priority area, no residents' parking schemes were delivered there.

Under the prioritisation methodology, Shrewsbury, Ludlow and Bridgnorth received the highest score, while Oswestry and a number of other towns were placed in the next tier. Since then, Ludlow's scheme has been completed, Bridgnorth's existing scheme is under review, and Oswestry's existing arrangements have been assessed but not yet progressed further.

It is also important to note that Bridgnorth and Oswestry have existing paper-based permit schemes that require review, digitisation and alignment with the Council's agreed charging structure.

At the same time, there is a clear need to accelerate work on a residents' parking scheme in Shrewsbury. Doing so should not come at the expense of necessary work elsewhere in the county.

This is therefore not a case of changing Council policy or abandoning work in other towns in favour of Shrewsbury. It is a case of progressing the Council's existing policy, recognising that while Shrewsbury was designated a Phase 1 priority in 2018, no residents' parking schemes were ultimately delivered there. The current administration is seeking to complete that unfinished work while continuing to progress reviews of existing schemes elsewhere in the county.

5. Councillor Robert Jones

The new Local Plan offers an opportunity to develop locally distinctive policies that reflect Shropshire's priorities, environmental assets and economic strengths. Agriculture remains one of the cornerstones of Shropshire's economy and identity, supporting jobs, businesses, food production and the wider rural economy.

Best and Most Versatile agricultural land is a finite resource which, in most cases, once lost to development, is effectively gone forever. While individual developments may only result in a relatively small loss of agricultural land, the cumulative impact over time can be significant.

Given the importance of safeguarding productive agricultural land for future generations, food security, economic resilience and natural capital in the face of climate change, can the Portfolio Holder tell us:

- Whether the Council is considering a specific locally distinctive policy approach to safeguarding Best and Most Versatile agricultural land within the emerging Local Plan?
- Whether the Council is reviewing examples of good practice from other local planning authorities, such as Cheshire East, where highly robust policies have been developed and implemented to ensure proposals affecting BMV land are rigorously assessed?
- Does he agree that the permanent loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land should only occur where clearly justified and that temporary developments affecting such land should be required to secure its restoration to productive agricultural use once the development ceases?

Response:

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) policy N1 states that for Plan making purposes, Development Plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment, and in doing so should steer the location of development, including site allocations, in ways which utilise land of least

environmental value, including avoiding the use of higher quality agricultural land where land of poorer quality is available.

For decision making purposes, policy N2 of the NPPF states that to contribute positively to the natural environment, development proposals should take into account the quality of agricultural land, and if significant development of agricultural land is necessary, use areas of poorer quality land where possible.

In responding positively to these requirements, and to inform the new Local Plan, an updated site assessment methodology has been prepared which specifically RAG rates site proposals against their agricultural land value as part of the consideration of a site's physical constraints. In doing so it is considered the quality of agricultural land is being fully incorporated into the site assessment process, and that seeks to avoid the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land.

For wider plan making, whilst the Council must not seek to duplicate policies contained in the NPPF, consideration is being given to policy areas which can add value and recognise the distinctive qualities of Shropshire. No firm proposals have yet been established for the policy areas the new Local Plan will cover, but the Council is happy to consider and respond to best practice in this area, and we will ensure that communities have the chance to comment and shape the plan during 2027 and 2028.

6. Councillor Andy Boddington

- Will Ludlow services 701 and 702 participate in the £2 national fare cap from January 2027?
- Under their current contracts, who retains fare revenue and bears revenue risk?
- Would a reduction from £3 to £2 require additional council funding after government reimbursement?

Response:

Thank you, Councillor Boddington.

Services 701 and 702 are operated by Diamond Bus under minimum subsidy contracts. This means that Diamond retains the fare revenue and carries the associated revenue risk.

In terms of the £2 national fare cap from January 2027, Diamond has indicated that it is likely to continue participating, as it has done since the fare cap was

introduced. However, it has not yet received confirmation of its funding allocation from the Department for Transport, so it is not yet able to give a firm commitment for January.

The fare cap is funded directly by Government to participating bus operators. It is not funded through the Council's local bus budget. Therefore, reducing the passenger fare from £3 to £2 under the Government scheme would not, in itself, require additional Council funding to make up that difference.

We will confirm the position on the 701 and 702 once Diamond has received its funding allocation and confirmed its participation.