

# Reporting on the Report No. 3

## Shrewsbury's fine Buildings.

Our report about the Built Environment (BER), is steadily gaining a degree of acceptance. However, there are still too many buildings in bad condition that let the town down. We were pleased to be invited to an informal discussion and to present the BER to Shropshire's Cabinet members. This group of nine Councillors representing, mostly rural wards, is chaired by Cllr. Lezley Picton, the Council's Leader, and has the greatest influence over Council decisions.

It seems the Civic Society's reputation has not been high amongst this group, so it was good to share facts and seek better understanding. There were some agreed points, for example, a strong dislike of the many new and undistinguishable estates that are surrounding Shrewsbury. It was good to see strong agreement on this. There was also a sense that there could be better promotion of Shropshire's built environments in the media.



The BER makes a number of recommendations to be effective in the long run but with minimal cost. Its main point is that the Built Environment is not valued well enough, either by the Council or by a number of other owners of buildings. It's not just the Civic Society that identifies the very high quality of the town's historic buildings. Shrewsbury is well loved and much admired by experts and visitors. However, there is now slightly better recognition of its high qualities, but this has yet to be realised in conservation efforts. For example, Shrewsbury's Big Town Plan does now recognise 'heritage' and its value to an economic future. Indeed, a new grant (of £125,000) has been secured to trial 'Design Coding', which should specify the detail of future town centre developments to ensure compatibility with the historic buildings.

However, there are still too many neglected buildings. Shropshire Council has no overall strategy to enhance the built environment. There are several strategies for Shropshire's wonderful natural countryside, which is recognised as an important attraction and for its health and well-being promotion, but the built environment is not. Perhaps there is an assumption that the historic buildings and streets are attractive but costly to maintain. So they get a low priority, especially when money is short. However, the very high quality of Shrewsbury will erode and devalue without proper care.



The BER was shared with the Council a year ago. There are a few signs of changes. For example, the Bear Steps building is nearing completion of structural repairs. There are discussions concerning Rowley's House and Mansion, but the findings of the BER are based only on actual evidence. We think that all the report's carefully argued recommendations should all be adopted in order to give better protection to Shrewsbury's unique buildings and heritage, including some more modern buildings, such as the Shirehall. This is the time for the public and the private sector to step up for Shrewsbury's future.

