

COUNCIL – 26 FEBRUARY 2026

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. Question from Tim Ashton

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Economic Growth, if they will make a statement on the Council's progress in **aligning the 2026–2029 Destination Management Plan** with the objective of reviving the 'Grand Tour of England'; and, with reference to the information first presented to this Council in February 2024 regarding William Shakespeare's familiarity with Shropshire, what assessment his department has made of the cultural and economic implications of the recent public research identifying the presence of the relics of **Saint Erkenwald** and the **High Altar stone of Old St Paul's** within the county?

Response from Rob Wilson, Portfolio Holder for Transport & Economic Growth

I want to highlight what is becoming one of rural England's most remarkable heritage developments.

The emerging research at Soulton Hall—especially the possible relics of Saint Erkenwald and the High Altar stone from Old St Paul's—is extraordinary. These finds could reshape how Shropshire is understood nationally. Erkenwald was central to early English Christianity, and the High Altar stone was at the heart of medieval London's spiritual life.

To find evidence of both in our county opens an entirely new historical chapter for Wem and Shropshire.

This is especially significant given the renewed national interest in the 'Grand Tour of England', which traces the country's industrial, artistic and spiritual heritage. Work on the draft Destination Management Plan already recognises Shropshire's heritage as being one of its most important attributes. It also references the potential of working with Essex on the Grand Tour concept as a strong example of the partnership working.

The Soulton Hall discoveries greatly amplify this opportunity. They offer a story of national resonance—one that places Shropshire back at the centre of England's cultural and religious development.

While the draft DMP provides structure for supporting the visitor economy, its real importance now lies in enabling this narrative: saints, stones, Shakespearean heritage, and a revived English Grand Tour that acknowledges Shropshire's rightful place.

The DMP's principles align strongly with the estate's ambitions and demonstrate how partnership working with destinations, heritage bodies,

and landowners can support the Plan's goals and strengthen Shropshire's storytelling.

The DMP is not an action plan for the Council, but a strategic tool for partners to shape priorities, support funding, and guide development.

We hope the final DMP will give Souldon Hall a robust framework—supporting sensitive development, expanding access to its heritage, and securing its role as a key contributor to the region's cultural and economic future.

2. Question from Adrian Tacchi

I speak as Chairman of the Sovereign Park Residents Association.

We are very concerned at the lack of progress in Shropshire Council not adopting the roads and sewers at Sovereign Park. We therefore ask what action are you taking against Miller Homes to address the numerous highway and Planning consent breaches, some of which are of a very serious nature, furthermore what process is in place should this Authority need to recover a deficit when a Developer's Bond does not cover outstanding works after they have left the site and why is this Authority allowing Miller Homes to build elsewhere in Shropshire when their previous performance is or should be well known, we feel that Residents are being treated very unfairly by Miller Homes and their Grounds Maintenance Company and call upon Shropshire Council to explain why they appear to allow Miller Homes to flout Planning requirements at the expense of your hard pressed Ratepaying Residents, many of whom have chosen to retire to this beautiful County Town which prides itself with its Floral Displays and Open Spaces when at the same time allowing raw sewage to spew into the roads allegedly caused by the removal of a Sewage Pumping Station which formed part of a Planning Consent, Finally, what action can this Authority take against Miller Homes for not carrying out or not completing the Grounds Works on Sovereign Park in accordance with the Landscaping Plan.

Response from David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Sovereign Park, Shrewsbury is currently unadopted but subject to a Section 38 agreement under the Highways Act 1980. Officers are in regular contact with Miller Homes in relation to the adoption of both sites off Oteley Road. Miller Homes are now actively engaging with officers to move forward with the adoption of the site. However, prior to adoption we require all works to be completed to Shropshire Councils satisfaction and the surface water and pumping station to be adopted by Severn Trent Water, which is subject to a separate legal agreement Shropshire Council are not party to.

As part of the Section 38 agreement, Shropshire Council secured a bond that can be called in if the developer fails to meet their obligations. Shropshire Council would use the bond money to carryout works and bring the road to an adoptable standard. However, we would not call the bond in unless the sewers were adopted or Severn Trent water or Severn Trent were also in a

position where they felt they had exhausted all options and they were also looking to call the bond supporting their legal agreement and carry out the works themselves. Thus ensuring the sewers are adopted.

In relation to planning, the only issue of non-compliance with the planning approvals for this development came in the form of a complaint with regards to the drainage scheme, which was investigated and determined to be in breach of the original approved plans. The developers seeking to regularise this matter sought a variation to the drainage scheme through application 25/02742/AMP and this was approved in July 2025 and thus resolved the breach of planning control. (This issue was a technical matter of paperwork trail as the drainage systems was considered acceptable and has the necessary S104 agreement with Severn Trent Water.)

With regards to the landscaping matter, the planning permission process is a self-regulatory process, with developers responsible for ensuring compliance with the permission and conditions contained within them. There is no routine monitoring of developments to ensure the long-term landscaping management is undertaken. The planning enforcement team offers a reactive service to consider alleged breaches of planning control where matters have been reported, as occurred with the drainage matters brought to the councils attention.

3. Question from David Kilby, Shropshire Playing Fields Association

Shropshire Playing Fields Association note from press reports the decision in January 2026 by Shropshire Council to pause the proposed £28.8m extension to the Shrewsbury Sports Village, which would include two new pools and multiple fitness suite, "pending a review of Shropshire's overall leisure requirements".

SPFA would like to ask why the project needs to cost so much for an eight lane competition size swimming pool, especially given that Shropshire Council already own the land, whilst existing amenities include car-parking, fitness suites, reception area, cafe, grass pitches, a premier league grass pitch, floodlit all weather pitch, climbing wall, children's soft play area, hardcourt tennis and netball courts and national grade floodlit cycle track.

Could Shropshire Council provide a breakdown of how much it would cost if the proposal was simply for a stand-alone purpose built, eight lane competition pool size complex, plus learner pool with appropriate changing room facilities and spectator area?

We note other similar recent projects in the West Midland area costing nearer to £11 million rather than the massive £28.8 million project being suggested, which in our opinion for an extension, seems massively excessive and unsustainable as a debt moving forward, especially given the historical data and evidence relating to the utilisation of the facility in its recent history.

Response from James Owen, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Leisure

The scheme at Sundorne was developed in consultation with the public and key Stakeholders to provide a facility that was both operationally and financially sustainable over the longer term. Its aim was catering for the needs of the swimming community and wider public across the county, taking into account of and complimenting the facilities already present at Shrewsbury Sports Village.

The plan for an 8 lane 25m competition pool, suitable to host county galas and similar events is not currently catered for in Shropshire.

As part of the project's due diligence, the £28.8 million pounds budget was benchmarked against other similar schemes in the UK and represents good value for money, comparing favourably with current market costs.

Leisure centres, by their very nature, are complex bespoke buildings, designed to reflect local needs and site conditions. Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide the cost for a theoretical standalone centre without developing a detailed proposal.

We are not aware of any other comparable projects in the West Midlands costing nearer £11M but if Shropshire Playing Fields Association can provide details we would be happy to investigate to see if there are innovations that would be useful for any future scheme in Shropshire.

4. Question from John Palmer

Today you are setting your annual budget for 2026/27. Impacted greatly by £39m spent under the Conservatives on the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road project, with nothing to show for it but a monumental budget line problem of a road in the hole.

What the public want to know is exactly who did what, when, how and why?

Is this Council going to stop dillydallying, before the evidence records, and recollections, magically disappear, and announce a fully transparent Inquiry?

Response from David Vasmer, Portfolio Holder for Highways & Environment

I would like to thank John Palmer for his question. Much of the factual detail needed for a proper response was contained in an answer I gave to Cllr Rosemary Dartnell at a Cabinet Meeting on 11th February. This gave a detailed breakdown of the £39m spent on the entirety of the North West Relief Road and separated out the spending on the Oxon Link Road. There was also a summary of the work done by the four contractors who received the highest spending, although by far the largest amount was over £25m on services provided by WSP.

While the decision on the future of the North West Relief Road was still paused, it was not possible to announce an inquiry into the project. However, I hope that its future will be resolved later on during the course of this meeting. We will then consult with the Transformation and Improvement Scrutiny Committee about appointing a Task and Finish Group to investigate why so much money was spent, with the ability to call witnesses. When the terms of reference for this Task and Finish Group are drawn up, I will ask that the lines of questioning you suggest are considered.

5. Question from Andrew Sceats

At Council meetings in 2025 of 17 July and 11 December I asked public questions about the type of accommodation being providing by, and the financing of, the Council's Cornovii Development Limited company. Including remuneration of its directors and costs of accommodation used by the company. I have recently been in correspondence with Councillor James Owen about what is happening. He informed me that the only capital receipts to the Council are through the sale of sites to the company and none through profits from the sale of properties. To date, no capital has been received by the Council for sites- only shares in the company which are 'worthless' as they only have a paper value. I would think that after 5 years operation the undisclosed directors' fees and other related expenditures probably exceed revenue for the Council. If the Council had offered any available sites on the open market to other developers much needed revenue would be have been generated. If Council decides that the Shirehall is demolished and its valuable site redeveloped the use of an alternative development company to Cornovii should be used to generate much needed funds. My question is -why was I, and many others, under the false impression that Council receipts from Cornovii Developments were from both the sale of sites (which hasn't happened to date) and also from profits made from the sale of houses provided and have the Directors and staff benefitted more than the Council from the way the company was set up and has been managed?

Response from James Owen, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Leisure

The Council welcomes the opportunity to clarify the purpose, structure, and financial arrangements of Cornovii Developments Limited and to address the points raised.

Cornovii Developments Limited was established by the Council as a wholly owned development company to support the delivery of housing and regeneration objectives that the Council could not readily achieve through the open market alone. Its primary purpose has been to increase the supply of housing, including affordable and specialist accommodation, and to retain greater long-term influence over the quality, location, and tenure of development within the county.

From the outset, it was made clear that the Council's financial return from Cornovii would be long-term and strategic, rather than simply an

immediate source of capital receipts. The business model does not rely on short-term profit extraction but instead on the creation of a sustainable development vehicle that can support wider economic, housing, and regeneration outcomes over time.

In relation to land transactions, capital receipts is a specific term meaning the proceeds that the Council receives from the sale of assets (in this case land). The Council has indeed received capital receipts to date in respect of land sales to CDL. Additionally, two sites were transferred, with value reflected through the Council's shareholding in the company. This approach was taken to enable Cornovii to remain viable during its early years of operation and to support delivery at pace in challenging market conditions, including rising construction costs and economic uncertainty. Both projects have completed and delivered a project surplus with one of them attracted an additional overage payment which is in effect a form of capital receipt.

Due to the position of the company being in its initial growth period where it is recovering planned past cash deficits the balance sheet shows that Shareholder funds are not yet in surplus and therefore the Council does not currently receive dividends from Cornovii. This position has been transparent within the company's approved business plans. Any future financial returns to the Council are expected to arise over the medium to long term and will be considered alongside the wider social and economic benefits delivered through the company's activities.

All directors' remuneration and senior staffing costs are set in line with the company's articles, shareholder agreements, and relevant governance requirements. These arrangements are subject to shareholder oversight and audit, and the company operates within an agreed framework to ensure propriety, value for money, and accountability. The Council recognises that there has been public misunderstanding about the nature and timing of financial returns from Cornovii. Cabinet accepts that clearer communication could have been provided regarding the distinction between capital receipts, dividend income, and wider non-financial benefits associated with the company's role.

Cabinet continues to keep the performance, governance, and value-for-money case for Cornovii Developments under regular review. This includes consideration of future options for Council-owned sites, including the Shirehall site, where decisions will be informed by financial, regeneration, and strategic objectives, and where alternative delivery models will be assessed as appropriate. The Council remains committed to transparency and will continue to ensure that members and the public are provided with clear and accurate information about the operation and outcomes of its wholly owned company.

6. Question from Caroline Price

Given that Shropshire is currently determining major planning applications without an up-to-date adopted Local Plan, what measures will the Council introduce to ensure that development decisions are consistently supported by fully tested infrastructure evidence, including, where developments rely on constrained existing access routes, independent highways review or safety audit prior to determination so that planning decisions remain genuinely planned, evidence-based and sustainable in the long term?

Response from David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

In the current absence of a five-year housing land supply, the Council applies the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out within the National Planning Policy Framework, as well as applying appropriate weight to the adopted development plan. When making planning decisions this still enables the Council to consider any adverse impacts, including those relating to infrastructure capacity, that may demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposals.

The Council retains in-house expertise in highways development management and other specialist areas who are routinely consulted when the Council is considering and determining planning applications. Likewise, the Council also consults statutory consultees, such as National Highways where they may be impacts on the strategic highways network, and infrastructure providers where required.

The Council intends to formally commence work on a new Local Plan under the Governments new system this Spring, subject to the necessary national regulations being in place. This will involve consultation and engagement with infrastructure providers to ensure that infrastructure capacity is fully assessed and considered when planning for future development within the county.