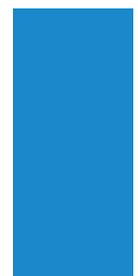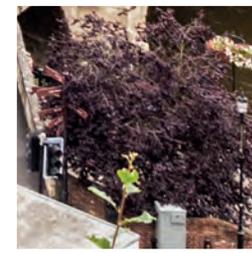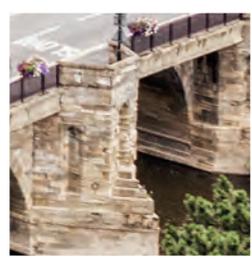# Community and Rural Strategy

Collaborate, change together and achieve

September 2020

Shropshire Council
Community and Rural Strategy
September 2020

Contents

Version	Change	Made by	Date
v.1	High Level Delivery Plan and Foreword added	Tom Dodds	26 June 2020
v.2	Amended following feedback	Tom Dodds	3 July 2020
v.2i	Amended further	Tom Dodds	8 July 2020
v.3	Amended following feedback from Gemma Davies	Tom Dodds	13 July 2020
v.4	Paragraphs on health needs added	Tom Dodds	16 July 2020

Foreword

Shropshire is the second largest inland county in the country and whilst the biggest population centres are Shrewsbury and Oswestry the remainder of the county is more rural and sparsely inhabited. We have communities living across our wonderful landscape and the Council recognised that there needed to be a strategy that was based on an understanding of place and that embraced the fact that different communities had different needs and ways to meet them, some they could address themselves, and others they would need support of one form or another to tackle.

In the summer of 2019 Shropshire Council agreed to embark on a Community and Rural Strategy. We have reviewed the significant amount of data and information the Council has access to, to give us an evidence base and we have been able to combine this understanding with the local knowledge to help identify the shared priorities, for which there has been general understanding and support. We have also listened to how local areas would like to work with Shropshire Council and the role that they would like the Council to fulfil as an enabler, as well as providing direction and a strategic lead. We have used this to help us draft this strategy.

Whilst we have been having conversations and listening to what local areas would like to see in the strategy we have also been considering what the local governance arrangements might be to support the locally led delivery of the shared priorities. We need to design this together with our partners in the communities. There are questions to answer through this process including what are the most effective geographies, how will communities be engaged, how will Shropshire Council local Members help to influence and enable local delivery, and how would the local arrangements work? We also need to factor into our thinking the boundary review of Town and Parish Councils scheduled to start in May 2021.

Since we started working on the Strategy Shropshire has been the subject of significant flooding and then the coronavirus pandemic. These events had and continue to have a big impact socially and economically. I believe the shared priorities endorse the energy that glowed in our communities during the pandemic, and that the purpose of this strategy will also be to embrace and provide solutions our different communities need in light of the pandemic, and how we move forward together for the benefit of us all. These challenging times have highlighted the diversity across the county and how resilient a lot of our rural areas are.

We have the opportunity to use the strategy to change the way we work together across the council, with our partners and with communities to realise our shared priorities and make a real and lasting difference.

As I finish this foreword I would like to introduce the draft shared priorities we have developed together with representatives from our town and parish councils, the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and Shropshire Councillors. I look forward to working together to progress their delivery:

- Keeping everyone happy and healthy, whatever their age
- Helping people who are lonely to connect with others and enjoy themselves
- Finding effective and sustainable ways to move people around
- Embracing the skills and experience of our older generation
- Making sure we have the right homes in the right places
- Attracting and keeping young people in the county and developing a skilled workforce
- Continuously improving physical and digital connectivity
- Reducing our impact on the climate, nature and the wider environment

Gwilym Butler
Portfolio Holder for Communities,
Place Planning and Regulatory Services

The context of the strategy

The development of the Community and Rural Strategy has taken place over the past 12 months. The opportunity to develop the strategy came from the recognition that a holistic view of the needs of Shropshire communities would provide a solid starting point to help promote sustainability and resilience, and to ensure that the challenges and benefits of living in rural areas are taken into account. Since work on the strategy started Shropshire has experienced significant flooding in February 2020 which was quickly followed by the introduction of the lockdown requirements as the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Communities across the county have been considerably impacted, but have pulled together, demonstrated their strength and spirit as they have helped and supported themselves. This strength and resilience is at the heart centre of what this strategy aims to reinforce and enable.

The strategy has two elements. The first is based around developing evidence based shared priorities for Shropshire as a whole, that are also relevant and recognisable to local communities. The second looks at how these can be implemented across the County and providing the framework for their delivery at a Shropshire Council area level and through action and delivery within and by local areas.

National context: The development of a Community and Rural Strategy for Shropshire sets out to realise local policy intentions and to reflect Government policy and strategy, including the Industrial Strategy, the Clean Growth Strategy and the 25 Year Environment Plan. The stated policy ambitions of the national administration are also being noted and factored in, including commitments around the levelling up of regional disparities and approaches towards climate change mitigation.
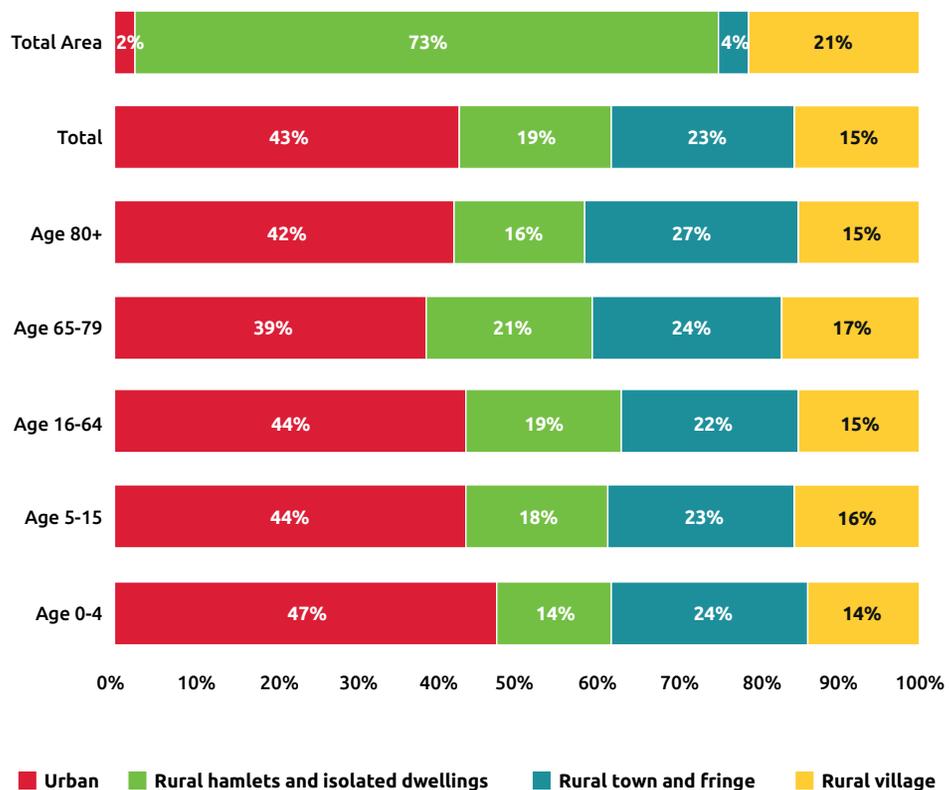
The Shropshire strategy work seeks to complement collaborative endeavours at national level with other rural authorities, including through the Rural Services Network, and through the County Councils Network and the "Leading Edge" initiative being led by Cornwall Council to seek to address current inequities for rural and coastal authorities.

Sub-regional context: Additionally, the local work draws upon and is informed by local strategic partnership working, across borders with Wales and with other local authorities, through the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), "Midlands Engine" and Midlands Connect infrastructure work, and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), and through ongoing work with other public sector bodies and community and voluntary sector organisations .

About Shropshire

Shropshire is a large rural county, the second largest inland county in England, with a population density of 1 person per hectare. Around 57% of Shropshire's population of 323,136 people (2019 mye) live in villages, hamlets and dwellings dispersed throughout the countryside. The remainder live in one of the 17 market towns and key centres of varying size, including Ludlow in the south and Oswestry in the north, or in Shrewsbury, the central county town. This geographic spread of diverse communities creates the social, economic and cultural patchwork set in flourishing natural environments that contributes to the quality of life of Shropshire people.

Figure 1: Shropshire geographic area and population by age range

	Urban	Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings	Rural town and fringe	Rural village
Total Area	2%	73%	4%	21%
Total	43%	19%	23%	15%
Age 80+	42%	16%	27%	15%
Age 65-79	39%	21%	24%	17%
Age 16-64	44%	19%	22%	15%
Age 5-15	44%	18%	23%	16%
Age 0-4	47%	14%	24%	14%

The rolling green landscape, open spaces and the culture and heritage of the County make Shropshire an attractive place to live, work and visit, whether in rural areas or within one of the historic market towns, with excellent schools, low crime rates and opportunity for everyone.

Shropshire has a rich cultural heritage to discover and natural landscapes to explore, for residents and tourists alike. There are Roman and Iron Age sites; castles and historic buildings; theatres and museums; the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which covers 23% of the county; parts of two World Heritage Sites, rivers and canals; walking and cycling routes including one of the largest Rights
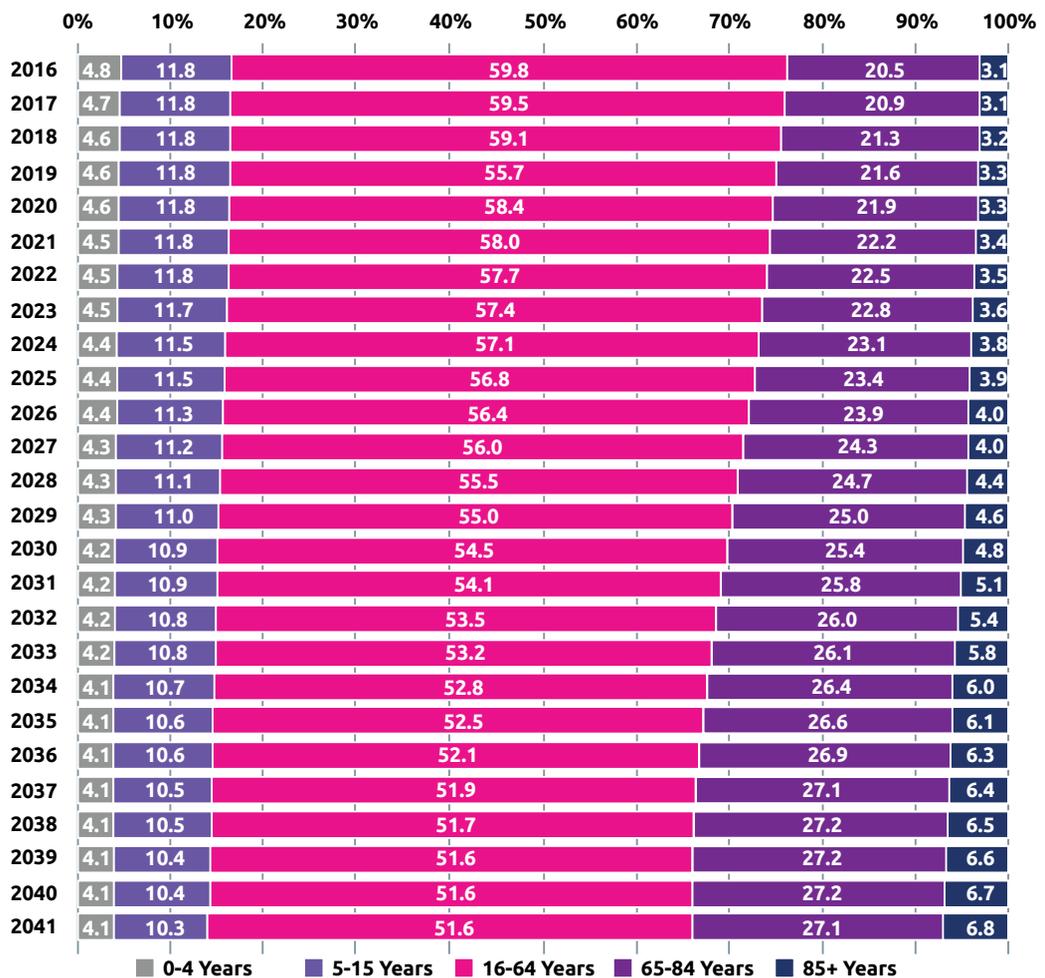
of Way networks in the country; geology and wildlife; and natural and industrial archaeology.

Our large geography means that our economy operates and reaches in different directions. We have Birmingham and the Black Country south and east, Wales on our longest border to the west and Manchester and Staffordshire north and east, as well as Herefordshire and Worcestershire to the south.

Shropshire is a beautiful and attractive place appealing to visitors and drawing people to move here, and there are opportunities and challenges which need to be taken into account in the strategy.

The population is older with the proportion of people aged 65 years and over being well above the national average and this is projected to continue. A higher proportion of Shropshire's older population live in rural areas rather than urban areas, whilst young adults leave the county to go to university or for employment, and there is a falling birth rate. Population growth is due to the in migration of adults.

Figure 2: Population change by broad age group

| Year	0-4 Years	5-15 Years	16-64 Years	65-84 Years	85+ Years
2016	4.8	11.8	59.8	20.5	3.1
2017	4.7	11.8	59.5	20.9	3.1
2018	4.6	11.8	59.1	21.3	3.2
2019	4.6	11.8	55.7	21.6	3.3
2020	4.6	11.8	58.4	21.9	3.3
2021	4.5	11.8	58.0	22.2	3.4
2022	4.5	11.8	57.7	22.5	3.5
2023	4.5	11.7	57.4	22.8	3.6
2024	4.4	11.5	57.1	23.1	3.8
2025	4.4	11.5	56.8	23.4	3.9
2026	4.4	11.3	56.4	23.9	4.0
2027	4.3	11.2	56.0	24.3	4.0
2028	4.3	11.1	55.5	24.7	4.4
2029	4.3	11.0	55.0	25.0	4.6
2030	4.2	10.9	54.5	25.4	4.8
2031	4.2	10.9	54.1	25.8	5.1
2032	4.2	10.8	53.5	26.0	5.4
2033	4.2	10.8	53.2	26.1	5.8
2034	4.1	10.7	52.8	26.4	6.0
2035	4.1	10.6	52.5	26.6	6.1
2036	4.1	10.6	52.1	26.9	6.3
2037	4.1	10.5	51.9	27.1	6.4
2038	4.1	10.5	51.7	27.2	6.5
2039	4.1	10.4	51.6	27.2	6.6
2040	4.1	10.4	51.6	27.2	6.7
2041	4.1	10.3	51.6	27.1	6.8

This is an established pattern that presents future tests and opportunities to innovate and find solutions for the Council and others. By 2041 the working age population (16-64) will be almost the same size as the dependent population (0-15 and 65+). Whilst this doesn't reflect the growing proportion of people aged 65 and above in the workforce, it does provide a strong indication that as Shropshire's population is getting older the proportion and number who are of working age is projected to be reducing.

There is also a projected growth in single person households in the future, particularly in the 65 years and older age group, which may change demand for types of housing and the need for social care support over time.

Health needs in Shropshire do vary from place to place, but there are some conditions which are more prevalent and which are preventable. Cancer, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, obesity and diabetes are amongst these conditions. Some of the prevalence of the conditions may be linked to the older age of the population, but raising awareness and promoting the changing of lifestyles and behaviours across all age ranges will help people remain healthy for longer. Considering healthy life expectancy at birth by gender illustrates the differences between places on the expected average age that a person would be diagnosed with a disability or condition that would require treatment. This suggests that both males and females living in rural areas are likely to have more healthy life years, particularly in the south of Shropshire.

### Figure 3: Healthy life expectancy

8
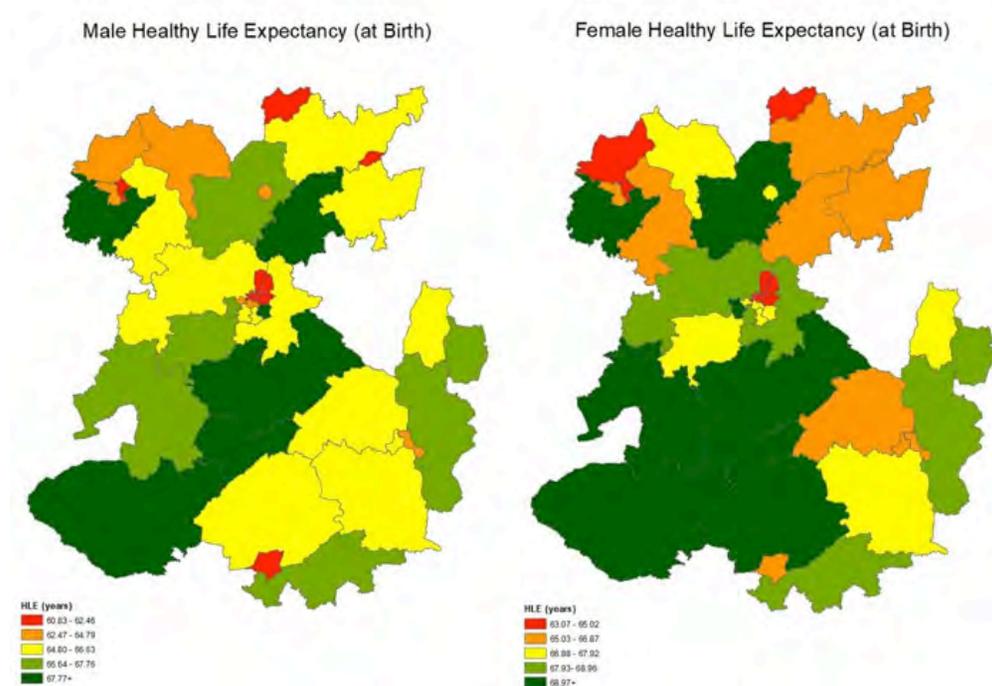
Being a large rural area, connectivity is vital to provide access to education, employment and leisure, shopping and health and care. This relates to both physical connectivity through highways and transport and digital connectivity through broadband and mobile phones. It is a key enabler for the economy and influences where people can live, particularly if they do not have access to a car.

Good digital connectivity provides businesses with the opportunity to operate in different areas of the county, employees to work from home, and during the coronavirus lockdown it has enabled school pupils to carry-on learning at home. An issue that has come more into focus for pupils during the lockdown period is digital poverty, where families may not have had digital devices for children to use for lessons and school work at home. This also highlights the importance of ensuring and enabling social mobility. Schools and the Council have provided equipment to help reduce this digital divide during the lockdown.

Access to affordable housing of all tenures is a consistent challenge across Shropshire communities, and particularly in rural areas. This can lead to situations where young people who grew up in communities move away to find a home that they can afford, and sees rural populations get older as a result. There are also strong links between the larger affordability gaps (salary and house prices) and areas with an older population.

Figure 4: Lower quartile and median quartile housing affordability ratio (the darker the shade the bigger the gap)
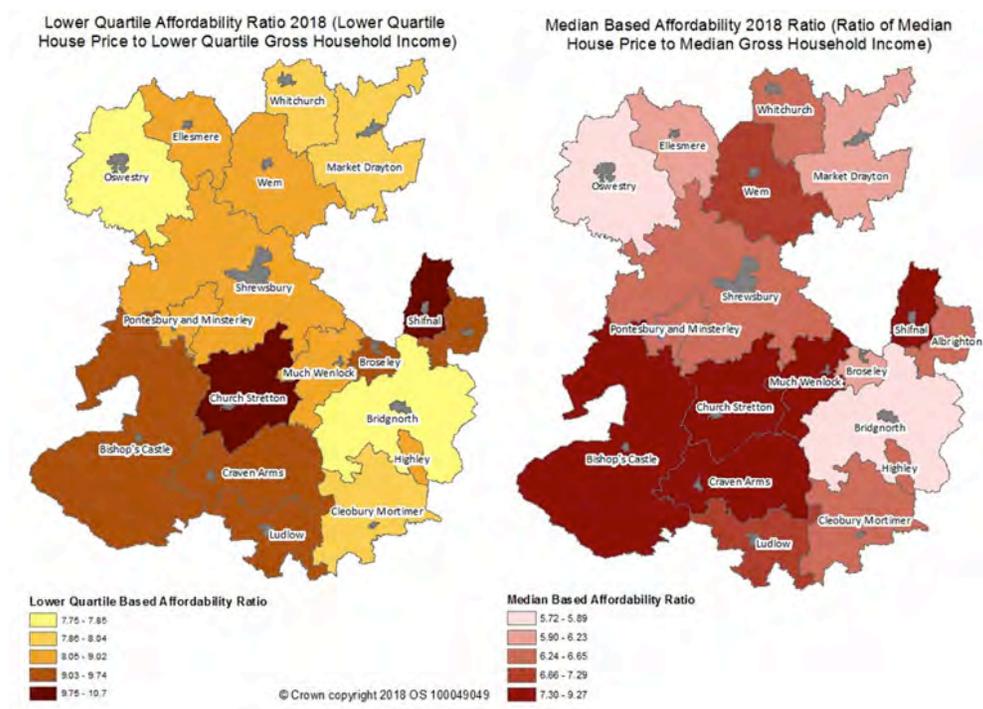
Shropshire is one of the most self-contained local authority areas in the country. 71% of working people that live here also work here, although the south of the county does see more people commuting out for their work. On average those who travel out of the county for work earn more per week than those who live and work here.

Whilst there are a small number of large employers, the majority are SMEs (small and medium sized businesses) with a higher proportion at the smaller end of the scale. Shropshire is a low wage economy and has a gross value added (GVA) that is lower than the England average with the gap continuing to grow.

Unsurprisingly for a rural county agriculture and land-based industry are significantly more important for the local economy than they are for the national economy. Health and care accounts for 1 in 7 jobs, with manufacturing and retail both having 10% of employment in Shropshire. The fastest growing sectors since 2010 are professional services, property and accommodation and food services which have strong links to the visitor economy and opportunities offered by Shropshire's great outdoor spaces for leisure activities. As the county reopens following the coronavirus lockdown, the impact on all sectors of the economy and how recovery plans can help businesses bounce back will become clear.
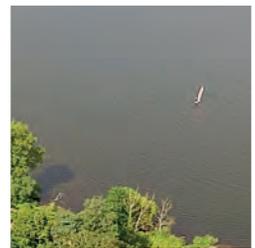
Developing our insights

In order to develop an evidence led strategy there has been a significant period of identifying, collating and analysing a wide range of information covering social, environmental, and economic factors at both local and county wide geographies.

In addition to this evidence base a survey was carried out of the town and parish Councils and the voluntary community and social enterprise sector.

The key messages and insights arising from this work have been shared in forums where the data and the local knowledge have helped to inform the intelligence and shape the draft shared priorities.

- Workshop session with the town and parish Council's and the voluntary community and social enterprise sector
- Workshop for Members and senior managers
- Discussions with the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) working group
- Presentation to and discussion with the Shropshire Business Board

Key issues and messages

The workshop sessions and wider discussions identified a range of issues and challenges, as well as potential solutions and possible action areas. They will be useful to inform initial discussions in identifying actions to deliver the shared priorities in localities and for the whole of Shropshire.

Mental Health for all ages came through strongly. There were particular concerns raised about support for children and young people with the role of school nurses and college support highlighted, as was support for parents from pre-school upwards.

Loneliness for all ages also resonated across all of the engagement work carried out. Access to support and services, both more formal and informal like local clubs and groups were raised, with access to opportunities in rural areas for children and young people a challenge, especially were transport was an issue. Access to venues, costs of the venues, and the availability of volunteers to run sessions were identified, leading to the challenge – "How can best use of assets in communities be made?"

The unintended consequences of changing how services are provided was used to illustrate how opportunities for interaction, particularly by older people, could inadvertently be reduced in communities. An example shared was changes being made to the provision of pensions with pensioners no longer picking up their pension from the Post

Office; reducing opportunities to meet others socially, and potentially impact the local high street through a change in spending habits.

The challenge of getting people around a large rural county like Shropshire was frequently raised. There is a reliance on private motor vehicles which can impact on those not old enough to drive, or who don't have access to a vehicle. Transport for young people, especially in rural areas, came through, as did the safety of the roads and safety whilst on the roads. This included young drivers and parents of children at rural schools with poor pathways and narrow roads. Community transport has been a feature of community life particularly in rural areas where volunteer drivers help people access shops and services including health appointments. A number of risks and issues were shared including barriers such as fuel and cost; the huge burden on volunteer drivers; and new legislation which risked making community transport untenable. In addition, many volunteer drivers involved in community car schemes are retired and of an older age.

Shropshire's growing older population is often referred to as challenge for the public sector and the voluntary community and social enterprise sector. However, through the workshop discussions the value of their experience and knowledge was recognised and the opportunity to harness this and look at multi-generational learning and volunteering were suggested. One challenge that was shared was that older people are working for longer and this could impact on the numbers volunteering.

Housing of the right type in the right place for people to access education, employment, services and support was robustly communicated. Affordable housing and housing for key workers was regularly raised. For example, if there is a desire to reduce travel to work home care workers need to be able to access affordable homes in the communities they work in. Currently there is a strong connection between areas with higher older populations and bigger gaps between salary and house prices. Similarly housing and access to employment must link. The availability of affordable 1 and 2 bed properties close to employment or education for young people to move into when they leave home was highlighted.

A particular challenge shared on a number of occasions was how to stop young people from leaving Shropshire, and how to attract young people to want to live here. The need to understand what young people are looking for in terms of education, employment, leisure and lifestyle, and housing and how to make Shropshire somewhere they want to be.

Connectivity, whether digital or physical was raised and linked to many of the issues and challenges made through the engagement work. The importance of ensuring that the quality of highways was maintained wherever possible was made, as was road safety enforcement. The condition of Rights of Way was also raised.

In terms of digital infrastructure, the importance of access to high speed broadband and mobile signal 4G/5G for all communities for business, education, social contact and leisure was a consistent message. This was balanced with concerns that the resistance to infrastructure developments such as the erection of mobile phone masts, would slow down progress. The use of digital technology to increase access to services and reduce the need for people to travel eg for appointments, was popular, particularly in relation to Health.

A cross-cutting theme that would need to factor in all plans was climate change and nature recovery, ensuring that actions and policy strengthened the focus on reducing or removing the impact on the environment. The ambition that arose from the engagement work was to make Shropshire the place for best practice on these issues.

There were also some key messages that came through the wider engagement work in the development of the strategy. From the survey of the town and parish councils and the voluntary community and social enterprise sector two specific points stood out:

- Respondent's did not feel that they could influence decisions in Shropshire
- A call for Shropshire Council to take a stronger role as an influence and leader, providing clarity of direction.

Through the workshops and engagement with the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) Working Group there was a clear message that one size does not fit all. The county is made up of a range of different communities that have different local needs and different structures and relationships. There could be a Shropshire wide plan that set out the actions that Shropshire Council would be progressing, but there would need to be bottom-up plans based on localities and developed from and owned by those communities.

Insights from the February 2020 Floods and the Coronavirus Pandemic The development of the Community and Rural Strategy evidence base, shared priorities, and the proposed approach, set out later in this strategy, was completed before the coronavirus pandemic lockdown restrictions and the national shielding requirements came into place.

A significant component of the Council's response was to move quickly to support communities. The work is ongoing, but substantial learning has already taken place which can have a direct bearing on how the Community and Rural Strategy could be delivered. A key feature of the learning so far has been the similarity between the effective response from communities, organisations and the Council and the previously developed approach to delivering the shared priorities set out in the Delivering the Strategy section of this document.

The learning has reinforced the recognition that rural and urban communities across Shropshire can and do, do a lot for themselves, requiring the Council to facilitate and enable them to support themselves rather than doing it to or for them.

The value of a clear shared purpose has come through as a key driver for staff to change behaviours and operate in a flexible and agile manner. In addition to this, there are under-pinning principles that have been identified through the learning, which could support successful implementation of the Community and Rural Strategy share priorities in localities:

- Making a difference for residents
- Having clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities
- Implementing adaptive and effective decision-making
- Being open-minded, embracing changes and learning from feedback
- Demonstrating leadership by everyone involved
- Dealing with uncertainty by looking for and implementing solutions
- Communicating in a clear, concise, and timely way to all
- Avoiding assumptions (get everyone on the same page)

Actions emerging from the learning which are relevant to the implementation of the shared priorities and working with localities include:

- Developing the evidence base by integrating it with the new datasets that have and continue to emerge from the work to respond to coronavirus pandemic that allow for ongoing understanding of community needs, identification of inequality and areas for action
- Building on multiagency partnerships in localities to sustain them for longer term, working closely with the VCSE, town and parish councils and other public sector colleagues to develop locality working

Voluntary organisations and community groups have been at the heart of efforts to support vulnerable people, the shielded and communities more widely, working with the Council, private sector organisations and others to do this. Feedback from a survey of these groups carried out in April 2020 provided the following insights:

- Loss of volunteers aged over 70 years. Although a number were 'lost' because they were shielded many volunteer managers believed that there was a risk that volunteers would not come back after the lockdown.
- Loss of income is a big concern, particularly where it was generated through training, charity shops, fundraising events, transport, and equipment loan.
- Diversion of funds into Coronavirus grant schemes is a big concern with questions over whether there will be less money to fund the wider activities and support when the crisis has past.
- Increased demand is a big concern. Many are worried they would not cope if there is a big recession and more people end up in hardship and debt (with basic needs not being met). A recession may also impact negatively on charitable giving.
- Befriending has been in high demand but is a service area that has seen reduced investment in recent years. Some organisations are worried that people getting more regular support now will start to rely on it but there may not be the ability to keep up regular befriending contacts after the crisis.
- Mental health support is a widely shared concern that has been raised for a while but highlighted further during the lockdown period. There is a sense that there not enough of the right support or training in place.
- Widely raised concerns about burn-out and mental health of staff and volunteers.
- Risks to jobs and future redundancies where there are paid staff.
- Risks that the sector will inevitably shrink. Organisations have run out of reserves now and some organisations normally expected to be in 'good health' are on the brink of collapse.
- Positively many have highlighted that they have new volunteers but that there are people coming forward who won't stay in place because a) they will go back to work and b) there is not any infrastructure support.
- The lack of general voluntary community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) infrastructure has been a concern for a number of years. Most organisations think that they will need help later when things are operating more normally again and fear there will not be any help later.
- VCSE and private sector partnerships have developed and that is seen as a real positive. How can this be maintained in the future?

Many of the insights emerging from the VCSE survey chime with both the shared priorities and the proposed approach to implement to deliver the strategy the shared priorities on page 17.

Our Shared Priorities

Through the analysis of the evidence base and the feedback received through the engagement work it has been possible to develop a vision, aim and priorities which should resonate with all. The shared priorities and the actions taken to deliver them cannot stand in isolation. They are interdependent.

Vision:

Sustainable Shropshire communities through local action

Aim:

Shropshire; a great place to live, work, visit and play for everyone

Shared priorities:

- Keeping everyone happy and healthy, whatever their age
- Helping people who are lonely to connect with others and enjoy themselves
- Finding effective and sustainable ways to move people around
- Embracing the skills and experience of our older generation
- Making sure we have the right homes in the right places
- Attracting and keeping young people in the county and developing a skilled workforce
- Continuously improving physical and digital connectivity
- Reducing our impact on the climate, nature and the wider environment

Delivering the strategy

The development and delivery of the Community and Rural Strategy has been about how the Council and communities, particularly those in rural areas who may have reduced access to services, amenities, and public transport, can best work together to achieve solutions and outcomes that are right for that place. From the outset the approach has been collaborative, developing shared priorities with the vision that local areas identify local solutions to deliver the priorities, and listening to how the strategy could be implemented together. Through this process the role of the Council should be more focused on enabling the local solutions to take place whilst it provides direction and leadership of place and delivering strategic and county wide schemes and initiatives.

This approach has been developed taking account of published literature and learning that best met the emerging opportunities and issues arising from the work on the evidence base and engagement with stakeholders. A key reference document has been Building Collaborative Places: Infrastructure for System Change (Collaborate, 2017). The approach is framed around but not limited to the following:

- A shared understanding of local challenges which informs the vision for the place, whether this is a community, a town, or a wider geographic area.
- A cross-cutting, cross-sector and collaborative model of governance
- Shared priorities and outcomes driving local accountability for their delivery
- A model that enables areas to identify priorities for them and the right solutions for their place
- Utilising social value and an asset-based approach to collaboratively make best use of resources in communities
- Evidence based understanding of the challenges and issues and progress and impacts by all partners involved
- Enabling space (digital and physical) for those who connect directly to individuals or communities or that communities or individuals connect through
- Enabling collaboration and changes to service delivery to take place as and when it needs to through effective communication and feedback arrangements, including responding to insights and evidence

The proposed approach of having countywide and local plans for the delivery of the shared priorities has been developed with the development and implementation of other local strategic resources. The development of Local Economic Growth Strategies and Local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments have and will be taking place.

The local delivery plans for the shared priorities are a mechanism to bring together the different actions and activities to assist with the coordination of their delivery. These will provide the opportunity for town and parish councils, voluntary and community groups, private businesses and Shropshire Council services to set out how they will work together to contribute to the local delivery of the shared priorities. They may also identify enabling actions or support from Shropshire Council or other organisations to support the delivery of the local delivery plan.

There will need to be local governance arrangements in place to guide the development and delivery of the local delivery plans, identifying and allocating resources, and setting local actions for the future where required. These will need to be representative of the communities within their defined geography and membership would be expected to include town and parish councils, the voluntary community and social enterprise sector, and public services as a minimum.

High Level Delivery Plan 2020/21

Action	Responsible	By when
Co-design local governance arrangements	Executive Director of Place	December 2020
Reviewing actions to deliver Shropshire Council strategies and projects to identify how they support or deliver the Shared Priorities	Executive Director of Place	November 2020
Complete gap analysis and identify any additional actions that are required to be delivered by Shropshire Council	Executive Director of Place	November 2020
Develop the Countywide delivery plans for the shared priorities (to be reviewed and updated annually as required)	Executive Director of Place	January 2021
Develop the local delivery plans for the shared priorities (to be reviewed and updated annually, as required)	Local Area Groups	June 2021
Integrate elements from local delivery plans into the relevant Place Plans	Executive Director of Place	Annually by October
Use the evidence base and local delivery plan actions to inform the development of local JSNAs	Director of Public Health	March 2022

Community and Rural Strategy
Collaborate, change together and achieve
September 2020

www.shropshire.gov.uk