

Report 3 to Wem Town Council

by Shropshire Councillors Peter Broomhall + Edward Towers – August/September 2021

Dear All,

Despite being the August 'holiday month' Peter and myself seem to have quite a lot to deal with, so our apologies for the length of this report! From our perspective general confidence does seem to be returning in our area - especially where outdoor activities/employment are involved. Nevertheless, it also seems that many of our residents are in fact waiting to see the effect on the population as schools and universities have now restarted after their summer breaks.

Rachel Robinson, Shropshire Council's director of public health has said *"Although we have seen a slight decline in cases during this week, infection rates remain very high. I expect to see the number of cases rise again now that children have returned to school, young people are back in colleges and going to university, and people return to work after summer breaks. We are also seeing a spike in care homes, so we are working closely with these settings to reduce the risk. Another 8 deaths between 27 August and 2 September takes the total locally over the last month to 21. This is a stark reminder as to how serious COVID-19 is. Thanks to the vaccines, the majority of people who get the virus will have very mild symptoms or will be lucky enough to have no symptoms at all, but we must think about the vulnerable people in our community."*

As to other matters that concern the town that we have been tackling:

The White Horse – We met with Dr Andy Wigley, Shropshire Council's Manager for Natural and Historic Environment on-site on 28th July. We looked over the building from the outside and heard from him the point that SC have reached in trying to resolve this long-running problem. An expression of interest was made by a party that were really seeking grant-funding to enable them to proceed. (You may remember that they has also contacted Wem Town Council a while back for funding and we replied that we don't award such grants). This is also not available and so as some time has now passed, he was going to confirm that this expression had lapsed. This would then allow Shropshire Council to continue to explore options for purchase with the Crown Estates, where the freehold now lies. We haven't heard of any further progress over the summer months, so will again be following this up.

State of High Street Car Park –The public continue to express their safety concerns to us and we continue to press for the needed repairs at every opportunity. This last week we wrote to Shropshire Council about the state of the vegetation that is overflowing borders and causing safety hazards, parking difficulties This is posing serious problems for cars and entering and leaving as for those pushing trolleys suddenly appear in front of moving cars from alongside bushes that have overgrown the borders. People are getting their skin scratched, clothes torn/damaged and their personal safety put at risk as they try and move out of the way of oncoming cars.

Highways and Traffic Issues – After a long delay and many emails we now have had a date for a face to face highways meeting between Shropshire Council and representatives of the Town Council [**Wednesday 29th September at 14.00 starting in the Roden Suite, Edinburgh House**]. Kevin Aitkin has been appointed by SC to lead the Wem Highways/Traffic Project and guide any experimental orders/trials based on the plans we have previously consulted about with the town.

Welcome Back Fund – We have proposals before us regarding the spending of £10500 allocated to Wem from this Government grant. These cover:

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

As you know we have submitted some suitable applications for Shropshire Council to administer and hopefully approve. There has again been slippage in the planned timescale that our Town Clerk is actively pursuing as it was to see **'works delivered through July and August'**...in particular to enable those projects we had agreed for supporting the town's Christmas Period. Time is running very short for ordering materials. **However, we do have until 31st March 2022 to spend the funding'.**

Isherwoods Way - Regrettably the hoped for signs of movement reported in Chris Mellings' April '21 report still have not progressed on the ground. We have now had approaches from at least two residents, as well a long meeting with one of them. There is now developing a very real problem with house sales because residents/ insurance companies fear that the home-owners in the vicinity will end up paying for the needed works, etc! There is the further fear that the infrastructure in the roads will also start to collapse because they were temporary fittings until road surfacing, etc was completed. As it is the road has a very uneven surface that traffic has either to surmount or to try and drive around, causing unnecessary damage to

the vehicles involved. Our June report mentions outstanding issues that have still to be resolved to enable the roads can be adopted....after seven long years! We know that an updated inspection was carried out before our election in May when various remedial works were marked up to be dealt with. We will continue to press for these very real problems and road adoption to be completed. A confirmation of timescales would be a first step...but there is now sign of this, as yet!

Lowe Hill Road Development for 100 homes agreed in the SAMDEV 2026 plan – We are very concerned about the access point to this development that we all agreed was a problem at our Planning Meeting on the 20th July, so we followed up with Shropshire Council to see where the planners had got to in their discussions. As a result we were put in touch with the Highways Department and had a site meeting with a representative from the department on 13th August. We were amazed to find that the Thomas Adams School wasn't considered a statutory consultee, so have contacted the school to see if they wanted to make a representation. Shropshire Council Highways said there was still time for this, despite our considering the matter back in July! They had a site meeting with the Headteacher on Wed 15th September. In our site visit we pointed out other possible entrances/exits to the development, and it was clear to us that the visit had proved very useful in showing 'Highways' how many cars were being parked around Lowe Hill Road and Pym's Road. We must hope that the Committee supports the town council's position of rejecting the access arrangements for this site. The other key points we asked Planners (and then the representative of highways that we met with):

- 'are the 'highways department' dealing with the Lowe Hill Application aware of the work going on with other officers at Shropshire Council to sort our long-standing Highway/Traffic issues in and around the town and testing them with 'experimental orders'? and will this affect their decision?
- Has consideration been given when coming to a decision on the access to the site for 100 homes about the very real possibility that under the proposals for SAMDEV 2036 (now with the Planning Inspector) there could be another 200 homes along the remaining stretch of Lowe Hill Road. Where would be best for this access, we asked. Would it not be best to have some joined up thinking here?!

It is now likely that this application will now come before the Northern Planning Committee at their next meeting on the 28th September.

The Millenium Green Edward has had two sets of discussions with representatives of the Millenium Green about:

- encouraging the use/development of this lovely area
- asking Shropshire Council to continue to offer their facilities for the free pick up of their waste, which they have now agreed after initially withdrawing this facility!

North Salop Wheelers (NSW). Edward chaired (as a Shropshire Councillor) and Peter represented WRPC (as a Parish Councillor) a meeting on the 19th August in the Lower Hall of Wem Baptist Church to assist NSW in finding a future starting with a new committee/officers. One key decision taken was to hold the delayed 2021 AGM for North Salop Wheelers on Thursday 9th September 2021. This took place and **a new committee comprising of 4 Officers and 4 Area Representatives was unanimously appointed to serve until the next AGM on 14th March 2022. The new Chairman is Cllr Andrew Everett.** This in turn has unlocked immediate funding from Shropshire Council-amongst other sources, and means that other key decisions ranging from staffing to fleet renewal can now be considered to further stimulate the groups future. Behind them they also have the successful Shropshire Community Transport Consortium (CTC) who will offer them a range of practical support measures, as needed. Whilst there is a lot of work to be done, the future of NSW now looks to be very different, one aspect of which could be trialling a linear 'destination-focussed' mode of operation using parish council support as well as individual pick-ups through 'ring and ride'.

Bus Back Better On-Line Survey. We sent you an email on 31st August to give some details related to this.

Shropshire Council are conducting an on-line survey that now has the 17th September as a closing date. It is part of the National Bus Strategy which is perhaps the greatest change to these services since 'deregulation' was introduced in the Transport Act of 1985 (ie transfer of operation of bus services from public bodies to private companies). As such it is very important that the public take a few minutes to give their opinions as this may well help to improve the sparse situation we currently have locally. It may well also help volunteer transport groups such as NSW Wheelers going forward.

We have not had a full Shropshire Council meeting during August, so nothing to report so far, as this report is being written. The next full Council Meeting is on 23rd September. One issue that has arisen is the new Cabinet's decision to implement that of the previous administration and close the two highway depots at Hodnet and Bridgnorth. This means, amongst other things, there will be none left on the east of the A49/county. Sufficient signatures have been received to recall the decision, put it on the agenda, further discuss it and attempt to amend it.

Hopefully this brings you up to date with the key issues affecting us here in Wem. If there are other matters not covered, or you would like to raise then let us know.

30.9.21

Agenda item 20b Shropshire Councillor Report

Kindest regards,

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers

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

Date: 16th Sept 2021