

## SALC Joint Working Group Meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023

Report to ORPC from Cllr M Bennett

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### 1. Notes of Previous Meeting.

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed. (Copy at appendix)

### 2. Severn Valley Water Management Scheme

A presentation was made by Mike Adams from the Environment Agency on the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme. The scheme aims to use largely natural means of reducing flows of water along the Severn during heavy rains. It was stated that some 26,000 Olympic size swimming pools of water have been experienced in recent flood, but the same amount needs to be replaced to ground water in times of drought. It was also estimated that there would be 20%-25% less water available by 2050.

There is a strong will to consult on the management scheme as it progresses in co-operation with Authorities in England and Wales. It would be useful for Councillors to see the presentation and it may be possible to arrange a meeting for ALL parish Councils in September so that the EA can repeat the presentation and take questions.

### 3. Ash Die Back – Martin Sutton

A verbal report was made of the significant impact that this disease will have as the Ash is common and widespread of which 80% could die. While many of the trees are on private land, It is estimated that no less than 1500 are close to highways and in danger of infection and death. Removal of these trees, either infected or fallen will require extensive traffic management schemes, but there is also a risk that there will be so much work that contractors to undertake what could be hazardous work, will be in short supply.

Concerns expressed that any felling over 5m<sup>3</sup> on private land (e.g. Church yards) might require a licence from the Forestry Commission and trees in conservation areas or with TPO's also presented issues with either pre-emptive action to reduce the risk or to deal with dead and dying trees.

Recommendation: ORPC to check if there are any ash trees on land in its control/ownership and consideration be given to raising awareness of the issues.

### 4. Voter ID at polling stations update.

The following note was circulated from Electoral Services.

*Further to the previous note provided in May 2023, the first tranche of changes, which included the introduction of voter ID requirements and measures to make it easier for disabled people to vote are now in force.*

*At the close of polls on Thursday 4 May, an Electoral Commission spokesperson indicated that initial assessment was that overall, the elections were well run. Across the country, votes were cast throughout the day and in line with the law.*

*The Electoral Commission has also indicated that they expect to publish its initial analysis of the implementation of voter ID in June, subject to data being available (Note: data not available at time of writing this note).*

*In September, they will publish a full report on the May 2023 elections. This report will feature further data, including the reasons people were turned away, as well as turnout, postal voting and rejected ballots. It will also provide analysis of other aspects of the elections, including accessibility support that was provided for voters in polling stations.*

*Feedback from some Electoral Administrators following their May 2023 elections was that whilst the requirement to show photographic identification was known by most, less was known on the acceptable forms of photographic identification.*

*The next tranche of changes is expected to come into force in advance of the May 2024 polls and includes provision relating to absent voting, overseas electors, EU citizens' voting and candidacy rights, postal vote handling and secrecy and commonly used names. There are also new measures relating to undue influence and intimidation. The detail relating to some of these measures is still to be confirmed.*

*Any specific queries can be addressed to: Electoral Services - [elections@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:elections@shropshire.gov.uk) -0345 678 9015*

## **5. Bus Update**

James Willocks made a worrying report on the state of 'bus services in Shropshire. Over the last few years, five applications had been made to Government for funding for the network with 97% of the current services requiring public subsidy. This could shortly rise to 100%.

NONE of these had been successful.

Currently Shropshire had received £1.5million with an indication that while a second year of funding would be available it might not be at the same level.

There was a need to invigorate the public transport network – the alternative being the total collapse of the entire system. Proposals included acquiring electric buses and introducing travel on demand services with real-time information systems.

## **6. Boundary Reviews**

Cecilia Motley chairing the meeting reported that a lot of discussions were in progress across the political groups about the draft proposals from the Boundary Commission, which despite a promise to visit Shropshire, had not done so.

Many of the proposals did not make sense or abide by the Commissions own remit to consider communities with ongoing consequences. Burnell and Bayston Hill were being put together to form a 2 member Division, which failed to recognise the considerable differences between the communities, and also failed to recognise changes to Parliamentary Constituencies which would result in a 2 member Division in 2 Parliamentary Constituencies.

These and other recommendations which seemed to be based solely on numbers ignoring geography and communities would also result in further complexities when Shropshire addressed the Local Governance Review with the possibility of some significant changes to Parishes and parish wards.

ALL parishes were strongly urged to consider the Boundary Commission Report and make representations to the Commission with a copy to SALC. **This must be done by 10<sup>th</sup> JULY.**

SALC has sent out the following (23-6-23)

*“This is an urgent reminder about the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s (LGBCE) consultation on the Review of Shropshire’s Divisional Boundaries.*

*You may recall that with very little notice, SALC forwarded an invitation from the LGBCE to an on line briefing on 15 December via Teams which explained the process the LGBCE were following. SALC forwarded their slides on 3 January and asked for a second briefing given the short notice and this took place on 12 January. At those briefings they stated that in drawing up the new divisions, their aim was to ensure that each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors. The review would also try to create divisions that as far as possible reflected the interests and identities of communities across Shropshire. Since the last review in 2008 the population in some of the divisions had grown more than others and there was more development taking place. The Commission stated that your views about the boundaries were therefore important in ensuring effective governance for Shropshire in future. The Commission wanted to hear your opinions on: the number of divisions; names of divisions, where the boundaries between divisions should lie and the number of councillors for each division. In the briefings, the Commission stated they would be visiting Shropshire to see the special characteristics of communities, however only virtual ‘visits’ via google have taken place which has been very disappointing.*

*Shropshire Council submitted its draft proposals dated 31 January which had the full backing by all the political groups on the Council. This proposed 76 councillors (3,499 electors per councillor) and to stay with the Cabinet system. The LGBC responded that they were minded to go with 74 divisions, (the same as now, with 3,500 electors per councillor, plus or minus 10%). Shropshire Council argued that the divisions needed to be increased to compensate for the uneven levels of development throughout the county.*

*The next stage was to look at how the new boundaries should be developed. A proposal, which again received cross party support, was drafted by the Council. However, the LGBCE drew up and published their own changes for Shropshire proposing there should be 72 divisions and 70 single member and two two-member divisions. Please be aware that most divisions are changing and there will be a lot of upheaval in the divisional and parish boundaries as a result (particularly those affected by Burnell/Bayston Hill becoming a joint division)*

*Some areas have been highlighted as needing further discussion and a good many proposals do not make sense cutting across Parliamentary boundaries and in turn, will no doubt have effect on the forthcoming parish community governance reviews which start later this year.*

*Time is running out! The current consultation runs until 10 July. Please do engage with the review to see the changes that may affect your area. It is so important that you log on to the interactive map*

*which is available at [www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/shropshire](http://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/shropshire) where proposed changes can be viewed. We do urge you to make representations on behalf of your parishes (or individual comments) on these proposals. You may wish to discuss with your unitary councillors, many of whom have commented on the potential changes in their divisions. It's feared that not enough people commented in the first iteration which has no doubt been a factor that has led to the most strange conformations that the LGBCE are now proposing."*

**7. VAS Policy update**

Ffion Horton advised that the draft policy from Derek Buchanan had been received back from Legal, but that he was reducing his work to 2 days a week. There was a desire to work with Parishes on the draft before it was released and SALC would arrange a meeting of interested parties to discuss it.

Noted that a number of Parishes either had lost or would lose PCC funding for schemes because of the continuing delay in producing the policy. Ffion Horton suggested that perhaps VAS signs could be purchased in advance to demonstrate the use of the funding, and be installed at a later date.

**8. Agricultural Reference Group**

This had been established under a Scrutiny Committee in 2020. 62% of highways were unclassified and there had been a change in the volume and nature of traffic using them. Shropshire Council, SALC, the Police and NFU were represented at the time with the intention of trying to identify answers to the issues identified, although it was acknowledged that this was also a national problem.

It was intended to re-establish this as a separate group (however some consideration might be needed as to its relationship to the new Scrutiny Committees) and revisit the terms of reference to see what might be achieved with strategic outcomes and case studies.

Appendix: JWG NOTES 24-3-23

Present: Cllrs: D Beechey, M Bennett, R Evans, D Fletcher, C Green, G Hickman, P Richardson, D Spicer, B Welch, R Wickson

Clerks: A Roberts

Officers: D Dorrell, F Horton, S Smith, J Tretheway and E West

Apologies: H Ball

	Item
	Cllr R Wickson in the Chair for this meeting.
1`	Previous Meeting The notes from the meeting had been circulated.
2	Place Plans E West reported that he would be engaging with Town and Parish Councils over the next few weeks over the renew process which would take place over a 6 week period in

	<p>April/May. It was key that infrastructure needs to support development would be the priority and service areas such as Highways, Education, Open Space and Medical Services would be consulted to identify where the most acute needs were. There would be no change to the 15% Neighbourhood CIL funding and notification of the amounts payable would be sent out within the next few weeks. Eddie answered a number of questions before leaving the meeting.</p> <p>Action: SALC to help in the engagement process/meetings with clerks.</p>
3	<p>Disbursement of UKSPF</p> <p>J Tretheway introduced the briefing paper which had been circulated providing an update on the UK Shared Prosperity (and Rural Fund).</p> <p>The allocation was £12.5M for Shropshire and on top of that a further £2.5M had been allocated by Rural England Prosperity Funding. In response to a question from B Welch, councils could contribute to projects identified in their areas and there was no guidance on this or how much should be contributed.</p> <p>A Roberts acknowledged the difficulties for individual parishes to apply for funding adding there was a need to encourage them to work together on this.</p>
4	<p>Voter ID at Polling Stations</p> <p>J Tretheway presented a briefing paper which had been circulated and undertook to provide more information on queries raised. These are set out in red below:</p> <p>On the need for further guidance is needed. The further update that will be provided following the May 2023 will allow the opportunity to understand lessons learned and any best practice that arises from those authorities with May 2023 polls.</p> <p>Would there be discussions post-May with Telford &amp; Wrekin on how it has gone with them in May? Yes, we plan to discuss with many other electoral services colleagues, particularly those in the West Mercia area.</p> <p>What guidance was planned for any small by-elections, which may take place from May onwards. How will SC inform voters they need photographic ID, and what policy will we have on this? We have a communications strategy in place that will be under constant review, and should there be an unscheduled poll, targeted communications will be implemented, this will include, but is not limited to, social media postings, leaflets/posters to parish clerks and poll cards. Further information will be provided following the May 2023 polls.</p> <p>Further information moving forward: Relevant links have been provided on Shropshire Council's website, including a number of frequently asked questions: <a href="#">Voter ID in polling stations   Shropshire Council</a></p>
5	<p>River Severn Partnership Update</p> <p>S Smith introduced a Briefing paper which had been circulated and reported on a recent meeting with the Environment Agency. A meeting with DEFRA and the Welsh Government's equivalent was imminent and he would report back on the outcome. It was noted that uncertainties over funding had delayed further engagement on proposed plans by the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme where strategic planning officers had been extremely pressured during recent floods which saw them undertaking front line operational duties.</p>
6	<p>Boundary Reviews</p>

	J Tretheway reported on BCE consultations in December and January. They would be conducting further consultation between 25 April and 3 July when it was key that local councils respond in deciding what is best for them.
7	Next meeting 24 May, 2.30 pm. Topic for the agenda will be - Ash Die Back and its impact across the County and how this might be managed, particularly with landowners who have trees on their land.
8	The Chair in closing thanked everyone for their input, and the information provided.