Shrewsbury and Atcham Green Party

Objection to Planning Application ref 21/00924/EIA

Shrewsbury North West "Relief" Road (NWRR)

1. Shrewsbury and Atcham Green Party (S&AGP) objects to the proposal to build a new road between Churncote Island and Ellesmere Road, on the following grounds: it will increase carbon emissions and will cause irreparable damage to biodiversity and tranquillity; it will not provide inclusive and accessible transport solutions for Shrewsbury residents; the application provides no evidence of potential economic benefits; despite the claims, many roads in the town will in fact see increased traffic levels and worse air quality if the road is built.

2. S&AGP has been campaigning against this proposed road for decades and is a founder member of the Better Shrewsbury Transport alliance ( BeST) which has thoroughly researched and discredited the claims made in the current planning documents. We endorse the detailed objection to this proposal submitted by BeST. The evidence against the proposal has become stronger over the years but has been ignored by successsive administrations at the council, particularly since 2009. Full references for the grounds for objection can be found in the BeST objection document.

3. Climate and ecological crisis.

Shropshire Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and is a key partner in the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership. The UK government has also declared a climate emergency and in April 2021 decided to set more ambitious targets for reducing CO2 emissions. The NWRR will cause increased CO2 emissions which can never be "offset" before the dates set for "net zero" in Shropshire and in the UK. In other words the road will be helping to ensure those targets are not reached and it is unacceptable on those grounds alone.

Irreplaceable wildlife habitat along the route, some of it of international importance, will be damaged and destroyed. This cannot be replaced or mitigated. We face an ecological as well as a climate emergency, and historic features such as ancient trees and wetlands are crucial for the biodiversity we all depend on. Removing soil and vegetation also reduces the capacity for CO2 to be absorbed.

4 Health and wellbeing

Access to areas such as the "Green Wedge " - the peaceful countryside which the road will destroy – is very important for human health and wellbeing. This area is within walking and cycling distance for most residents of Shrewsbury and is much loved. The suggestion that a new path, next to and unprotected from 60mph traffic, is a "benefit" to the walking and cycling network, is an insult , especially when compared to the footpaths and cycle routes that are being lost, severed, or made more dangerous and less attractive to use. We are also concerned to hear that the NWRR will probably mean Shrewsbury loses its half-marathon and triathlon, both very well supported events that bring visitors and income to the town. Event organisers say that the NWRR roundabout on Berwick Road will make that road unsafe for runners and cyclists.

5. Inequality and inclusivity

The NWRR proposal ignores the needs of many people in Shrewsbury and across Shropshire. Building more roads such as this one reduces inclusion for the 20% of households in Shrewsbury who don't own a car, and the many more people – particularly young, old, or disabled – who don't have use of a car. This is particularly so because there is no parallel investment in other modes of transport, to take advantage of any reduced traffic in the town. The application makes vague statements that diverting traffic on to the NWRR "may" reduce delays for bus services and provide a more pleasant environment for walking and cycling – but no data are given and no measures are included to ensure that these benefits are delivered.

The road's supposed benefits will only affect Shrewsbury and its immediate surrounds, but the funding will come partly from developer contributions across the county. This clearly disadvantages the residents in the market towns and villages, who all need investment in public transport and safer cycling routes.

6. The administration at Shropshire Council is ignoring mounting evidence that means the planning application should never have been submitted, and this out of date road should have been abandoned long ago. There is the national and international evidence on the climate emergency, and also on the fact that new roads do not solve congestion or bring economic benefits. There is evidence from the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan that the town centre can be prosperous and far more attractive through other measures which would be popular. Herefordshire has looked at the evidence and cancelled its own proposed bypass. And there is the evidence in the planning documents themselves, that many roads would see increased traffic, and poorer air quality. There is also a serious threat to Shrewsbury's drinking water.

7 Travel time

Much of the evidence put forward to justify the road is questionable. For instance it is claimed that journeys from Battlefield to Churncote will be quicker via the NWRR than via other routes. But this ignores the fact that almost all such journeys will require travelling to and from the start and end points – they will not be made solely on the NWRR. Once those extra sections are added in, with possible delays caused by increased traffic at either end (including the Battlefield Link and the A5 at Churncote) the time benefits disappear.

8. Conclusion

Shropshire Council pays lip service to the need to act on the climate and ecological emergency. Transport is a key area for this , as over a third of the county's CO2 emissions come from transport; and many of the solutions are well known, affordable and popular, such as making it safe to walk and cycle for short journeys, and requiring developers to provide properly for active travel to and from new developments. The council has failed to update its local transport plan along these lines, and has a very weak draft local plan with no commitments on reducing carbon from transport.

Cancelling the NWRR would be the easiest measure of all if Shropshire Council was serious about taking action on the climate and providing transport solutions that benefit all residents. If it is not cancelled, planning permission should be refused.

Signed:

Coordinator

on behalf of S&AGP