

Via email:

Nick Bitel – Chair DVSA, Directing Board

Shropshire Council
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire SY2 6ND

Date: 21 January 2022

My Ref:

Your Ref

Dear Mr Bitel

Whitchurch Driving Test Centre Closure

Further to your recent announcement to close this driving test centre from the 11th April I wish to register Shropshire Councils strong objection to the closure and ask that you urgently reconsider this decision.

In many ways Shropshire enjoys a good quality of life and standard of living but our sheer size and scale at over 1,230 square miles, means we are a relatively sparsely populated county and our rurality is often an economic and social barrier to our residents and businesses. In this sense the role that each of our market towns play in supporting their hinterlands is crucially important and the social infrastructure within them is vital to their local economies and in supporting vibrant sustainable communities.

Removing this test centre and forcing residents of the central and north east areas of north Shropshire to take driving tests in other towns, some potentially in other county areas, we feel is not in the best interest of local learner drivers or the driving instructors who serve the local area. Whitchurch serves a large wider rural area that does not have the benefit of regular bus services in the same way that urban areas of the country enjoy, therefore the use of personal vehicles is often the difference to being included in society and having access to services or not. In that sense this decision is seen as yet another barrier to employment and access to social infrastructure such as local doctors, schools, shops, dentists etc.

We recognise that there are other test centres located in the county, but that also Whitchurch accounts for circa 20% of the overall volume of driving tests within the Shropshire Council area. Asking people to travel to places such as Crewe, Wrexham or Shrewsbury will also force people to take tests in areas that they are not familiar with or understand. North Shropshire is not an area of relatively high income and the average weekly wage is well below the regional average, which means that the local community will be disproportionately penalised financially in having to, not just travel to the alternative test site, but pay for instruction in those alternative areas to aid their chance of success.

In many ways this decision is to the detriment of our residents and our businesses, especially our base of well regarded driving instructors. We are especially concerned about the impact on our young people and this closure undermines our efforts to retain our base of talented young people helping them into local employment and setting them up for success in life.

Yet again we are seeing a part of government withdraw services from local rural communities and adding to the inequality between cities and counties. Indeed, we consider this decision is the exact opposite of the Government's agenda for 'levelling up' and addressing regional inequality. In a general sense we are very concerned that you did not enter into any form of local consultation or give any rationale for why this decision has been taken. We ask that you urgently reconsider the decision to close this test centre and we would welcome a meeting to discuss this with you.

Your sincerely



Lezley Picton
Leader