

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS**  
**COUNCIL 17 JULY 2025**

**1 Question from Andrew Sceats**

'The Council decided to found, wholly own and supervise the activities of Cornovii Developments Ltd, a local building company.

The Council should now consider investigating whether Cornovii's two main aims - (1) meeting unmet housing need and (2) providing financial assistance to the Council, are being achieved?

(1) Other companies currently concentrate on building the more profitable 3-5 bedrooms houses. When Cornovii was founded, the Council waiting list showed a 50% need for one bedroom, 33% for 2 bedrooms and 3% for 4 bedrooms plus. Also there were identifiable groups needing accommodation including; young people, old people and those with differing disabilities and health issues.

From statistics provided by Cornovii it seems not to have provided an alternative model to other providers, concerning target groups.

(2) There were significant start-up costs and ongoing costs, so instead of Cornovii providing a financial contribution to the Council, it has been steadily increasing its loan liability to the Council. Cornovii had a borrowing facility of £14 million at 31/3/2020, £42 million at 31/3/2024 with a projected peak loan debt of £56.165 in December 2027. These amounts are within a Council loan facility of £69 million!

These figures don't include the cost of Cornovii projects using Council-owned sites which occasionally have been funded by share issue in Cornovii (which is its own company!!).

The term 'financial assistance to the Council' was both unquantifiable in target amount and length of time it was to be achieved'.

**Response from Cllr James Owen, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Leisure**

1. Cornovii Developments Ltd was created with a clear social purpose: to complement the housing market by delivering homes that meet local needs—especially where the market has historically underprovided. Council recognises the importance of smaller homes and inclusive design, and Cornovii's business plan reflects this. While early delivery focused on establishing a viable pipeline and securing planning consents, the new

administration is now reviewing Cornovii's housing mix to ensure it continues to align with the original vision. This includes:

- Evaluating the proportion of 1- and 2-bedroom homes being delivered and planned
- Assessing how schemes support specific groups, including older people and those with accessibility needs
- Reinforcing social value outcomes of future development.

This review will help ensure Cornovii remains a responsive and community-focused developer, aligned with our upcoming new wider housing strategy.

2. Cornovii's financial model was designed with long-term value in mind. Like many development companies, it requires upfront investment to acquire land, secure planning, and deliver homes. The increase in borrowing reflects the company's growth and the Council's confidence in its delivery capacity.

Importantly:

- All borrowing is within the approved £69 million facility and is subject to robust governance and risk management
- Cornovii is currently in the growth phase, however, both financial and wider economic benefits have been flowing back to the Council in line with company's business plan since its inception. It is expected to reach peak debt in December 2027 at which point (subject to any future changes to the plan and company strategy) the debt profile will start to decrease as the net shareholder funds position moves to a surplus.
- The Council is working to define and publish clearer metrics for "financial benefits," including:
  - Dividend potential
  - Land value uplift
  - Social return on investment for example affordable housing and local employment.

The Council remains committed to transparency and will continue to monitor the company's performance closely to ensure it delivers both financial and social value for Shropshire residents.

## **2 Question from Tamarin Bibow**

1. I have lived in Ruyton XI Towns with my husband and young family since 2021.

2. We live on part of the B 4397 heavily used by traffic of all sorts heading to and from the industrial estates and business parks on the North side of Shrewsbury as a “rat run”.
3. We suffer personally, as do many local residents, from serious pollution, both noise and air quality resulting from traffic forced to come through our village. Most of these vehicles use the rat run only because drivers see no practical alternative.
4. But as a Shropshire resident with a local business, children to take to school etc I’m just as concerned about the wider impact of cancelling the North West Relief Road. If the project is not delivered what other options are there for relieving congestion, not just in the rural villages surrounding Shrewsbury but in the town itself?
5. Please can the Council Leader now supply more detail as to:
  - the next steps
  - what measures the new Administration plans to take to divert traffic away from existing rat runs and from Shrewsbury town centre.

**Response – Cllr David Vasmer Portfolio Holder for Highways and Environment**

With the decision to pause delivery of the North West Relief Road, the next steps for the council are to ensure that the financial implications of this are managed effectively'

As regards future options to address town centre congestions and rural rat running, it remains the case that there are many effective interventions that can still be pursued.

With rural traffic management, the continuing assessment of impacted towns and villages for weight, width and speed restriction orders where appropriate will continue, as will close working with National Highways, where there is a need for ongoing coordination between the management of their network in Shropshire and the local highway network. The council will also continue to work closely with National Highways on their emerging future investment plans, in order to ensure that the capacity for effective cross county movement is provided on their network. This will directly assist in removing the need for local rat running for both car and freight journeys.

In terms of Shrewsbury town centre, there are a number of potential schemes and approaches contained within the developing Shrewsbury Moves strategy. In looking

at enhancements to public transport, and active travel measures and facilities (walking and cycling), the council is committed to continuing to work with partners to rebalance the town centre traffic mix, and in doing so, address the current congestion challenges.

### **3 Question from John Palmer**

In April 2009 the newly-formed Shropshire Council steered its exciting new £37m entertainment venue Theatre Severn into full activity, becoming a regional beacon, attracting residents and visitors to vibrant Shrewsbury, a town renowned for its culture and heritage. Promised as a facility for all the community, it includes the Walker Theatre, which has a standing capacity of 500.

In recent years, the Tories' laissez faire disinterest in the venue's social responsibility to serve all ages, has allowed market forces to narrow the breadth of music gigs in the Walker Theatre to mostly lame tribute shows and beardy trad folk, aimed at a moneyed mature audience demographic. The stark feeling is: "Under 30? You're not catered for - as punter or local artist".

Finances are tight. Yet this new, newly progressive Council surely has a perfect chance to seize the reins?

Will this Council suggest raising middle-class mainstream main theatre performance ticket prices, thus allowing subsidising of low-cost entry to gigs by more dynamic, fresh touring bands, with support from the best burgeoning talent amongst young local artists? Given such showcase opportunities, some young local artists may well progress to offers of European tour slots: cultural exchange to make the far right isolationists weep! How about it?

### ***Response – Cllr James Owen, PH Housing and Leisure***

Theatre Severn prides itself on providing a busy and varied programme of events for all. With over 647 ticketed events in the last financial year, the live music programme is extensive and makes up a large proportion of these (approx. 100 shows).

Admittedly standing gigs are far less frequently staged than seated, but this has been as much for logistical reasons as financial. In January 2025, Theatre Services invested in a new P.A. system for the Walker Theatre which will enable the staging of standing gigs without the costly need to hire in sound equipment and engineers. This investment has also enabled standing gigs to be staged within a one-day timeframe, whereas previously this has required a minimum of two days from the programming diary.

With this new investment in place, viability has improved, and there are plans to extend our programme of live music gigs aimed at a younger audience. However, band tours tend to book much later than theatre shows, therefore achieving this relies on tour schedules and Theatre availability aligning. Over the last 10 years, we've staged 23 different standing gigs (over 6,000 tickets sold) for a variety of bands attracting audiences of all ages.

2024/25 was Theatre Severn's most successful year to date, generating over £7m in income, attracting a record attendance of 224,595 to a ticketed event (which is a 12% increase on 2023/24) and a generating a surplus of over £700k.

It is worth noting that there are other established venues in Shrewsbury already catering for this market, with an extensive programme of live music events at Albert's Shed and The Buttermarket.