

Dear Minister,

## Controversial North West Relief Road (NWRR) in Shrewsbury

I am writing to you on behalf of Better Shrewsbury Transport in response to a letter from Lezley Picton (Leader of Shropshire Council) dated 7 March 2025 asking you to support the controversial North West Relief Road (NWRR) in Shrewsbury. Better Shrewsbury Transport is an alliance of local organisations and individuals including Shropshire Wildlife Trust, CPRE – Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth Shrewsbury Branch, Extinction Rebellion Shrewsbury Branch, Sustainable Transport Shropshire. The campaign is also supported by local branches of the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. I understand that the leaders of those parties have already written to you about their intention to cancel this controversial road project if they are in control of the unitary authority following the elections in May.

In her letter, Councillor Picton makes a number of claims about the merits of the proposed new road which are simply not true. We feel strongly that the letter is a disgraceful last ditch attempt to put an optimistic spin on what has been a disastrous project for the incumbent Conservative led council. We have been supported in this view by leaders of the [opposition Labour](#) and Liberal Democrat parties.

In contrast to Councillor Picton, we say that the highly controversial NWRR<sup>1</sup>:

- Does not help meet Labour's missions.
- Is poor value for money.
- Is not 'shovel ready'<sup>2</sup>.
- Assumes that Shropshire Council will somehow have found £52M to build the Oxon Link Road (OLR)<sup>3</sup> without which the rest of the link road is pointless.
- Will not reduce congestion in the historic heart of Shrewsbury.
- Puts Shrewsbury's water supply at risk according to the Environment Agency who are deeply concerned about the way in which Shropshire Council has continually ignored their advice and whose concerns are still unaddressed.
- Is unpopular with the people of Shrewsbury who would like to see money spent instead on improving existing roads and provision of better levels of public transport.
- Is deeply unfair to the people in the rest of Shropshire who will see no benefit from the scheme that threatens to bankrupt their council.
- Will lead to an increase in emissions of greenhouse gases and NOx from transport in Shrewsbury.
- Will destroy a large number of supposedly 'irreplaceable' veteran trees including the 550 year old Darwin Oak – a petition to protect the latter garnered >100,000 signatures and was presented in Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> All our claims are consistent with Shropshire Council's own figures whenever these are available

<sup>2</sup> For instance, there are 38 pre-commencement planning conditions that have not been fulfilled many of which cover complex regulatory issues that Shropshire Council has been unable to resolve in the last 4 years and so seem unlikely to be resolved any time soon. The council's risk assessment for the road says that there is an 80% chance of delay to the construction programme due to missing the seasonal window 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

<sup>3</sup> Note that combining the latest cost for the OLR with the figures Shropshire Council presented to the Marches LEP in Nov 2023 in a revised business case for the OLR with shows that the BCR for this bit of road will be less than 1.

- Will increase the number of road fatalities in Shrewsbury.
- Will carve up Shrewsbury's unique 'Green Wedge' that brings nature and opportunities to enjoy tranquillity into the heart of the town.
- Is not needed to facilitate the major housing developments planned for Shrewsbury as these all have access to the A5 without the NWRR being built.

We have set out more detail on these issues below where we show in detail how misleading Councillor Picton's statements are

## Background

The NWRR project involves construction of four miles of new road through environmentally sensitive areas to the north west of Shrewsbury. The project subsumes the Oxon Link road (OLR) project which would be the first section of the proposed new road starting from the A5 west of Shrewsbury.

In 2019, when the estimated cost of the scheme was £87M, the Department for Transport (DfT) awarded the project a grant of £54.4M from the Large Local Majors fund, stating explicitly that Shropshire Council would be responsible for any increase in cost<sup>4</sup>. At the time the road was scheduled to be open in spring 2023. However, the project has been beset with delays, largely due to Shropshire Council's poor management of the project and its failure to satisfy statutory stakeholders, principally the Environment Agency who are still very concerned about the risks that the proposed road poses to Shrewsbury's critical water supply.

In November 2024, the project was subject of a highly critical [external audit](#) which said that Shropshire Council did not operate adequate financial control and oversight. The auditors also criticised the lack of a clear funding plan to address the massively escalated cost of the project (estimated at £178M at that point). Following this criticism the senior council officer in charge of the project took voluntary redundancy "[by mutual agreement](#)". In February 2025 Shropshire Council admitted that, having spent £39M on the project to date, the total cost of the scheme had escalated to £215M (£52M for the OLR and £163M for the remaining road section).

At the end of February 2025 Shropshire Council released its draft Final Business Case (FBC) for the NWRR (in the course of the final council meeting prior to the local elections in May meaning that there has been [no proper scrutiny of this document](#)). Note that the FBC assumes that the £52M OLR will already be built despite the council having no clear funding plan for that section of the road which is also subject to many of the same environmental constraints.

## Good value for money?

In the Outline Business Case for the road Shropshire Council estimated the Benefit:Cost ratio (BCR) to be 5.33 (Very High Value for Money). However, it was clear at the time that a number of the assumptions they had made were very questionable (e.g. greenhouse gas impact given as a positive, no allowance for environmental impacts etc.).

The draft Final Business Case claims the 'adjusted' BCR for the road is now 3.88 (2.81 pre 'adjustment') and Councillor Picton claims that this ranks it among the higher scoring schemes across the country. This mainly serves to highlight the generally low BCR scores for road schemes such as this, especially in comparison with active travel schemes which [typically score between 5:1 and 13:1](#).

In fact, the BCR quoted by Councillor Picton has clearly been 'adjusted' in a number of dubious ways:

- It excludes the £52M cost of the OLR which is assumed to have been built despite the council having no credible plans for funding this bit of the road. As the assessed benefits of the scheme almost entirely derived from diverting traffic onto the completed road it is impossible to meaningfully assess the

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<sup>4</sup> The grant was for the section of the road excluding the OLR. The DfT funded section was costed at £71M at that time.

benefits of only part of the scheme. Based on Shropshire Council's own figures, the BCR for the OLR is likely to be below 1<sup>5</sup>.

- It also excludes the costs to date (£39M, £32M if excluding OLR) despite the [council specifically stating in July 2024](#) that “*all scheme preparation costs from the point of Outline Business case onwards to the completion of construction will be captured as part of the BCR calculation*”.
- The costs exclude any allowance for the significant loss of natural capital (~£10-20M) and any financial allowance for the risk to the town's critical water supply.
- The benefits include an assessment of 'wider economic impacts' including allowance for £55M of 'agglomeration impacts'. These 'wider economic impacts' make up over 20% of the assessed benefits in the 'adjusted' BCR but a review by a very experienced transport expert, Prof John Whitelegg<sup>6</sup> found that “*My comment based on 20 years of teaching and research in Economic Geography is that there is no evidence at all on agglomeration benefits in small urban areas like Shrewsbury. Its all about big cities.*”

When all of the dubious adjustments are removed, the BCR for the combined NWRR and OLR is below 1 indicating that it is not good value for money and the government should not support this scheme.

Councillor Picton suggests that the government should “*build on the £38 million we have already invested to develop the NWRR project, rather than to waste this money*” but this is a classic example of the sunk cost fallacy. The decision on whether to spend more money on the project should be based on the future returns to society not on the fact that Shropshire Council has managed to fritter away such a vast sum of money to little avail.

We also note the recent [IPPR report](#) that says:

*“investment in new road building, over other forms of transport investment, does not deliver good value for money, help meet Labour's missions, deliver the emissions savings needed to reach net zero, or safeguard nature. Instead, this money should be redirected away from capital spending on new roads towards renewing our existing road network, public transport and active travel. These investments have the potential to unlock economic growth while supporting the health, opportunity, and safer streets missions, alongside decarbonisation targets.”*

## Financial Challenges

As discussed above, Shropshire Council has been severely criticised by the [external auditor](#) for progressing with the project in the face of significant price escalation when it had no clear strategy for addressing the large and growing funding gap. This is still the case.

In its latest financial strategy the council sets out the options with respect to funding of the NWRR but bizarrely concludes that, rather than face up to the failure of the project (as Norfolk Council has recently done with a similar road project), the only option is to plough on and hope that they will be allowed to raid the Local Transport fund outlined by the previous government, despite the lack of clarity about the reality of that fund and the fact that the previous government [specifically stated](#) that the fund would not be used to fund the NWRR.

With respect to the possibility that the council could agree with the DfT that it does not need to refund the grant money spent to date, Councillor Picton says that “*In Norfolk, insurmountable issues have been identified that prevent delivery of the Norwich Western Link Road. In Shropshire, for the NWRR, they have not.*”

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<sup>5</sup> In November 2023 Shropshire Council provided a 'refresh' to the OLR Business case to the Marches LEP who had agreed a grant of £4.2M towards the road but had become frustrated with delays to the project and the inaccuracies of Shropshire Council's timetable (the OLR was originally due to be complete in Nov 2020 when the grant was awarded). In the Business Case 'refresh' Shropshire Council estimated the BCR of the scheme at 3.3 (down from an initial 4.37). However, this was based on a cost of £17.9M (up from an initial £12.93M). The business case refresh suggested that the costs would need to rise by £16.1M for the BCR to drop below 1. The latest cost for the OLR is £52M, a rise of £34.1M. It therefore seems very clear that the BCR for the OLR will be below 1 and probably negative.

<sup>6</sup> John Whitelegg is visiting professor of sustainable transport at Liverpool John Moores University.

As we outline below, not only are there significant outstanding planning issues that are still not resolved despite the council being aware of them for over 20 years, the latest carbon report for the road shows that, far from reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the road will lead to an increase in emissions from road users in Shrewsbury. This is directly counter to the DfT's target of continual and ongoing reductions in such emissions and, by the [council's own admission](#), will mean that the council will not be able to meet its commitment to reach net zero by 2030.

## Effect on congestion

Councillor Picton mentions reduction in traffic in 'the town centre' eight times in her letter to you. However, her definition of 'town centre' is not what people who live in Shrewsbury might expect. Overall, there will be no benefit on the streets in the historic heart of Shrewsbury. In fact, the council's traffic modelling shows that with the NWRR the proportion of trips to the town centre by car increases. These streets would only see reduced traffic with a more comprehensive, holistic transport scheme such as that recently proposed by Shrewsbury BID (i.e. [Shrewsbury Moves](#) see more on this below).

The traffic modelling does show that there would initially be fewer car journeys through the Smithfield road corridor on the edge of the town centre. However, the majority of traffic would still be present (reductions of around 20% (1 in 5) from current levels) and any space created by the NWRR would rapidly fill up (Satnav will make sure that 'empty' roads are used). Meanwhile, the re-directed traffic will increase congestion in areas around junctions with the NWRR.

Councillor Picton also talks about "*heavy standing traffic that is currently forced to run right through the heart of the neighbourhoods would see traffic levels greatly reduced.*" but this is simply not the case. The routes that would benefit most from the NWRR are generally not the densely populated residential parts of the town where standing traffic is a problem.

Councillor Picton claims that "*average single journey time across roads in the northern Shrewsbury area would be reduced by 17 minutes*". For start this is an extremely misleading quote of the council's own numbers (journey time reductions of 8-17 minutes in 2050 rather than an average of 17 minutes for journeys round the whole of the edge of the town (i.e. the maximum benefit)). In fact, the council's traffic modelling suggests that the majority of journey time reductions would be below 2-3 minutes. As for reduced bus services, none of these will be using the NWRR and so quoting the 17 minute figure in this context is again deeply misleading.

Councillor Picton quotes the emergency services as supporting the NWRR, but this is based on their understanding of the benefits as presented by Shropshire Council which we have shown to be very misleading. In fact, the council's traffic modelling shows that the NWRR will make queuing at junctions near the town's hospital worse not better.

## Good for housebuilding and the economy?

Councillor Picton claims that "*The NWRR, in tandem with the Oxon Link Road<sup>7</sup>, to be delivered at the same time, is also important for increasing the number of new homes in and around Shrewsbury*". It has been clear from the start that the real driver for the NWRR is to open up large areas of NW Shrewsbury to housebuilding. However, the council has refused to admit the massively damaging impact such a major development would have on the already congested roads in north Shrewsbury and there are no published traffic modelling results.

The Shrewsbury peripheral roads are already congested and this (particularly Battlefield roundabout) is already acting as an economic constraint on the town. Building large numbers of car dependent houses in NW Shrewsbury without investing huge sums in dualling the whole 'ring road' including the NWRR will add to these constraints.

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<sup>7</sup> As noted above, the BCR for the OLR is below 1 and the council has no credible plans in place for the £52M funding required to build that road.

Instead, we are advocating that any large-scale housebuilding should be focussed on high density developments on brownfield land (including car parks) in the town centre supplemented by peripheral developments in the south and east of the town which have better existing transport links and are not so environmentally damaging.

Councillor Picton draws attention to the strains on the A5 corridor and its importance for the economy of the region but the NWRR has only a marginal effect on the A5 and in some places (e.g. around Churncote roundabout) will make congestion worse. If the concern is about the A5 then the government would be more effective in investing directly in improving the pinch points on this route, particularly the intersection with the A49 south of Shrewsbury.

The economic benefits of the road are entirely based on monetising small time savings on large numbers of car journeys. It is also based on a background rate of increase in traffic that has failed to materialise over the last decade. The benefits are very sensitive to the assumptions about the amount of future traffic growth and, if there's no traffic growth then the benefits shrink massively. The general consensus of [transport experts](#) is that, even with significant uptake of EVs, future traffic growth will not be consistent with a net zero economy. Diverting non-essential journeys (like school runs, shopping etc) into other transport modes will free up existing infrastructure for business use.

We have already referred to comments by Prof. John Whitelegg that the claimed 'wider economic benefits' of the road are not supported by evidence.

Councillor Picton is right in saying that "*Reducing traffic, congestion and air pollution is crucial to making the town centre a more attractive place to live*" but building a new road that will by their own admission divert more journeys into cars is not the way forward: instead the evidence all points to provision of cheap, direct and reliable public transport and active travel routes is the way to make towns more attractive to live in.

## Barriers to opportunity in Shrewsbury

The beneficiaries of the road will predominantly be the better off. When the council discuss the proportion of car owners they always use the county based statistic (84%, i.e. 16% without a car) whereas in Shrewsbury there are more people without access to a private car (22%) and this number is much higher in deprived areas such as Harlescote (25-30%). The council says that these non-car owning people will benefit as buses will be more reliable – but only if they run! We understand that one of the key concerns of businesses in north Shrewsbury is the difficulty in getting young people to work there as many don't drive and public transport is poor.

The scheme passes through and would link up some of the least deprived areas around Shrewsbury meaning that around a third of the benefits of the scheme are assessed as accruing to the least deprived quintile<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile the council assesses the impact of the scheme on personal affordability benefits to be 'Slight Adverse' for the Most Deprived quintile and 'Large Beneficial' for the Least Deprived quintile<sup>9</sup>. This suggests that the scheme is poorly focussed on reducing levels of inequality in Shrewsbury.

## Shovel ready project?

Councillor 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.

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<sup>8</sup> Table 3-6, Shropshire Council NWRR Social and Distributional Impact Report, Nov 2024

<sup>9</sup> Table 3-8, *ibid*

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>10</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.

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>11</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.

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<sup>10</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.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2025/01/17/major-shrewsbury-firm-objects-to-latest-north-west-relief-road-developments/>

## Greenhouse Gases

One of the stated objectives in the Outline Business Case was “*To contribute towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions*” and this was the part of the basis on which the DfT agreed to fund the scheme. However, in the carbon assessment section of the EIA for the project in 2021 it was acknowledged that the ‘embedded carbon’ of the construction would only be offset by subsequent reductions in user emissions after 180 years.

In November 2024, Shropshire Council released a revised carbon assessment for the scheme which showed that, rather than reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars in Shrewsbury, building the proposed road would [increase them](#).

The council has admitted that it has no costed or quantified plans to offset the 55,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> that it told the planning committee would mean that the council would [no longer be able to meet its commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030](#). Interestingly, the FBC that Councillor Picton has drawn to your attention says that the greenhouse gas emissions of the NWRR (excluding the OLR) would be 95,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>. When an allowance is made for the OLR this suggests that the true emissions will be double the amount presented to the planning committee. This is in part because of a significant difference in the traffic scenarios used in the carbon report used to justify the offsetting figure and the FBC. This inconsistency is typical of the way the council picks and chooses figures to fit its short term tactics.

## Other environmental issues

It is bizarre that Councillor Picton can claim that the NWRR will be good for biodiversity when the council's own Tree team has objected to the road on the grounds of the unmitigated impact on “irreplaceable” veteran trees and ancient woodlands.

There are numerous other ways in which the NWRR would be devastating for the local environment including noise and visual impacts on Shrewsbury's ‘green lungs’.

## No viable alternatives?

In her letter to you Councillor Picton provides an apparently definitive criticism of any alternatives to the NWRR. However, Shropshire Council has not carried out any serious assessment of alternatives to the NWRR for 20 years and even then it was clear that the public's first priority was for improvement in the county and town's woefully poor level of provision of public transport.

Last year the Shrewsbury Business Improvement District produced its [Shrewsbury Moves](#) Strategy, a 10-year vision and plan to transform movement and public space across the town. This focuses on sustainable and active transport interventions as being critical for a cramped, historic town such as Shrewsbury in which years of car-centred development have failed to deliver an efficient system for moving people around much to the detriment of local people's health and the local economy.

Shrewsbury Moves garnered widespread cross-party support and will be formally launched in a [public festival](#) across town this month. Shropshire Council cannot compare this sustainable and forward-looking strategy with the failed NWRR as it has not carried out the required traffic modelling, economic assessment and environmental comparisons between the two schemes. This means that Councillor Picton's assertions about the lack of a credible alternative are, like much of the rest of the letter, misleading and untrue.

It is particularly rich of Councillor Picton to say that these alternatives will “*Do little to reduce net carbon emissions from development*” when they are designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while the council's own carbon reports show that the NWRR will not only release a significant amount of carbon during construction but also increase user emissions now and into the foreseeable future. This will not help the government deliver on its net zero commitments and will mean that Shropshire Council will have to abandon its commitment to reach net zero.

## Help the NHS?

Jo Williams, interim CEO of Shrewsbury & Telford Hospital Trust has written in support on the NWRR. However, it is not clear what information Shropshire Council gave her about the effect of the NWRR on local traffic patterns to elicit that support. The council's traffic modelling shows that building the NWRR will encourage more people to drive in Shrewsbury and the journeys will on average be longer (in distance). Meanwhile, while some sections of road will have short term relief, other sections will have increased levels of traffic, especially near any junctions with the NWRR.

For instance, the council's 2021 Transport Assessment suggests that the A5/B4386/B4386/Mytton Oak Road roundabout (where ambulances come onto Mytton Oak Road to access Shrewsbury Hospital from the A5) will have increased levels of queuing if the NWRR is built with one arm forecast to operate over capacity. Similarly, the council's modelling shows that the NWRR makes queuing at the Mytton Oak Road/Gains Park Way junction and at the Racecourse Lane/Mytton Oak Road Roundabout worse (the nearest junctions to the hospital). This would hardly seem to represent a significant improvement in access to the hospital as described in the letter of support from Ms Williams.

Shropshire Council's approach to this is to say they will monitor the situation and react if there is a problem. However, you will be aware of how limited the council's financial reserves are and the unlikely prospect of the council being able to respond adequately to any problems that occur once the road is complete.

We are all aware of the toll that rising levels of inactivity are having on the NHS's ability to respond to unprecedented levels of demand. Supporting a measure that encourages more people to drive would seem to be adding to that problem instead of resolving it. Shropshire Council may have said that the road will increase opportunities for active travel, but this could only occur if the council simultaneously adopts measures to restrict driving in the town centre and encourage public transport and active travel. The council has no allocated budget to do that. In the absence of such measures the result of any spare capacity in the town centre will be for more people to drive there. There is very extensive evidence over many years that building new road capacity encourages more driving (induced traffic) whereas restricting road traffic has the opposite effect.

Meanwhile, just before Christmas, Shropshire Council released the results of new carbon modelling that showed that the impact of the road on carbon emissions is many times worse than previously stated. Shropshire Council does not have a credible, quantified or costed approach to mitigating these emissions and so approving the planning permission will mean that Shropshire Council will no longer be able to meet its commitment to be net zero by 2030. I note that the NHS website says: "*Climate change threatens the health of the population and the ability of the NHS to deliver its essential services in both the near-term and longer term.*" so supporting a project which will by the council's own admission make the climate emergency worse would also appear to be counter to the NHS's objectives.

## The missing link in Shrewsbury's ring road?

Councillor Picton claims that the NWRR will provide the 'missing link in Shrewsbury's ring road' and refers to York (population 202,800) and Oxford (population 160,021) as comparable cities that have ring roads. But this is a false analogy: rural towns the size of Shrewsbury (population 76,782) don't need ring roads. We don't even have a partially complete ring road, what we have is a major bypass on an international route (the A5) that loops outside the town's development boundary to the south and a link road (A49) that links the industrial areas of north Shrewsbury with their key markets in the West Midlands. These are the roads we need and the council and government should focus on making these fit for purpose. Shropshire Council has never demonstrated a clear case for significant amounts of business traffic going from south west to north east round Shrewsbury.



## NIMBY's or genuine local (and national) concern?

Councillor Picton says that she believes “*that the North West Relief Road is a classic case study of the barriers that scheme delivery faces in the UK.*” In fact, the project is a classic case of a small clique of Conservative councillors pig-headedly trying to push through an environmentally damaging road that makes no financial or economic sense in the face of overwhelming evidence that it is a bad idea. Recent road projects in Shropshire such as the A5 Shrewsbury, A5 Nesscliffe and A53 Hodnet bypasses have seen no significant opposition from councillors or environmental organisations as the environmental benefits (in terms of taking traffic out of residential areas) were clear and the environmental damage was viewed as being, on balance, acceptable.

The huge level of grass roots opposition to the NWRR stems from the very significant environmental damage that it would cause (outlined above) together with the enormous financial strain the project has already and will increasingly place on the council which is already teetering on the verge of bankruptcy.

The council continually implies that the opposition is limited to ‘a small vocal minority’ or an ‘*increasingly professional campaign operating locally but supported by national and even international interest groups*’. While we accept the compliment about the professional nature of our campaign (with pro-bono inputs from local specialists in ecology, air quality, water, transport etc), the available statistics suggest that the opposition to the NWRR is deep and widespread:

- In the 2021 Local Elections 88% of the vote for councillors on Shrewsbury Town Council went to parties that explicitly rejected the NWRR as a solution to the town’s congestion issues. The Conservative Leader who was had personally driven forward the NWRR project [lost his seat](#) to a candidate who strongly opposed the road. The Labour-led council has consistently opposed the NWRR.
- In the 2024 national election Shrewsbury voted for change with 77.5% of the vote going to parties that explicitly rejected the NWRR as a solution to the town’s congestion issues. The incumbent, long-standing Conservative MP who had constantly promoted the NWRR project lost to a Labour candidate who was a vocal opponent of the scheme as a local councillor.
- Over 5,000 people submitted objections to the planning application for the NWRR (overwhelmingly from people in Shrewsbury and Shropshire) compared to 220 supporters
- Over 20 local and national NGOs have submitted objections to the NWRR
- Over 100,000 people signed a petition to save the 550 year old Darwin Oak that would be cut down to make way for the road

Labour led Shrewsbury Town Council has objected to the NWRR and recently agreed a motion calling for Shropshire Council to commission an independent inquiry into the poor management of the project to date.

In this letter we have set out why the claims about the NWRR in Councillor Picton’s letter are untrue or misleading and should be ignored. We urge you to make clear as soon as possible that the government does not back this controversial and divisive project and urge Shropshire Council to instead invest its money and time into promoting the Shrewsbury Moves strategy as a sustainable and economically viable solution to mobility issues in the town.

Regards



Mike Streetly

on behalf of Better Shrewsbury Transport