

Shropshire County Councillor's Annual Report to Hadnall Parish Council – 2025/26

Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for being so welcoming and helpful in my first year in a completely new role for me. I have had to find my feet quickly and hopefully I have been of some service to your community in that time. I am looking forward to working with you further and maximising what we can do to improve the circumstances for everyone.

Highways

Highways issues generally have been high up our priority list within my council group. My colleagues and I are set to play prominent roles in upcoming 'Task and Finish' groups on Highways, Potholes and next steps after the cancellation of the North-West Relief Road. We intend to closely scrutinise Shropshire Council processes to identify how we are failing in these areas and options for improvement.

I have recently had very productive meetings with Simon D'Vali, Shropshire Council's new Strategic Transport Executive Manager, a new role in Shropshire. He is part of a new injection of personnel into the Highways Department and my initial impressions are very positive. The level of engagement with councillors is a night-and-day contrast with what we have been used to so far, to the extent that I have Simon's personal number and his commitment to respond swiftly to enquiries. While we will continue to face a challenging economic environment, we will hopefully now have greater clarity on which problems will be prioritised and realistic timescales for rectification works to be conducted so we can deal with the issues accordingly.

One clarification we have finally received is that the primary school is included in the schedule for the implementation of a 20 MPH limit, which we have been chasing for quite some time. Another issue that took a lot of chasing was the speed reduction works on the A53, due to commence today.

Planning

In my role on the Northern Planning Committee, I have been challenging the planners repeatedly on inappropriate, large housing developments around North Shrewsbury that cannot be supported by our inadequate infrastructure and services. I successfully moved an amended motion to defer planning permission for 450 houses on Ellesmere Road. The amendment compelled the planning officers to conduct a more thorough analysis of effects on traffic around the north end of Shrewsbury, taking into account the NWRR cancellation, traffic flow restrictions incorporated into the 'Big Town Plan' and the application to build 570 houses by the Battlefield Roundabout. All of the above

would seem likely to combine to greatly worsen the already dreadful congestion in this area.

Sadly, when this was brought back to the committee last month, when I was unable to sit, the application was approved. The planning officers presented traffic data that did not answer the specific questions in the motion, particularly with regard to the future effects of the Big Town Plan, despite this being in accordance with the guidelines of the National Planning Policy Framework. We will need to press the same issue when the Battlefield development is presented, as this will greatly magnify the congestion in the area.

One slim piece of good news involves the granting of permission to build a Hilton hotel on the David Lloyd site. While I am concerned about the visual impact, the offer of the developer to make improvements to the Sundorne Roundabout is a welcome gesture. If more pressure could be applied to big developers to make such gestures to improve local infrastructure, then the current dash for housing might be somewhat more sustainable.

New Shropshire Plan

A positive development is the commencement of work on a new Local Plan. The withdrawal of the old Local Plan is heavily responsible for the lack of coherence to the way developments are implemented and distributed without apparent due regard to the supporting infrastructure. So, the good news is that the Plan Making and Scoping Consultation for the new Shropshire Plan is now live. The bad news is that this is expected to take 30-months. While this is apparently faster than the old way of formulating local plans, it is still hugely frustrating to have another 2 ½ years of fighting over-development. I attended Cabinet two weeks ago, where this process was being discussed. I asked whether, given the conditions I've described, any sort of accelerated process could be enacted in Shropshire. The response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning was that the process is a statutory requirement from central government and that the protracted process is necessary to ensure that the resulting plan is not vulnerable to legal challenge from developers. So, a positive step in the right direction, however it does mean that we have 2 ½ years of fighting ahead in order to prevent irreversible over-development.

Council Finances

As a group, we have been scrutinising the punishing effects of our latest financial settlement. An 8.99% Council Tax increase and £190 million of borrowing to be paid back from future taxes requires much more transparency on how our money is being spent and the justification thereof. We have been pushing hard for the creation of a fraud team in the council as unusually we don't have one. The council administration

have agreed in principle to our initiative, however they want to delay its creation until the 27/28 financial year and we believe it should be implemented as soon as possible.

At that last Cabinet meeting the administration laid out its priorities in its new Corporate Plan. I questioned their decision to make economic growth the last of six priorities, arguing that it ranked right up with their number one priority of financial stability. Without it there is no way we can get out from under the burden of hundreds of millions in debt and 8.99% Council Tax rises.

We have also questioned the extensive ongoing spending on carbon reduction schemes, to the tune of over £10 million a year, or in other terms, half of this year's Council Tax increases. While many in Shropshire support such schemes, given our parlous financial state and a general global movement away from decarbonisation, we believe it would be prudent to at least temporarily reduce this spend until the declared financial emergency is at an end.

Looking Ahead

I look forward to continuing to provide what assistance I can, better understanding the needs of Hadnall and better representing those needs in the council chamber and committees. Thank you again.

Brendan Mallon

Councillor for Tern