

Report 2 to Wem Town Council by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers – July 2021

Dear All – Please find below our second written report as your County Councillors.

Business has continued to accelerate across the County Council as the May elections now fade into the past and committee's start to do their work in scrutinising and delivering for Shropshire residents. Measures to control the spread of Covid, particularly as restrictions required by government having eased on July 19th are still being issued and we will pass them on for your information/circulation as they come to us.

Cases have been rising fast in Shropshire over the last month, and although they are still increasing, the rate has started to slow. In the week of 2-8 July, there was 568 new cases reported – an increase of 24% on the previous week.

Once again, the majority of cases were among the young, unvaccinated population with the average age just 29. We are backing the NHS campaign locally to get as many 18-29 year olds vaccinated as quickly as possible. If you know someone who is, please encourage them to get the jab.

Our Induction training continues....so some hours each week are spent having these sessions, as well as picking up an increasing case load of local issues that need to be followed up on.

As to other matters that concern the town that we have begun to tackle:

The White Horse – We now have a date to meet Shropshire Council's Manager for Natural and Historic Environment on-site this next week. He has been key in getting to grips with this long and complex issue. Hopefully he will be able to show us progress is being made in rescuing this iconic building.

State of High Street car park – There continues to be no further update about this since Chris Mellings last report to the Town Council in April 2021. The public continue to express their safety concerns to us and we will continue to press for the needed repairs at every opportunity.

Highways and Traffic Issues – We have now had the long-awaited for meeting with Shropshire Highways (Steve Brown and Dave Gradwell) and Steve Charmley (SC Portfolio for Highways) on 20th July and a brief report of this was given at the Town Council Planning Meeting later that night. In short the action points we are now working to are:

- Shropshire Council will provide the name of the officer assigned to lead the Wem project (this should now have been notified to us when this report is presented to Council)
- Plan for a meeting for early/mid September to meet again and update on the development of a project plan
- In future provide monthly 'catch up' meetings to report progress on timescales

This now gives us something positive to report and helps us move forward in trying to ease our highway issues.

Welcome Back Fund – following the Government's announcements about this and some delay, Penny has attended a 'Welcome Back Fund Briefing' on 19th July where it was confirmed that Wem will receive £10500 for the following works

- Supporting the Christmas Period – It must be used for new items only
- Enhancing the High Street eg. additional street cleaning / public realm works

She has sent Town Councillors an email giving details about this, and by the time you read this 'Monthly Report' she will have supplied us with her report together with collated ideas for the Town Council to consider how we wish it to be allocated in time for their deadline of 13th August! Our part is just to submit suitable applications, theirs is to administer the process for those they approve. There has been slippage of about a month in the planned timescale, it was to see '**works delivered through July and August.....but we have until 31st March 2022 to spend the funding**'. Our hope remains that it will bring some much-needed benefit to Wem.

Isherwoods Way - The hoped for signs of movement reported in Chris Mellings' April report still have not progressed on the ground. Outstanding issues have still to finally be resolved and the roads adopted after seven long years! Please refer to our June report for details. Chris was told in his final exchange about this, that an updated inspection has been carried out and various remedial works have been marked up to be dealt with. A confirmation of timescales still hasn't been received! Obviously we will continue to press for these outstanding issues and road adoption to be completed.

Finally we attended a very long!! meeting of Shropshire Council on 15th July 2021 held at Theatre Severn...each of us again well spread out over all the floors...but this time with the advantage of each having a microphone....that unfortunately 'played up' towards the end of the afternoon! Four matters of note to us in Wem on the agenda were:

1. The very big item of **approving the new Shropshire Local Plan for submission for Examination**. The debate was vigorous but ultimately resulted in a slim majority for it's acceptance. It clearly has issues within it that will now be the subject of debate with inspectors, etc going forward as we try and find a successor to the current SAMDEV plans that run until 2026. The need to have a healthy 5 year plus land supply is clearly important to prevent sporadic and opportunistic development with little proper scrutiny, but the process of how these new plans have been developed and the current conclusions that have been made is at the heart of finalising what will be SAMDEV 2, that is planned to run concurrently until 2036.
2. There was **an item on 'Investment in Highways'** led by Steve Charmley (portfolio Holder) that we have already reported to you by email on Fri 16th July to say that ***"variations to the current capital programme were agreed and an extra capital investment of £8m was set aside for highway maintenance for the current year. A mandate was also given to officers to investigate a highway investment strategy of between £60m and £120m as part of a broader medium-term financial strategy."*** This clearly shows that the public disquiet about the state of our roads has been noted in Shirehall. These changes, with some cautionary advice as to which other pocket the money was coming from!, were welcomed by Shropshire Councillors. As one resident wrote to me about these changes: ***"I can understand the scale of the issue as there have been years of "neglect". Key that the strategy is got on with and properly resourced. Competing demands for money will only get more intense"***.
3. **Some constitutional changes were voted upon one of which is to remove all references to Local Joint Committees**, that had been introduced at the beginning of Shropshire Council in 2009 in order to encourage local decision making. Because of financial pressures and the reduced capacity of officers to provide support for LJC's their effectiveness has been diminished. Several Councillors (including myself-EWT) spoke about their value in keeping democracy local and the benefits of getting to know Councillors from our neighbouring parishes, their needs and finding ways to work together on projects of mutual interest. Lezley Picton (Leader of SC) speaking for this change, said she was aware of the value that LJC's had brought and was working on an alternative model that was perhaps broader in scope based around the 18 Place Plan areas in the county. Needless to say the change was voted through, so we shall now have to monitor how Lezley's plans take effect and whether they will need to be challenged and refined so that the best of the work of the LJC's is maintained in giving local people a voice and in calling SC officers/councillors to account.
4. Motions were passed about:
 - Decarbonising our homes
 - Forming a partnership between Local Government and National Government to tackle Climate Change
 - A commitment to support an initiative to make Shropshire into a recognised 'Council of Sanctuary' welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries and to work towards achieving the status/recognition of the national award 'Council of Sanctuary'

Hopefully this brings you up to date a little about some of the key issues that affect us here in Wem. However, if there are matters we haven't covered, or you would like to raise/need information about, then let us know.

Kindest regards, *Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers*

Shropshire County Councillors for the Wem, Wem Rural & Whixall Division