

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question from Councillors Dan Morris and Steve Davenport

Could the Portfolio Holder for Highways Cllr Richard Marshall update Council on the status of the economically important Pant-Llanymynech bypass? In addition, given the new found enthusiasm for road bypasses by some parties who were seemingly hitherto unconvinced of the economic and environmental benefit of building bypasses, does he now expect a similar new found enthusiasm and support from them for the North West Relief Road, and please could he update Council on when he now expects determination at planning for the NWRR?

Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services

Can I thank the members for the question. Contrary to what many would have you believe it is vital that we continue to invest in the critical infrastructure of the county to ensure our economy is as productive as we can be, that people can move around and access essential services and that our connectivity to the rest of the UK places us in the best possible position.

As everyone knows Shropshire wrestles with pockets of deprivation in various locations, but tackling rural deprivation and improving access to services, education and employment is perhaps the key one which can raise the level of our local economy and contribute to improved quality of life. Of course when such work is done well it can help mitigate a range of wider environmental pressures such as congestion and the resultant air pollution.

I was very pleased to hear the Liberal Democrat MP for North Shropshire on the radio publicly supporting the administration's policy of road building and I very much look forward to working cross party to ensure both the pan-Llanymynech by pass and the NWRR are delivered.

My understanding is that the DfT are still working on developing an Outline Business Case for the Pant-Llanymynech by pass and I am delighted to say that for Shrewsbury NWRR we have almost concluded the extensive amount of ground investigation and environmental assessment work required to satisfy the requirements of the Environment Agency and Natural England. The aim is to complete the submission of that information in January which then enable the matter to be considered by Planning Committee in the spring.

Question from Councillor Julian Dean

Energy bills are a continuing challenge for small businesses as well as for households. Meanwhile the council has a commitment to achieve carbon neutral status by 2030 on its own estate.

What energy efficiency measures have been installed in the Darwin Shopping Centre since its acquisition? Have PV panels been installed on its extensive roof space?

Are tenants provided with advice and guidance on reducing energy use? Is there a renewable energy purchase scheme promoted to tenants?

Are greenhouse gas emissions for the shopping centre included in council emissions reporting?

Beyond the Darwin Shopping Centre is there a programme of support and guidance on energy saving measures and renewable energy installation for the council's business tenants elsewhere?

Response from Councillor Ian Nellins, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Q. What energy efficiency measures have been installed in the Darwin Shopping Centre since its acquisition?

- Core C goods lift has been installed this year and utilises the latest technology and energy efficient drive system. This was a consideration when choosing the type of lift needed.
- The centre energy contracts are all with West Mercia Energy to give us the best possible costs / contracts available.
- The gas meter has been removed from the Pride Hill centre and a programme of removing electricity meters in the Riverside is ongoing. This reduces standing charges on redundant areas.

Following an Env' Audit by the previous owners –

- All lights within the Darwin centre have been changed to LED. This includes the new (for 2022) Xmas lights in the Darwin – energy efficiency was a part of the tender process by centre management + Shropshire Council. The centres power supplies are split into essential (24hr) and non-essential (timed). To offer the most savings we have installed dimmable / motion sensor-controlled lighting in the back of house areas so no lights are operating when the centre is closed.

- All escalators in the Darwin have “eco” mode to aid in saving energy.
- The centre’s BMS operates equipment at minimum times.
- Historically the centre was heated throughout however the heater units were inefficient and were removed as part of the Primark project. The centre now utilises heat from the atriums (solar gain) and retains this heat with air curtains and overdoor heaters at the entrances.

With the above in mind, it was considered by auditors that unless very significant costs are incurred to change or install new systems the Darwin Centre operates as efficiently as possible.

Q. Have PV panels been installed on its extensive roof space?

- This has been looked at previously however the cost to install was considered prohibitive. Although the Darwin roof is extensive it is littered with tenant owned / maintained HVAC and our smoke extract systems, so a clear space is not available to install enough panels to make it viable.
- Additionally, water harvesting was also investigated however as an add on it again was considered unviable when considering initial install costs versus ongoing savings within the public toilets.

Q. Are tenants provided with advice and guidance on reducing energy use?

- National retailers will follow their own advice from head office however independent are advised to consult with their energy providers.
- The tenants fit out guide includes a section on environmental considerations and specifically highlight energy efficiency when choosing materials and products. Raw materials with inherently lower environmental impact (e.g. recycled paper, packaging made from recycled materials etc.) and increase the proportion of wood and wood products (supplied as raw materials) which are derived from certified sources and sustainable forestry (FSC) should be used where possible.

Q. Is there a renewable energy purchase scheme promoted to tenants?

- All tenants have their own metered supplies therefore national retailers will be tied into contracts via their brokers. As a

recommendation new, independent tenants, are given information for West Mercia Energy (Shropshire Council energy brokers) however the decision is theirs.

Q. Are greenhouse gas emissions for the shopping centre included in council emissions reporting?

- Carbon emissions from the shopping centre are not included in SC's footprint since we are not directly responsible for emissions generated by our tenants.

Question from Councillor Mike Isherwood

Following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak and the coroner's ruling that the toddler died due to a respiratory condition caused by mould growing in his family's home, can portfolio-holder Cllr Dean Carrol tell Council what steps he and his department are taking to ensure that a similar situation does not arise in any property of which Shropshire Council is ultimately landlord.

Response from Councillor Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Growth, Regeneration and Housing

Members will be aware that Shropshire's Council housing is managed on our behalf by our Arm's Length Management Organisation, Shropshire Towns and Rural (STAR) Housing.

The risk of condensation and mould growth is something that STAR has always been aware of and works closely with tenants to alleviate such issues as they arise. We are also aware that due to the cost-of-living crisis the potential that residents may not being able to afford to heat their homes adequately has increased. As a result, STAR has been working hard this year to update processes.

STAR Housing already has in place a 5-year stock condition survey programme, providing clear condition data about the stock. This exceeds usual good practice, as most Registered Providers have only 10% stock condition data, from which they extrapolate to make assumptions on the remainder.

All of STAR's contract officers and responsive repairs team leaders received Housing Health and Safety Rating System training from a qualified Housing Quality Network trainer in September 2022, with particular emphasis on damp and mould. The team had previously been trained in this, but this refresher training has ensured new staff were also captured.

All of STAR's external contractors are expected to report any issues of concern to STAR. This can include anything from damp and mould to issues of hoarding, or of child neglect. A strong relationship has been built with contractors, who are happy to assist as "eyes and ears" in properties where access may otherwise be difficult.

STAR's own in-house team of operatives are also expected to report any issues they observe via e-forms, which are directed to the relevant teams to be actioned.

Since early Autumn STAR's contact centre has become more proactive, checking with every tenant when they report any type of repair to ask whether they have any damp or mould concerns. Where issues are reported, when the operative attends to carry out the original repair, they will also carry out an inspection to see if they can determine the cause of these issues. If necessary, a further inspection by a repairs team leader will be carried out. If it is something that the operative can identify (e.g., a fault with an extractor fan) they will then report this repair for action.

Where a tenant reports damp and mould, STAR carries out an inspection. Where required, for example if it is due to a structural issue or damp-proof course failure, a further specialist survey is done by contractors who then recommend remedial works. Alternatively, there may be a need for the tenant to be signposted to STAR's Financial Inclusion team to see what assistance can be provided to access additional financial support for them to increase their home heating usage.

STAR regularly posts and publishes "help us to help you" information asking tenants to report issues and reminding them how they can make contact, via phone or email. Energy efficiency advice is provided both on the STAR website and via tenants' newsletters posted out to them. The website has advice videos, including "Breaking the mould" giving advice about how to avoid condensation and mould.

From October 2022 STAR's Housing Support Officers have been carrying out monthly checks to see whether the extractor fans in our supported clients' homes are working, or whether the tenant has turned them off. This ensures ventilation of the property.

STAR reviews complaints on a regular basis, including any disrepair claims to see whether there are any "lessons learnt", or where we can prevent further issues occurring. As an example, the monthly checks by support workers were initiated following identification of an issue of supported tenants turning extractor fans off. STAR now works closely with tenants so that they understand the importance of ventilation and that the costs of having the fans operating are minimal.

STAR's board has recently approved additional funding for further help and assistance, both towards the cost-of-living crisis, and any increase in reports of damp and mould. This includes an additional financial inclusion officer to provide further advice as required for those concerned about use of their heating and other bills.

Question from Councillor Rob Wilson

Since May 2021:

How many miles of road have been resurfaced in Shropshire?

How many miles of footpath have been resurfaced in Shropshire?

How many miles of cycle path have been resurfaced in Shropshire?

Response from Councillor Richard Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Highways and Regulatory Services

Since the start of May 2021, Shropshire Council has undertaken:

- 229 miles of road resurfaced
- 14 miles of footway resurfaced
- no cycleways have been resurfaced in that period (however 3/4 mile of cycle lane resurfaced on Abbey Foregate as part of a carriageway scheme).