

Big Conversation

Survey Feedback

To end of 6 March 2017

The issues below have been raised many times and appear to be the most dominant themes within the responses received to date for the Prosperous Economy theme within the Big Conversation 2016/17.

Prosperous Economy

1. What could Shropshire Council do to make the local economy more prosperous?

- Encourage tourism.
- Keep visitor information offices open.
- Improve public transport so allow people to access employment opportunities etc.
- Improve roads, transport infrastructure and access (ensure an integrated approach to works and improvements).
- Build the North West Relief Road.
- Accept that people need cars in Shropshire and try to make access easier to car users.
- Invest in particular areas. Examples include:
 - Meole Brace retail area (also a comment that there is poor mobile signal in this area).
 - Parking and public transport access for Shrewsbury Business Park.
 - Develop land owned by the Council.
 - Any opportunities linked to HS2.
- Reduce business charges – rates, rent etc. Avoid empty premises and properties.
- Reduce town centre parking charges.
- Broadband and mobile connectivity.
- Digital skills so that all can access services online.
- Give communities more control over local budgets.
- Challenge the Government over its investment in rural areas.
- Develop relationships with local businesses.
- Focus on attracting new business.
- Support start-ups and new enterprises with business advice, grants and loans.
- The Council provides some helpful resources for businesses (website, templates, advice/support clinics) but other local businesses don't know about them – they are hard to find.
- Invest in business units and build grow on spaces for our thriving businesses.
- Protect small businesses especially with regard to planning. Ensure planning conditions are complied with.
- Try to attract a large employer or two.
- Support existing businesses while attracting new (recognising the importance of SMEs).
- Better promote local business and use local businesses to keep investment local.
- Promote the area to both tourists and residents to encourage local spending.
- Consider money flows and how to retain money within the area.
- Avoid outsourcing.
- Make better use of the assets we have (Quarry park used as an example).

- Develop apprenticeships.
- Consider how a focus on generating opportunities for young people could lead to better economic prosperity.
- Provide affordable housing.
- Invest in volunteer recruitment and management for activity such as tourism.
- Invest in improving high streets and town centres (try to avoid empty premises).
- Further develop the environmental services sector within the county.
- Don't focus on urban areas and forget the economic issues in rural areas.
- Develop green energy opportunities.
- Achieve a balance between encouraging investment opportunities and maintaining the rural character in a sustainable way.
- Help the voluntary sector with funding bids/taking over services.
- Make use of volunteers to tidy areas.
- Speed up decision making processes to allow initiatives and programmes to be delivered more quickly and efficiently.
- Learn from other areas which are more successful.
- Stop all the severe cutbacks. Investment is important.

2. We work with local businesses and others to encourage investment in Shropshire. Do you see any barriers or opportunities to improve economic prosperity in Shropshire?

- Commonly mentioned barriers to economy prosperity included:
 - Traffic problems and access to town centres
 - Rural transport
 - Lack of adequate road and rail infrastructure
 - Broadband access
 - Mobile phone connectivity
 - Planning process (speed) and opposition to applications
 - Low wages
 - High business rents from commercial landlords
 - Limited public transport
 - Car parking fees
 - Even if housing was built the jobs and infrastructure are not there (doctors, clinics, schools hospitals are overloaded)
 - Ageing population
 - Lack of a clear, jointly shared vision
 - Poor planning decisions/ the Council as a barrier
 - Poor communication and marketing by the Council
 - Cost savings/ budget reductions
- More specific opportunities mentioned included:
 - Expanding the wheels 2 work scheme (RCC).
 - Extend car sharing schemes.
 - Making better use of assets owned by Shropshire Council.
 - Courses at the University could be aimed at subjects which could benefit Shropshire.
 - The Council could use its influence to try and resolve issues with very high business rents.
 - Smarten shop frontages and high streets.
 - Offer more business units.
 - Provide business loans.
 - Developing a greater mix of skills.
 - Incentives, information, advice, support and guidance for establishing social enterprise, cooperatives and community benefit societies.
 - 'Bottom up' approaches rather than a 'top town' focus.

3. What would encourage you to support local businesses, services and amenities more than you currently do?

- A large proportion of respondents already actively support local shops: and buy locally.
- Cheaper parking to make access to town centres more attractive than free supermarket parking.
- Reduction of town centre congestion.
- Investment in park and ride.
- Improved local bus services (reliability and extended travel times are key themes mentioned by respondents).
- Improved access generally with cycle routes and choice in terms of travel options.
- Better customer service from local businesses and improved professional standards.
- A greater mix of shops (avoiding a dominance of charity shops on high streets).
- More attractive town centres (without too many empty premises).
- Some town centres appear to be dying.
- Longer opening hours (for shops and services (health services included in examples)).
- Affordability is important. Local business need to compete with prices offered out of area.
- Better promotion and marketing of local businesses, services and amenities (lots of comments to suggest that if people knew more about local businesses and services they would support them).
- Many local businesses don't have an online presence.
- Try to stop national chains from taking over the high street.
- High quality/unique/ specialist shops (e.g. organic food outlets).
- Much longer opening hours, especially on Sundays.
- Leadership from the Council to demonstrate:
 - how new business can be created
 - how business income can be reinvested into local areas
 - how people can support businesses and services within their local area
 - how small local businesses and social enterprises can be supported

Dominant themes within comments made to date:

- Broadband and mobile investment
- Tourism
- Reduced cost of town centre parking
- Public transport access to town centres
- Support to improve vibrancy of high streets
- Buying locally and supporting local services
- Promoting local businesses and services more effectively.

Feedback from the Big Conversation 2015/16

You said:

- Attract more businesses: promote Shropshire as a place to locate in order to raise more income through business rates.
- Build new homes: to increase revenue through council tax.
- Improve broadband connectivity: to encourage businesses to locate in Shropshire and improve digital connectivity between people and communities.
- Develop new partnerships: Creating better linkages between businesses, other public sector bodies and the University Centre Shrewsbury.
- Work more closely with local businesses: Encourage further involvement of business in finding solutions to the challenges Shropshire faces.

Responses to the Big Conversation Feedback 2015/16

Responding to the feedback received in 2015/16 Shropshire Council:

- Raised council tax: from 2016 onwards we raised council tax by 3.99%, the maximum amount that we could.
- Delivered faster broadband to more than 55,000 premises through the Connecting Shropshire project. The project continues to drive forward improvements to broadband provision for residents and businesses.
- Has increased energy efficiency: after fitting solar panels to the roof of Shirehall, we expect to save £16,000 per year in electric bills and pay off the investment in 10 years.
- Is prioritising economic prosperity for Shropshire, and setting the direction for economic growth for years to come.
- Has built stronger partnerships: We have established the Shropshire Estates Partnership comprising of 16 public sector organisations and been awarded £110,000 to develop and submit plans to the Cabinet Office around utilising assets more effectively.
- Transferred council-owned cafes: We have contracted out the running of council-owned cafes and restaurants to private companies including The Boathouse in Ellesmere, The Foundry restaurant at Theatre Severn, Stop. Café at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery and Community cafe at the Lantern in Sundorne.
- Increased commercialism: Commercial companies are now running more services without any subsidy from the Council. This has helped achieve £400,000 in savings over the last two years.
- Is promoting innovation: we are looking to develop a partnership with the private sector which will offer lower cost energy to Shropshire residents, generate potential income for the council, reduce wastage of energy, reduce fuel poverty and enable renewable energy generation.
- Is developing new apprenticeships: As part of our Apprentice Levy offer, we want to increase the apprentice level 3 and 4 take up across businesses in the county.
- Is being more ambitious: Following feedback from the Big Conversation, in our Corporate Plan we are being much more ambitious about how we will grow our economy, develop the housing needed and generate new income streams.

Over the coming months we will be using the feedback from the Big Conversation 2016/17 to plan next steps and further develop our action plans.