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Dear Minister

The case for completing Shrewsbury's Ring Road: the North West Relief Road (NWRR)

I am writing to you as the leader of Shropshire Council. I will be leaving the Council as an elected member after the forthcoming elections in May. However, I wanted to do so having made clear the strong case for the Government to reaffirm its support for the North West Relief Road beyond May and my tenure as Council Leader.

In summary, the NWRR is a shovel-ready project with a high Adjusted BCR score of 3.88, that offers significant benefits for economic growth and new housing delivery, reductions in congestion and air pollution, improvements to public transport and the delivery of our sustainable travel strategy. It can help the Government deliver on its priorities within the life of this parliament in a way that many schemes simply cannot.

Shropshire Council has now published its updated draft Full Business Case (FBC) that presents the case for building the North West Relief Road (NWRR), which would finally complete the missing northern section of Shrewsbury's ring road.

The NWRR is not a new project. It is simply the long-overdue completion of the ring road - vital infrastructure - the existing three quarters of which was built 40 or more years ago.

The strength of the business case reflects the integral role that a complete ring road can play in the success of a town. Ring roads are enabling infrastructure, not vanity projects. They unlock so much of what the Government is rightly seeking to achieve.

The NWRR directly delivers on the following one of the five missions of the Government:

1. **Kickstart Economic Growth** - to secure the highest sustained growth in the G7, with good jobs and productivity growth in every part of the country making everyone, not just a few, better off.



In reality, it also contributes to key elements of the others. It will absolutely help to **break down barriers to opportunity**, by better connecting people to jobs, education and public services. In so doing, it will help to **build an NHS fit for the future** by providing benefits to the NHS, as well as the fire and police services, as demonstrated by the supporting public statements from these organisations (enclosed).

Overcoming the barriers to development

Before I briefly list the key benefits and present the FBC ([Full business case | Shropshire Council](#)) I wanted to draw attention to the wider point at stake for this, and other projects that demonstrate a positive benefit. This wider point reflects a fundamental challenge facing the country. It is one that I fully support the Government's efforts to address.

The Government has made a strong commitment to overcome the very substantial barriers that have arisen in the UK to the successful delivery of key infrastructure. Barriers are often in the form of opposition that comes from sources including increasingly professional campaigns operating locally but often supported by national and even international interest groups. It also comes from within the planning system itself. I believe that the North West Relief Road is a classic case study of the barriers that scheme delivery faces in the UK, and which the Prime Minister has determined to overcome.

The North West Relief Road has been more than eight years in the making. It has passed through every point of approval required, including intent to grant Full Planning Permission. Vast sums of time and money have been required and spent – funded by Government – to get to this point, amounting to more than £38 million. It has been scrutinised at every level and faced reappraisal due to the recent period of high inflation – which has posed a challenge to scheme delivery everywhere. The NWRR has now passed every one of these hurdles. It has done so because of the inescapably, self-evidently strong case that sits behind this project.

I am aware that the opposition groups on the Council recently wrote to you in their letter dated 6 Feb 2025 to inform you of their intention to scrap the NWRR scheme, should they take control of the Council after the May elections, and to ask for the £38 million of Government funding already spent to develop the scheme to be written off. However, I am clear that such a move would make no sense. Furthermore, it would perpetuate the trend of this country failing to take the positive decisions needed to make progress on delivering key infrastructure.

Opposition groups on the Council this week raised the point that the Government will not be asking for £33 million of funding, allocated to develop the Norwich Western Link Road, back from Norfolk County Council after that scheme was scrapped. However, I note that the DfT has said it does expect '...to be provided with proposals for 'alternative' solutions to the Norwich Western Link to relieve congestion on local roads". Shropshire Council has assessed alternative options to the NWRR. A number of these options were referenced by the opposition groups in their recent letter to you. Our assessments show that the multiple smaller interventions suggested as alternatives, would:

- Leave the existing, suboptimal incomplete ring road in place, failing to address the existing traffic patterns and usage.
- Take many years to develop the new options, from scratch, delaying improvements to boost growth, transport and sustainable travel, and adding further uncertainty that a solution will definitively be delivered.
- See Shrewsbury experience significant **additional congestion** and delays for many years as each smaller intervention would have to be delivered within an operational road network.
- Do little to reduce net carbon emissions from development
- Require net new additional funding from Government, while wasting £38 million already spent.
- Ignore the public support for the scheme and stated benefits for public services that the local NHS, fire service, police and the town's largest bus operator have said the NWRR would deliver.
- Fail to deliver the strategic benefits to sustainable travel and reductions to congestion that are seen due to the gap in the existing ring road forcing significant volumes of traffic into and out of the town centre, just to navigate across the north of the town.

To be clear, for Shropshire, the type of new solutions requested by DfT of Norfolk County Council in scrapping the Norwich Western Link Road would require significant additional Government funding to deliver. In Norfolk, insurmountable issues have been identified that prevent delivery of the Norwich Western Link Road. In Shropshire, for the NWRR, they have not.

It surely makes more sense, and is better value for the taxpayer, for the Government to build on the £38 million we have already invested to develop the NWRR project, rather than to waste this money and start again from scratch on funding a set of solutions that are less effective. Instead, the clear choice is for the Government to independently view the FBC for the NWRR, consider the 3.88 Adjusted BCR score for the project, and if it agrees on the benefit of the scheme, assist us with any additional resources available to help Shropshire Council deliver the project in full.

Summary of the NWRR Full Business Case (FBC)

The updated draft FBC for the NWRR confirms the revised estimated cost for delivering the road – an estimated maximum of £215 million (including the cost of the accompanying Oxon Link Road) over the total 10-year lifetime of the project - and the benefits it would deliver, including reductions in journey times.

The revised draft FBC confirms the powerful case for building the NWRR, despite the rise in costs of delivery due to inflation. The benefits are driven by the fundamental role of the project in driving a number of strategic aims for Shrewsbury and surrounding areas, these being:

- Shorter Journey Times
- Reduced congestion in Shrewsbury and surrounding villages
- Reduced congestion on the town's bypass and smaller rural roads
- Supporting the Shrewsbury Moves Strategy
- Attracting new investment and growing Shropshire's economy

Value for money and impact

The revised draft FBC confirms that the NWRR would deliver an Adjusted Benefit to Cost Ratio score or the Adjusted BCR of 3.88. The return on investment of £3.88 worth of benefit for every £1 spent demonstrates the positive impact of the scheme and ranks it among the higher scoring schemes across the country. It should be noted that even the Adjusted BCR score does not take account of all of the wider benefits that the local Shropshire NHS, police, fire service and Arriva Bus have said the scheme would deliver.

Journey time savings and reduced congestion

A large number of vehicular journey times along various routes are modelled in the draft FBC using the prescribed DfT analyses methods. After the NWRR is built, journeys along a very few roads would slightly lengthen, although this is on roads that currently do not see heavy traffic and the increase is marginal. However, the overwhelming outcome would be a significant reduction in journey times across the north of Shrewsbury as a result of having a complete ring road.

When considering the overall impact on journey times across all roads across the entire day, the average single journey time across roads in the northern Shrewsbury area would be **reduced by 17 minutes**. This means that a typical return journey along the same route in each direction would be an average of 34 minutes less than it is currently. This is a massive saving per day with the potential to substantially improve the quality of life for many people in Shropshire, benefiting those travelling by car, while increasing productivity.

Crucially, this level of journey saving has major implications for improving bus services, making bus journeys more reliable across the entire length of a route – benefitting everyone living on that route. The benefits to public transport of the NWRR have been publicly welcomed by Arriva Bus, the primary bus operating company for Shropshire. Major public service organisations have publicly backed the NWRR due to the benefits they see that the project would deliver for their organisation. The police, NHS, Fire service and Arriva, Shrewsbury's largest bus service operator, have all referenced the reductions in congestion and journey times as delivering a significant positive impact for staff getting to work and people accessing their services (quotes enclosed for reference), while people living in communities blighted by heavy standing traffic that is currently forced to run right through the heart of the neighbourhoods would see traffic levels greatly reduced.

Boosting the Shrewsbury Moves Strategy

The reductions in congestion on many neighbourhood roads and roads around the town centre that the NWRR would enable support the Shrewsbury Moves strategy, designed to increase cycling and walking and improve public transport.

By reducing traffic congestion in and around the town centre, a safer and more attractive environment for cycling and walking would be created, with greater opportunity for new cycle routes. In addition, the NWRR would see a new 7km segregated cycle route

constructed alongside the road to bridge the gap between existing sections of the town's cycle route network.

Bus services would see a dramatic reduction in congestion along a number of routes they use to access neighbourhoods in the north of town. This area has among the lowest levels of car ownership in the town with more than a third of households being dependent on public transport. The increased reliability of journey times and time tabling for bus services will improve the lives of many families and make the bus a more attractive option for many other people while improving options for Park and Ride facilities.

Contrary to claims by groups opposed to the NWRR, the completion of the ring road will assist our moves to grow sustainable travel, as demonstrated above. Other examples demonstrate this point. In York, a complete ring road has been key to assisting their own plans for more sustainable travel and improved bus services. In Oxford, the Labour-Green coalition Council is introducing plans to prioritise cycling and bus services, with a complete ring road being directly referenced as offering the alternative for those who still need to travel by car, thereby enabling the policy they are pursuing.

Growing the economy

Poor road links and high levels of congestion deter investment in the area by new employers who can choose anywhere to locate. They also increase the risk of existing employers moving elsewhere. While not all roads deliver increased economic activity, schemes that deliver fundamental improvements do. The NWRR would fill the gap in the incomplete Shrewsbury ring road - which is critical infrastructure for the town. The journey time savings would also make the town significantly more attractive to companies looking for a competitive location to base themselves. This is reflected in the NWRR's high Adjusted BCR score of 3.88. More locations with better infrastructure also make the UK as a whole more attractive for investment. Notably, Shrewsbury sits along the important A5 corridor connecting the Anglesey ferry routes from Ireland (one of the UK's key trading partners) to the mainland, presenting significant opportunities for inward investment. Furthermore, this key route from the Midlands remains a priority for Shropshire and Midlands Connect. Construction of the NWRR will also see a significant proportion of the goods and services used in construction, and the labour employed, sourced locally, estimated to generate around £50m of additional Social Value for Shropshire over the 2.5 year construction period.

The town centre of Shrewsbury has faced significant challenges from the growth in online retail over recent years. Increasing the residential population of, and visitors to, Shrewsbury is a vital element of sustaining retail and hospitality in the town centre. More people living in the town centre will help to provide a direct customer base for retailers and maintain the town centre as a thriving destination for everyone in the area and visitors alike. Reducing traffic, congestion and air pollution is crucial to making the town centre a more attractive place to live. Modelling shows that the NWRR would enable this. The NWRR, in tandem with the Oxon Link Road, to be delivered at the same time, is also important for increasing the number of new homes in and around Shrewsbury to make an affordable home a reality rather than a dream for local people who want to stay living in

the area. Without proper supporting infrastructure, these homes are unlikely to be delivered.

Increasing Biodiversity

The biodiversity (the number of species of plants and animals present and thriving in an area) of many parts of north Shrewsbury is currently poor. Through the funding available to deliver the NWRR, the council will increase biodiversity in the area by at least 10%. It will plant circa 4 hectares of new native woodland, and invest in breathing new life into Hencote Pool, an overlooked Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located in the area.

Progress of the NWRR

I trust this letter sets out the very compelling case for Government support for the NWRR. Only one planning condition remains to be finalised before the FBC comes to full council. With the pre-election period beginning in Shropshire from Monday 10th March, I regret that I will not be able to see it come before the Council personally. However, I very much hope that you, as minister, and the future leader of Shropshire Council, will endeavour to deliver this scheme in full.

The Council's officers stand ready to answer any further questions you may have.

Yours sincerely



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Leader

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