

## Myth 12 Risks to the town's water supply have been resolved?

In her recent letter to the Road's Minister Lezley Picton describes the project as being 'shovel ready' but this is far from the truth. The project has been continually delayed due to poor decision making and appalling project management (as set out in the recent highly critical [external audit](#)). There seems to reason to think that this inability to deliver the project in a timely or cost-effective manner will suddenly change with the award of huge amounts of extra government money.

Councillor Picton says that the NWRR "has passed through every point of approval required". This again would seem to be wishful thinking. I note that, despite the planning committee approving the planning permission in October 2023, the Planning Decision letter has still not been issued. We will now explain why that might be.

Shropshire Council's tactic throughout this project has been to punt any difficulties down the line and hope that 'something will turn up'. This meant that, when the planning application was pushed through the planning committee in October 2023 (with a six to five vote), there were many outstanding issues that, instead of being resolved through the EIA process were passed to 62 planning conditions (38 of which need to be delivered before construction can start. This includes a number of key risk assessments covering important environmental protections for which the outcome is still uncertain).

The Environment Agency wrote to Shropshire Council after the approval of the planning permission saying:

*"We advised you as Local Planning Authority that **we were not sufficiently reassured at the planning stage** based on matters that need more detail, outlining that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) needs to be robust, and risks/mitigation fully explored."*

*We said **we would not advise you to grant planning permission, subject to planning conditions, at this time**. We outlined that further information should be submitted to inform the EIA and subsequent potential planning conditions or other mechanisms, ensuring the planning is clearly and robustly identified around potential impacts to the water environment. Our comments were made with environmental protection in mind and to inform the appropriateness of the scheme.*

*We had previous discussions with you about our concerns and explained the need for further work to be carried out. We advised that **if, as LPA, you were minded to override our concerns and were prepared to manage risk by way of conditions, with critical information missing/provided once permission had been granted, then that was your decision as determining authority but we did not support this approach.**"*

We understand that this is still the Agency's position and that the concerns about the potential impacts of the scheme on the critical water supply for Shrewsbury have still not been resolved<sup>1</sup>. This is just one of the many planning issues that have not been resolved in the four years since the planning application was made. The delays have not been due to foot dragging from consultees but because Shropshire Council, instead of tackling these (or acknowledging that they are unresolvable and scrapping the proposal), has chosen to ignore their concerns and push difficult issues down the line in the hope that they will go away.

In summary, not only does the proposed scheme suffer from significant unresolved planning issues, but these have proven to be intractable since Shropshire Council was first advised about them over 20 years ago. The chances that these will be resolved in the near future therefore seem hopelessly optimistic.

In addition to the planning issues, the council's risk assessment for the project says that there is an 80% chance of delay to the construction programme due to missing the seasonal window for ecological works and a 50% chance of objections from landowners (including the Labour led Town Council) leading to a public inquiry into the CPO process leading to a 12-18 month delay. Any delays will lead to further cost escalation.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the council has been aware of the issue of the road passing through the inner Source protection Zone of the town's critical water supply since 2005. The Environment Agency's position on this significant risk has been consistent throughout the process and the new data collected by the council has, if anything, reinforced the Agency's position.

Meanwhile, a local business that would be adversely affected by the NWRR has indicated its intention to call for a Judicial Review of the planning permission as soon as the Planning Decision letter is issued<sup>2</sup>. Better Shrewsbury Transport has also taken [legal advice](#) about the inadequacies of the planning process taken by Shropshire Council and will be ready to call for Judicial Review as soon as this becomes possible.

We set out our detailed review of the risks to the town's water supply here

<https://www.bettershrewsburytransport.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/8-BeST-Jul-2023-Detailed-note-on-risk-to-water-supply-5020955.pdf>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2025/01/17/major-shrewsbury-firm-objects-to-latest-north-west-relief-road-developments/>