

## **Outstanding Highways Issues in Wem**

### **Background**

Highways issues have been a problem in Wem for many years especially with the increasing number and size of HGV's using the town as a through route. In 2016 after pressure from the Town Council an HGV survey was undertaken by Shropshire Council. The results of this survey were presented by Shropshire Council on 12.1.17 at an Open Town Meeting attended by over 75 people. At the Town Council meeting held 26.1.17 the following resolution was passed

#### **RESOLVED:- to support the following options**

- **To request a review of HGV signage in the Town and surrounding area.**
- **To request that Shropshire Council Highways Department undertake a feasibility study into whether a traffic lighting system to manage vehicle flow through the town similar to the Much Wenlock system would be suitable for Wem.**
- **To request that Shropshire Council consider whether there was any merit in implementing a one way traffic system through the town to relieve pressure on the High Street and surrounding roads.**
- **The Town Council would wish Shropshire Council to reconsider the need for a relief road to enable HGV traffic to bypass the town.**
- **That the parking bay outside the old Nat West Bank be converted into a loading bay. This option must go hand in hand with an increase in the presence of Parking Enforcement Officers in the Town.**

**FURTHER RESOLVED:- That as it is vital to continue to engage on this issue with Wem Rural Parish Council, local business and community representatives, Wem Economic Forum is nominated as the lead group to progress these options in partnership with Shropshire Council.**

As a result of this resolution in April 2018 Wem Economic Forum Traffic Working Group carried out a lengthy consultation with the public, the results of which were considered by the Town Council at its meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2018. The following resolution was passed under minute point 32/18 and sent to Shropshire Council.

**RESOLVED:- to submit to Shropshire Council the following schemes as the Town Council's priority community safety projects;**

- **Introduction of an environmental weight restriction on Mill Street**
- **Creation of a one-way system west east along Noble Street**
- **Diversion of Vehicles down Drawwell Lane**
- **Creation of a one-way system along the High Street from New Street junction around the town.**

Alongside this work discussions were also held with Shropshire Council and Owen Paterson MP over the need for a relief road but this suggestion was not progressed due to a lack of finance available to carry out a scoping project.

Since 2019 the WEF Traffic Working Group have met regularly with officers and were pushing Shropshire Council to progress these matters particularly the one way system, the Chapel Street

and Leek Street traffic priority reversal as an experimental order and the installation of signs to discourage HGV's from using the town as a cut through. To date only the HGV signage has been progressed to any conclusion and these were installed in 2020 although there is still some confusion around whether the signs are in the agreed location.

During May 2020 the Town Council was approached by Shropshire Council to discuss social distancing measures in the town. A site visit was attended by Cllr Dee, Kevin Aitken and Cllr Towers and it was proposed by Shropshire Council that the section of New Street from the Business Park and High Street from Mill Street Junction to the Co-op junction would be made one way to allow for social distancing by pedestrians. As part of these works it was proposed that the reversal of the one way system on Leek Street and Chapel Street would also take place in order to allow access to the car park from Mill Street. It was agreed that these works would take place as an experimental order which was slightly different to how the works were implemented in other towns. This proposal was considered by the Town Council on 25.6.20 and the following resolution passed:

**RESOLVED****- to support Shropshire Council's proposals on the proviso that there is a full consultation with the wider community at the end of the experimental order.**

On 26.6.20 the Town Clerk was made aware of a post on Social Media with details of the proposed one way system, an incorrect map was uploaded which included a much larger one way system than what was being proposed and this was circulated widely on social media resulting in numerous complaints to both Shropshire Council and the Town Council. Following this a meeting was held with Steve Brown, Cllr Dee and Kevin Aitken via teams on 15.7.20 where the Town Council's stance was repeated in relation to the Covid-19 proposals. No further update was provided by Shropshire Council except for an email received from Kevin Aitken on 7.8.20.

*We are now having to cut back on the introduction of any new Covid 19 social distancing measures. We are currently awaiting advice from our Public Health group, their report is expected next week.*

*If Covid 19 measures are required we will only be introducing a trial one way on the eastern section of High Street and on the southern section of New Street. We have recently undertaken vehicle swept path analyses and tracking assessments to the Chapel Street and Leek Street junctions, we have severe concerns with regards to vehicles having to overrun the footways whilst undertaking turning movements, therefore we are not now proposing to include the reversal of existing one-way on these streets as part of the proposals.*

No further communication has been received on this issue until meeting held which was organised by Cllr Dee on 15.10.20

Notes from Meeting Held with Steve Davenport on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020 at 11.00 in Edinburgh House to discuss outstanding Highways Issues in the Town.

Present

Cllr Steve Davenport Shropshire Council Highways Portfolio Holder

Cllr Mellings, Cllr Dee, Cllr Broomhall, P O'Hagan Town Clerk

**Highways Update** - Cllr Davenport provided a brief update on how the Kier contract was developing and progress within the Highways Teams on recruitment and the redesign of the teams.

**Street cleaning** – Concerns over the lack of progress on the street cleaning pilot were raised. Cllr Davenport explained the complexities of this in relation to the current Kier contract. He expressed a willingness to work with Town and Parish Councils to re-look at the current streetscene management process so that local councils could have more input into it in the future and ensure that matters raised were dealt with quickly and not to the detriment of the town. The Clerk explained it would be useful if Town and Parish Councils could be trusted to report matters via the same portal that Councillors use as this could speed up the process and provide more of a digital trail.

**Outstanding Highways issues in the town** - The Clerk outlined some of the recent background to the issues that were concerning Councillors.

It was explained that except for the HGV signage to date none of the concerns previously raised by the Town Council had been progressed. Councillors were particularly concerned about the lack of action over the one-way system that was proposed as part of the Covid -19 social distancing measures. It was recognised that the proposals did meet with fierce opposition from members of the public but this opposition was partly due to the fact that residents were responding to an incorrect proposal which was circulating on social media and included a much larger one-way system than what was being proposed. However, despite being given this information nothing was done by Shropshire Council to address this.

Cllr Mellings expressed the view that any experimental one-way system would need clear and appropriate communication with residents and stakeholders prior to it starting and that any scheme may also require the installation of temporary pedestrian crossing points along its route especially on Pym's Road to alleviate the fears of residents that the proposals will result in an increase in the amount of traffic through residential areas. The view was also expressed that a one-way system would only work with an alteration to the traffic flow on Leek Street to enable vehicles to access the main car park from Mill Street.

Steve Davenport explained that he was keen to work with the Town Council in order to have schemes developed for the benefit of residents and the town's historic buildings but needed a clear steer from the Town Council in exactly what projects they considered the most important to progress. It was agreed that a motion would be put to the Town Council by Cllr Mellings, Dee and Broomhall at its October meeting so that Shropshire Council can be clear exactly what highways issues the Town Council sees as a priority for progression.