

MEMBER QUESTIONS
COUNCIL 24 SEPTEMBER 2026

Question from Councillor Kate Halliday

I have previously raised concerns regarding parking pressures in Belle Vue and Coleham, including the impact of increasing development, commuter parking and the loss of on-street parking spaces. Despite this, residents continue to contact me describing worsening difficulties in finding parking close to their homes, particularly in Old Coleham. Similar concerns are now being raised in relation to further potential developments on Old Coleham that will remove existing parking capacity whilst potentially adding additional demand.

In addition, since the Council increased parking charges in its off-street car parks, many residents have reported a noticeable increase in long-stay on-street parking in Belle Vue and Coleham, with people parking in residential streets and then walking into the town centre. This has led to vehicles parking on pavements and close to junctions, obstructing footways, reducing visibility for drivers and pedestrians, creating difficulties for people with prams and mobility scooters, restricting access to residents' driveways, and raising concerns about whether emergency and service vehicles can safely access some of our narrower streets.

For example, when traffic from Longden Road was recently diverted along South Hermitage, a road designed to accommodate two-way traffic, severe congestion occurred because parking on both sides of the road effectively reduced it to a single-lane route.

Given the ongoing nature of these concerns, when can Belle Vue be considered for a residents' parking permit scheme, and will the Council consider temporary parking restrictions on South Hermitage during future traffic diversions to prevent a recurrence of the severe congestion recently experienced?

Response from Cllr Rob Wilson, Portfolio Holder for Transport & Regeneration

Thank you for the question, Cllr Halliday.

Shrewsbury is a vibrant and busy town, with a growing reputation nationally has a great place to visit. This presents us several challenges, and increasing levels of parking in residential areas close to the town centre is one of those.

As you have pointed out in your question, this is far from a new issue in Shrewsbury. Whilst the council has implemented limited parking schemes in Bridgnorth and Oswestry, Shrewsbury hasn't seen the same level of consideration.

I believe that the time has now come to consider protecting the residential neighbourhoods which surround the loop of the river, Coleham and Belle Vue are a prime example.

I am pleased to say that officers are now considering how this can be done, and more details will I hope, follow in the near future.

Regarding pavement parking, especially where footways are obstructed, I am pleased that the Government has now said that Local Authorities will have additional powers to act. However, at this moment in time no further details have been received from the Department for Transport and officers are raising that concern with civil servants.

In terms of the example provided relating to South Hermitage and recent works resulting in a temporary diversion, the issues are acknowledged and should future diversionary routes be taken through similar residential streets, where feasible, temporary parking restrictions could be considered to help reduce issues.

Question from Councillor Andy Boddington

Forecasts from the World Meteorological Organisation indicate an “exceptionally high likelihood of nearly 100 per cent” that El Niño will persist through to February 2027, with climate impacts continuing well into 2027. The UK Met Office says 2027 is very likely to exceed 2024 as the warmest year on record and be another year to temporarily exceed +1.5C above the preindustrial period. The consequences are likely to include flooding as well as excess heat.

- 1) What capacity does Shropshire Council have to support residents during this event?
- 2) What preparations has it made, including liaising with the government?
- 3) What information will it be providing to residents?

Response from the Leader, Cllr Heather Kidd

1. What capacity does Shropshire Council have to support residents during this event?

The Council has a coordinated approach to managing severe weather and major incidents involving a range of services including highways, flood risk management, public health, communications, social care, housing, emergency management and other operational teams. These services work alongside emergency services, health partners, utility companies, the Environment Agency and voluntary organisations to support communities when incidents occur.

The Council maintains arrangements for welfare support, rest centres, community assistance, road closures, recovery efforts and support for vulnerable residents where required. In relation to flooding, the Council's flood risk management work includes supporting community flood action planning, working with local communities and partner organisations (including the River Severn Partnership working across borders into Wales, and promoting measures that improve local resilience to flooding. These plans are continuing to be reviewed including following the impact of extreme weather we have seen in this year alone.

2. What preparations has it made, including liaising with Government?

Shropshire Council works closely through the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum, which brings together local authorities, emergency services, health organisations, the Environment Agency, utility providers, voluntary sector organisations and Government partners to plan and prepare for a range of risks, including flooding and severe weather.

The Council maintains arrangements for welfare support, rest centres, community assistance, road closures, recovery efforts and support for vulnerable residents where required. In relation to flooding, the Council's flood risk management work includes supporting community flood action planning, working with local communities and partner organisations (including the River Severn Partnership working across borders into Wales), and promoting measures that improve local resilience to flooding

Alongside these arrangements, ongoing work is undertaken to improve flood resilience across the county, including support for flood action groups, community flood planning and partnership projects aimed at reducing flood risk and improving preparedness in vulnerable communities.

3. What information will it be providing to residents?

Where severe weather impacts are anticipated, the Council will provide timely information through its website, social media channels and other communication routes. This may include weather warnings, flood advice, information on service disruption, support available to residents and practical steps people can take to protect themselves and their property.

Residents are encouraged to take sensible steps to prepare for potential emergencies. This includes signing up for free flood warnings from the Environment Agency, keeping essential items and important documents readily accessible, and considering a simple emergency "grab bag" should they ever need to leave their home quickly.

The Council also encourages communities to look out for vulnerable neighbours, friends and family members during periods of severe weather, particularly older people, those with health conditions and anyone who may require additional support.

Conclusion

Whilst long-range climate forecasts can indicate an increased likelihood of certain weather patterns, it is not possible to predict the precise impacts on Shropshire this far in advance. The Council will continue to monitor information from national agencies, work closely with partner organisations and keep residents informed as appropriate.

Shropshire Council has experienced a number of significant flooding events in recent years and continues to strengthen both its response arrangements and longer-term resilience work. This includes collaboration with communities, flood action groups, the Environment Agency and Local Resilience Forum partners to improve preparedness, response and recovery across the county

Question from Councillor Duncan Kerr

On the 25th August Angela Rayner, Secretary of State and the Minister for Housing wrote to the Council leader saying the Government is “committed to delivering the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation”....and to “decisively raise our ambition to ensure we build council houses on a scale not seen for decades”.

The letter asks Council to “review their plans for increasing the supply of council homes; consider how council-owned land could be used for housebuilding and tell the government what barriers are preventing you from building ambitiously and quickly”. It states they “expect every Council to scale up now”.

Having approved a 30 year HRA business plan which shows over £110m in balances at the end of the period we seem to have the financial headroom to respond positively. However our barrier is the availability of suitable land in the right location, at an affordable price with planning permission likely.

Although clearly relevant to both the call-in on the decision to make surplus to requirements the land owned by the Council at the Oswestry SUE, and the Cabinet’s recent decision to wind-down Cornovii Ltd, this letter was not included or referred to in those papers.

In the light of this can you please publish your response to the Minister’s letter so the public can be re-assured that your warm words of support for Council housing building are matched by your actions in resisting pressure from MCHLG to sell our only suitable sites.

Response from Cllr James Owen, Portfolio Holder for Housing

The Council has submitted its response to MHCLG in line with the deadline of Tuesday 22nd September. The final response was not ready to be shared at point of publishing this question response but we would be happy to share the final response

with Duncan Kerr following this meeting and to any other members who wish to see it.

Question from Councillor Dawn Husemann

Given the stated aims of the council to harness the 'benefits' of AI as part of its digital strategy to improve service efficiency and reduce costs, what specific safeguards are currently in place or will be put in place to protect the integrity of council functions and ultimately the safety of our residents, service users and staff?

This is particularly important given the context of current widely reported concerns about the potential harms arising from AI. Our first duty is to safeguard and protect our residents, service users and staff and significant risks may arise through the increased adoption of AI to deliver council services. The legislative framework to control this technology is almost non-existent. The 'law of unintended consequences' is likely to apply massively to future development of AI and whilst that makes designing appropriate protections difficult, it is critical to the future security of our people. Will the administration explain how our stakeholders will be protected?"

Response from Cllr Alex Wagner, Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Transformation & Economic Growth

Thank you, Councillor Husemann, for raising this important question.

I agree that our first responsibility as a Council is to safeguard and protect our residents, service users and staff. Any use of artificial intelligence must support that responsibility, not compromise it. However, I also think it is important that we approach AI with ambition, confidence and a willingness to change.

We are trying to transform Shropshire Council, making services easier to access, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, and using our resources more effectively to give our staff better tools to do their jobs. AI and automation can play an important part in that change. This is not simply about taking existing processes and making them digital. It is about being prepared to rethink how the Council works and use new technology to deliver better outcomes for residents.

AI has enormous potential to improve customer experience, reduce repetitive administrative work, make information easier to access, analyse information more effectively and, crucially, free up our staff to spend more time exercising professional judgement and supporting residents. I do not believe the choice is between innovation and safety. We need both. Indeed, strong governance is what enables an organisation to innovate with confidence.

Our Digital Roadmap is therefore deliberately ambitious about technology while being clear about the standards within which it must operate. It does not propose the unchecked adoption of AI. AI and automation must sit within the Council's governance, security, ethical and data-management frameworks, and their purpose is to support professional judgement, not replace it.

The Council already has an approved Artificial Intelligence Policy. This sets out clear principles covering data privacy and security, transparency, bias mitigation, accountability, accessibility, ethical use and compliance with relevant legislation. It commits the Council to being clear about the capabilities and limitations of AI technologies, to identifying and mitigating bias, and to retaining responsibility for the outcomes of systems we choose to use. Importantly, the policy makes clear that staff remain accountable for outputs generated using AI. Those outputs must be checked to ensure that they are accurate, lawful, compliant and fit for purpose. The relevant Information Asset Owner must also consider issues including legal compliance, bias and discrimination, cyber security, relevant security certifications, data sovereignty and data protection before systems are adopted. Where decisions affect residents, accountability remains with appropriately authorised Council officers. AI may assist with analysis, administration or recommendations, but it does not make decisions on behalf of the Council, nor does it replace human judgement or accountability.

While AI-specific regulation is continuing to develop, it would be wrong to suggest that councils are operating in a regulatory vacuum. Existing requirements around data protection, information governance, cyber security, equality, safeguarding, risk management and public accountability continue to apply in full. Our Digital Roadmap also explicitly identifies uncontrolled or ungoverned use of AI as a risk to data, compliance and the quality of decision-making. The response to that risk is not to avoid innovation. It is to innovate properly, through controlled and ethical adoption, prioritised use cases and proper oversight through our digital and data governance arrangements.

We are also taking a deliberate and phased approach. If we want to be genuinely ambitious about AI, we need to get the foundations right. That means improving data quality, strengthening information governance and making organisational ownership of data much clearer. AI is only as useful as the information and systems underpinning it. Inaccurate, incomplete or inconsistent data will produce poorer results. The roadmap therefore includes clearer ownership, stronger governance frameworks, common data standards, stewardship and continued improvement in data quality.

Any proposed AI-enabled service will remain subject to the Council's normal and improving governance arrangements, including consideration of legal compliance, privacy, security, accessibility, data protection and risk management. Technology does not remove the Council's statutory duties and it does not transfer responsibility away from elected members or officers. Those responsibilities are exactly why we are taking a controlled and governed approach to adopting AI.

The pace of technological change is significant, and residents rightly expect public services to make sensible use of the tools now available. If AI can help us answer enquiries more quickly, reduce paperwork, improve productivity, identify problems earlier or allow frontline staff to spend more time with the people who need them, then we should be actively exploring those opportunities. We should be innovative, curious and prepared to challenge the way things have always been done, while remaining responsible about risk.

Ultimately, accountability for Council services and decisions remains with the Council, its members and its officers, not with technology. By keeping human responsibility at the centre, using data lawfully and securely, and properly scrutinising risk, we can be ambitious about AI, embrace innovation and use new technology as part of the wider transformation of Shropshire Council while continuing to protect the residents, service users and staff we are here to serve.

Question from Councillor Brendan Mallon

In July 2025 this Council approved £1.3 million of additional borrowing for the Ludlow pyrolysis project. Members were told this covered legacy, “unforeseen” biodigester tank remediation issues adding £400,000 plus other increased costs, despite a March 2013 report identifying digestate removal requirements, then estimated at £100,000. The appendix to the 2025 report set out eight cost lines with no individual amounts, just a single total of £848,000. The Council has since confirmed in writing that remediation has now cost £652,100 (up 63%), that this was the principal reason additional funding was sought and not part of the original tender but added to the existing contract with BioDynamic Carbon, in which this Council has a 50% shareholding. BioDynamic Carbon and associated companies don’t carry a registered activity for demolition, site preparation, remediation, or the collection or treatment of hazardous waste or a published record of such work.

Will the portfolio holder:

- (a) reconcile the £100,000, £400,000 and latest £652,100 figures and explain why this cost was deemed unforeseen
- (b) publish the individual figures behind the eight aggregated cost lines totalling £848,000
- (c) state which provision of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 was relied on to add £652,100 of demolition and hazardous waste works to that contract without a separate tender, and the date the written procurement and external legal advice referred to in the Council's own disclosure was given
- (d) identify which contractor physically carried out those works, the sum paid to that contractor, and the sum retained by BioDynamic Carbon?

Response from Cllr Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Myself and colleagues on Cabinet are very concerned that the previous administration has led us into an enterprise that:

- is not core business or a specialism for local authorities and will continue to need specialist support and advice;
- has provided, to date and potentially into the future land, buildings and other Council resources;
- is not clear on future profitability and return on investment net of sunk costs; and
- lacks transparency on the underlying risks of running such a business in an increasingly complex and competitive green energy space.

You will also recall that in the recent Quarter 1 monitoring report to Cabinet, prepared by the s151 alerted Cabinet to the need consider the status of projects related to the climate emergency and Council's legacy to be carbon neutral by 2030. This is a target now reset by most Councils to fall in line with central government targets that are closer to 2050. This issue will form part of the Quarter 2 report to be considered by the Cabinet later this year.

Of course, this administration embraces the concerns for the climate emergency and just how important that is; but the additional resources commitment to pyrolysis last year predated the financial emergency that soon followed. For Shropshire and our residents, it is the financial emergency year that must be at the front of our minds in all decisions that we take, hard though these may be.

With these facts in mind, in August the s151 Officer confirmed with me that he would be leading a commercial review of the pyrolysis project including project governance and financing, Joint Venture arrangements, contracts and future viability. The aim is to complete a draft report by 1st October with options and recommendations presented to the Chief Executive, and colleagues. Following this an options report will be presented to Cabinet.

My primary concern is to ensure that, at the earliest opportunity, the Council recovers the full investment in the pyrolysis project at the earliest opportunity based on current business case for both the Council and the JV. I and we also wish to understand the risks that lie ahead not least in the context of no further funding being available from the Council in the short term.

I consider in answer to your questions the s151 Officer's review is carried out and that we return to these specific questions as and when Cabinet consider future options later in the year.

As ever, I would be happy to request the s151 Officer to provide earlier briefings to the all party Budget Forum in advance of any Cabinet report.

Finally I must repeat my personal commitment and that of the Cabinet colleagues to tackling the climate emergency. But these measures must be affordable and as far as possible risk free.

Question from Councillor Susan Coleman

In the CIPFA report executive summary, key risk 8 says whilst the council should focus on those areas where the greatest savings can be made it cannot afford to ignore any other potential opportunities such as stopping those activities it is not obliged to deliver This has a rag rating of 9 red

Please can the portfolio holder tell Members which discretionary/ non statutory services it will be stopping in 2027/28 and what savings this will deliver

Response from Cllr Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

As set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan presented to Cabinet in July, this administration is committed to a new budget framework which promotes accountability linked to service plans and robust risk management. The budget framework will generate savings proposals across all of our services - both discretionary and statutory. We must remember that some of our discretionary services provide highly valued support to local residents (e.g. leisure) but we must of course turn over every stone to find opportunities to bridge the budget gap which the last administration has left for this new Council. At the same time, we have asked officers to look at all statutory services where services may exceed minimum requirements and where savings may be made while protecting the needs of residents. The first of these proposals will form part of the refresh of the MTFP in November as we seek to be open and transparent about all of the difficult decisions that we have to make in this extraordinary financial emergency. It is disappointing that it has taken this administration to introduce a new and open approach to preparing our Council budget. What a shame that, after years of chaos and failures, the previous administration could not put such measures in place in February 2025 that could have avoided such a disastrous and unmanageable budget to be agreed and the catastrophic position that it created.

You will see there at Item 8 on today's agenda this is down for discussion. I also note you pick out just this one risk marked as red. There are many others. To ensure it is fully understood I repeat again that the answer to this particular point is shown in the response shown in Appendix B. It is a pity the previous administration continually ignored the comment that was included for many years in each budget report that it was unsustainable. We, this administration fully understand the position this council is now in and are taking action, as also intimated in other sections of the CIPFA report. We are working to return this council to a sustainable position. This includes the actions as shown in the answer to this particular risk, all Service Directors are being challenged to think differently and consider minimum service delivery. The interim result will be included in the MTFP later this year and this will again and very different to the way the last administration behaved will be shared with opposition group leaders.