

## SHREWSBURY BIG TOWN PLAN – MASTERPLAN VISION /SOME OBSERVATIONS April 2021.

### **Shrewsbury Civic Society's (SCS) comments on the latest Big Town Plan (BTP) Masterplan document.**

The Society's last statement (February 2021) about the BTP welcomed its new objective to “celebrate heritage”, “protect” good buildings and “maintain a high quality townscape”. It was concerned about the lack of identified means to do so. It was also concerned about some of the document's over-stated language and lack of progress on Design oversight. This response includes our collated views on some the detailed proposals in that report. It does not deal with the Riverside/Frankwell area.

#### **SUMMARY**

This summary is based on Shrewsbury Civic Society's aims and principles.

The Draft Masterplan (DM) has attempted a detailed analysis of the existing situation, based on a rather arbitrary division of the town in six 'quarters'. Also the DM has attempted to reflect the initial vision of the 2018 Big Town Plan (BTP) about movement, balanced growth, green networks and a synthesis of all these. To achieve that the authors included specialist input on:

- Commercial Viability
- Heritage and Conservation
- Movement and Access.

#### **Heritage and Conservation**

We find the proposals limited and unsatisfactory. Only a part of the old town is named 'Heritage Quarter', there is no quality design guidance for new buildings as proposed by the BTP and an intrusive, large and dominant new building is demonstrated for the Square.

## **Movement and Access**

We also find the proposals limited and unsatisfactory. In spite of adopting the principle of reducing cross town traffic, no effective measures are proposed to secure the pre-eminence of active travel, or the creation of any new traffic free shopping streets. However, the bold proposal of creating a second rear access to the railway station has merit, but it relies heavily on potential investments by other agencies and private owners.

## **Station Quarter**

This is envisaged to become a high quality gateway to town through upgrading the present station square and creating a new plaza on the other side coupled with extensive new housing development. That, could be in competition with the Smithfield proposed mixed development.

## **The Northern Corridor**

This also includes proposals for extensive housing, but there is no mention of land reserved for schools, health care facilities, or local playgrounds and shopping. We welcome the revitalised footpath connections with the centre.

## **The West End**

These proposals include new buildings in the place of the open air car parks of today near Rowley's House, but we cannot emphasise enough how important it is to demand and observe high design standards for any new developments.

## **The Abbey Foregate Area**

Activating the railway arches has some potential, but a multi-storey car park would detract the views of the Abbey and the proposed housing scheme would deprive the local population of two large and vital supermarkets.

## **The Historic Quarter**

As mentioned already we found the treatment of the Historic Quarter inadequate, especially considering that almost the whole of the old town in the loop is the major asset of Shrewsbury. It was also disturbing to have two different versions of the Castle Street/Station Area proposals. Converting Castle Street to single lane with cycle-ways on both sides needs more detailed

functional examination and the so called Darwin Square can only be two neighbouring open spaces on different levels, divided by traffic.

### **Frankwell and Riverside**

This area is included in the Masterplan Vision Document but has nevertheless been the subject of a separate master-planning study. The resulting report is now made public and available for consultation. The Civic Society will make more detailed comments on that in due course. However, the first impression is one of risking an over-development ambition, thus intensifying traffic generation and increased requirements for local parking, depending on the final land use plan. In any case we cannot support any premature or speculative demolition of buildings in search of developers, without any specific and scrutinised plans in place. This would go very much against the needs of the climate emergency such as minimising carbon emissions.

Our general comments are:

- In order to achieve the suggested “attractive urban living and working opportunity” all proposed new developments need to reserve land for schools, health care, local playgrounds and local shopping.
- On promoting active travel and outdoors activities in several new squares, consideration must be given to the realities of the English weather. Potentially empty large paved areas could be improved by reduced size and more greening.
- We are concerned about potentially unreliable predictions of future traffic loads in the town centre. We believe that in order to eliminate cross town vehicular movements, traffic management measures are needed, including digital technology, which would exclude non local traffic.
- There is a need to ensure that all new developments, are designed to a very high design standard and to be appropriate to the historical context, their immediate surroundings and the conservation area.
- Shrewsbury is also known for its sky-lines and roof-scape. Attention is needed to avoid high developments in all sensitive areas of the town including Old Coleham and Old Potts Way.
- Bearing on mind many disastrous building replacements in the 1960’s and the serious concerns of today about carbon emissions we urge preservation and retro-fitting wherever possible, also including the Shirehall. This principle does not feature in the masterplans.

### Some positives and negatives

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several general principles support our objectives.</li> <li>• Many specific proposals could enhance the town without eroding its special qualities.</li> <li>• The three BTP partnership members work with agreed common purpose and processes that can come to fruition.</li> <li>• The range and degree of public involvement has been strong.</li> <li>• There has been a good degree of publicity that may lead to more visitors and more investment.</li> <li>• The new recognition of the town's important history and its heritage streets is welcome.</li> <li>• Traffic/access is treated as an important consideration, and many unanswered issues are acknowledged.</li> <li>• SCS was invited to take part in many master-planning sessions and to offer responses to Documents.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The town's heritage and historic built environment was not an initial priority and starting point for planning.</li> <li>• Hyperbole and over-generalisations in the report's writing mask some good ideas.</li> <li>• Some proposals favour attracting visitors before facilitating residents' interests.</li> <li>• New reductions in the uses that are needed for town-centre buildings may not be sufficiently accounted for.</li> <li>• Master-planning appears to ignore the previous BTP aim of 'Balanced Growth,' and suggests little outside the town centre.</li> <li>• No progress had been made to devise ways to ensure design is of high quality or that Carbon emissions are minimised.</li> <li>• The area divisions seem arbitrary and ramifications of, and for, the rest of the whole town are neglected.</li> </ul>
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### Some initial reactions:

The focus appears to be on increasing visitor numbers. (However, what sort of visitor is being attracted?)	Sometimes, the objectives appear to override the interests of local town residents.
There is an anticipation of some 119,000 sq ft of new retail space and nearly 2000 additional homes	Is enough account taken of topical trends in this tumultuous period for interest in, and values of, town centre property?*

Both councils have declared climate emergencies and aims for carbon neutral activities by 2030.	The document does not identify significant new ways to reduce carbon. Indeed, the Riverside project will rely heavily on demolitions and new CO2 emitting constructions rather than re-use and retro-fitting.
Many of the proposals will make very welcome improvements.	They are occasionally too “large” for the town. Eg swathes of paved steps to the river would be better broken up or “greened”.
Shrewsbury’s built environment and heritage, together with its position as a countryside portal, are key drivers of tourism and footfall.	The so called “Shrewsbury Story” does not feature in master-planning priorities.
A new heritage report now accepts the importance of sensitive design.	No means to ensure high quality design are included. Nor are there any practical suggestions to preserve/maintain historic streets and buildings.

\*One recent estimate from 3 universities suggests that the use of town and city centre office space will be reduced by at least 20%. Details of the so-called “Zoomshock” are emerging but it is likely that new estates on the town’s fringes will need more services. The pandemic has accelerated the need for imaginative thinking about the sort of uses that town centre development (old and new) will need. The Master-Vision Document has little to say on that.

## **Commenting more specifically on the BTP Masterplan Vision Document (Glen Howells Version 1, Jan 2021)**

### **From the Executive Summary (p.06)**

This is an imagined future state of Shrewsbury, in 2036, as long as the Consultants advice in this report is followed. The ‘visionary’ narrative of the 2018 Big Town Plan is now enhanced with ideas of how to advance the ten initial priorities for the town.

There were to be **six, character area studies**, of which we have seen and responded to one, the Castle Street Study, and were introduced to a second one in a Zoom lecture, the Smithfield/Frankwell Study. (We will respond to the latter in due course.) However, this overall Masterplan also deals with these two areas, albeit in a different way from the two studies and covers all the remaining areas. **This is confusing and inconclusive.**

The Masterplan Vision includes a ‘Movement Vision’. Additionally, we now read that Heritage has been a “*key consideration in the development of the Masterplan Vision*”. We also read that “*the use of vernacular materials and traditional forms of construction should be used to augment and develop the spirit of place*”. All these are of course very welcome. However, **we are not impressed by hyperboles** like “the Movement Vision (will be) making Shrewsbury one of the most inclusive and accessible towns in the UK”.

### Developing the Masterplan Vision (from p.23)

Basically this chapter introduces three new external Consultants to handle the subjects of

- **Commercial viability**, stating that the masterplan must be flexible, adaptable and viable and referring to more details outside this report (AVISON YOUNG). The report includes data suggesting that the whole plan could involve some 694,000 sq.ft of new office space, some 118,900 sq.ft of new retail spaces and some 1,904 new residential units. (p.158) We suggest that such a mix of requirements may be based largely on pre-pandemic, pre-climate emergency and pre-internet shopping requirements. **This is not up to date.**
- **Heritage and Conservation.** Provides an incomplete map of Listed Buildings e.g. depicting only nine of the 15 Grade 1 in existence and ignoring assets such as the Lion Hotel, St Chad's Church etc., as well as blanking a whole quarter of the centre from any listed buildings. There is no mention of the town's Conservation Area - its extent or significance - but a reference to more details outside this report (DONALD INSALL ASSOCIATES). Whilst the inclusion of a heritage report is a welcome addition, its findings appear too late to have made a difference to the master-planning eg any planned support for the protection of, and enhancement of, Shrewsbury's architectural heritage. The INSALL Report clearly identifies key historic features, opportunities and protections needed for each of the areas (more sensibly named by letters) which are not properly addressed in the Vision Document. **This section's impact is unsatisfactory.**
- **Movement Vision**, states that movement in Shrewsbury needs to be transformed with attractive alternatives to driving being available to everyone. Traffic management measures are stated to "*be implemented to reduce non-essential car journeys.... while discouraging journeys that pass through the centre and don't stop*". We examine these measures further on. We are referred to more details outside this report (STANTEC) although these have not been forthcoming.

### The Masterplan Vision (from p.44)

We are pleased to read in the very beginning that "*It imagines a better connected and exciting place to live, work, learn and visit, which builds on the unique historic urban fabric and character of the town*".

However, as with the Heritage and Conservation section, we are not convinced that the underpinning within the Masterplan, Movement Vision will necessarily create “*healthier and friendlier streets*” by allowing pedestrians and cyclists to mix with cars and busses. (See Movement Vision Section below).

- **Big Moves.** This is a chapter summarising four supplementary ideas, really expressing the many good intentions of the plan, under four new headings: Connecting Communities/Quality & Characterful Public Spaces/Celebrating Heritage/Creating Opportunities & Growth.
- **Connecting Communities.** The plan simply emphasizes most of the existing and a few new links for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. (Apparently, the Monkmoor Road and the Castlefields communities remain unconnected!)
- **Quality and Characterful Public Spaces.** The plan depicts all the existing squares and green spaces, plus a few proposed ones. Caution is needed in extending the overall number and size of public spaces because too many may dilute the opportunities for activity and provide swathes of, often empty, paving. Consequently, very high quality design with a great deal of ‘greening’ is essential in Percy Thrower’s town.
- **Celebrating Heritage.** There appears the same incomplete map of listed buildings, with just two additions: the two celebrated listed bridges of Shrewsbury (English Bridge and Welsh Bridge). The town’s Conservation Area and several significant parts of historic town are not included at all. At last, there is a design principle which includes the protection of listed and non-listed buildings (SCS is developing a list of the latter). However, the means by which Shrewsbury’s heritage and buildings should be “celebrated” is not made explicit within the Character Area proposals and so **the impact of this “big move” is questionable.**
- **Creating Opportunities & Growth.** We find design principles that would apply across the proposed development sites of this Masterplan. Unfortunately, these Design Principles are very general and in common usage, pointing to “*balanced growth*”, “*appropriate and complimentary mix of uses*” and “*commercially viable, flexible and adaptable*” developments. They also are limited in that the plan has not considered the fast-changing balance of viability (especially in the retail sector) across the whole town.

At the BTP 'Festival' (Jan 2021) many national and local experts spoke about Shrewsbury's unusually high quality heritage and built environment. Below is a small sample of such comments.

**Bill Grimsey** said that *"LAs are the custodians of Place...the curation of Place is the most important thing and must be collaborative."*

**Prof Mark Barrow** said Shrewsbury *"must build on our character."*

**David Gillam** talked of Shrewsbury Town Centre's *"charm", "distinctive uniqueness", and a need for a "heritage trail"*.

**Prof Tim Jenkins** said *"Shrewsbury has an absolutely unique heritage", "the town is like an open air museum", "there's a huge opportunity to utilise heritage"*

**David Milner** said *"the Heritage premium is X4 in London (currently)." "Repurpose adaptable buildings... beauty matters."*

Many other experts (too numerous to mention here) contributed to the BTP Festival events, telling of their high valuation of the town's built environment.

(NB A full set of notes and quotes from all seven webinars is available from the Society)

### **Movement Vision** (from p.56)

Some of the data given on Page 30 may now be inaccurate even as indicative figures. This is because of recent changes in lifestyles, climate, the pandemic etc. Furthermore, the Shrewsbury Town Profile has not been updated since 2017.

- **Reducing traffic in town.** This of course has been a desirable target of this town for many a year. We have made two related reports available concerning pedestrianisation. The measures this Vision proposes are as follows: (p.31)

- **Create low traffic zones.** There are two such zones in the plan. The most extensive one covers a large part of the old town, but surprisingly it excludes Pride Hill, Mardol, Hill's Lane and most of the northern half of the old town. Unfortunately, no guidance is given about the meaning and the application of this measure, there and around the Abbey. In reality, most of the residential part of the old town is characterised by low traffic anyway, perhaps with some limited exceptions. There are also at least two pedestrian zones, in addition to pedestrian street, Pride Hill.
- **Increase Park & Ride bus frequency.** Obviously this needs careful balancing with demand, but it is true that a measure of increased frequency can stimulate demand.
- **Allow cross-town movements by bus.** The frequent passing of the large P&R busses through the town conflicts with the aim to offer the pedestrians freedom from traffic. Only small electric mini-buses can nowadays be justified in the town's medieval streets.
- **Move car parking out of the loop.** This is only possible if a complete and efficient system of non-polluting town centre mini-buses is in operation. Such a system should link up with the nearest P&R bus stops or other bus stops, for transferring passengers. However, without active restrictions to traffic entering the centre, there is no guarantee that short-cutting through the centre will be avoided.
- **Relocate bus station.** Again this is only possible, for any location outside the loop, if the above system of town centre mini-buses is established. An obvious place for the relocation of the bus station would be within the proposed redevelopment near the proposed new access to the railway station (see Station Quarter). In any case, it is obvious that before the elimination of the present bus station, a new bus station must be ready to take over. Such a plan would eliminate the current occasional flooding difficulty at the current site and could effectively produce an integrated transport hub. However, it is likely to be very expensive, with insufficient enabling investment opportunities.

- **Create bus and cycle corridors with priority over private traffic.** Not necessary for buses, if private traffic is reduced or eliminated during shopping hours, but yes for cycling. In fact, the Castle Street study proposes the opposite i.e. the elimination of the bus lane. Too many existing cycle routes into town are incomplete.
- **Deliver a second pedestrian/cycle access to the railway station.** This is highly desirable.
- **Become a 20mph town.** This limit exists already for most of the town centre. More signage and stronger enforcement is needed. We too, believe that it should be expanded to include the whole of Smithfield Road and all three entry points to the old town, including the Frankwell roundabout, as well as, at least, all the residential streets of the wider town.

Unfortunately, there is no mention of traffic free hours in the shopping streets. Neither is ‘pedestrian priority over cars’ mentioned anymore as it was in the 2018 Big Town Plan. (see p.18). This is probably because pedestrian priority and 20mph traffic speed are incompatible. Essentially, the planned changes for the pedestrians are very limited, except that there may be less traffic in the (unlikely) event that the above measures make a difference. The pedestrians, at peak shopping times, will continue to stay on the pavements, currently trying to avoid each other for the fear of the Coronavirus.

### **Movement and access.**

**We recognise that the Master-plan Vision Document is a Draft and that there are several factors outside the control of the BTP Partnership. However, movement/access/traffic are agreed as features upon which many proposals will rest. So a vague picture, where the ‘focus is on the pedestrians’ because with less traffic they will find it ‘easier to cross the roads’ is insufficient. For example, a ‘Darwin Square’ is hardly feasible without significant traffic reductions on the only North to South-East route. A strategy to reduce through traffic in the town centre is, of course, welcome but the measures proposed are not robust or wide-reaching enough to have the impact needed (The 20mph has been in operation for several years already without any traffic reduction). We believe that traffic free areas provide the best conditions for real appreciation of the built heritage, as well as for distraction-free trade, window shopping and open-air activities.**

### **The Character Areas** (from p.64)

Most of these areas have some degree of distinctiveness as well as each being mixed and many proposals relying on the effect of developments in others. There are also several character features that exist in each. However, one that seems to be under-represented is the Historic Quarter. This is an inappropriate name as a large majority of the town is historic.

There is no obvious reason to leave out any parts of the old town such as the Town Walls, Belmont, Swan Hill, Claremont Hill and Claremont Bank. In fact, one can easily claim that the Historic Quarter is the whole of the old medieval Shrewsbury with a few small exceptions.

### **Station Quarter** (from p.70)

This is an ambitious project relying primarily on the willingness of Network Rail to open a new main entrance to Howard Street. If feasible, the rest of the plan becomes possible as a serious potential for development. However, in terms of funding and market demand, it will be in competition with the nearby Smithfield development which is claiming priority.

In any case, the new bus station could be included in the programme as well as adequate parking capacity for the railway station since the proposed Parking Hub (plan on page 82) is a little too distant to serve the railway station.

Such intense development could generate a lot of new traffic and the existing local network will need to be tested for resilience. A potential bottle neck is going to be the narrow Beacall's Lane, which is best suited for one-way traffic.

Some special attention is needed at the southern end for the Dana footpath, which needs to start from the level of the castle grounds and not through steps as it is today. It is worth noting that this point is the beginning of the whole route to the Flaxmill via the old canal route.

## Station Quarter Proposal

	Positive	Neutral/conditional	Negative
Removal of parking and vehicles from Station Square	Could eliminate traffic from forecourt. (This is a key change and seminal to BTP, to enable other developments but current design is inadequate.)	Only if North Station Plaza can provide all facilities for integrated transport hub. No shops on Victorian frontage. Reflection of heritage needed.	Not easily appropriate for medieval castle area. Pedestrian priority spaces will rely on much reduced traffic. Water feature inappropriate.
Create Northern Station Plaza	Helpful second railway station access and modern façade could be fine but much space needed for integrated transport modes.	Bus station needed here if the current one is demolished.	Proposed additional car park is a little too distant for the railway station.
Retain/Improve Gala Bingo hall	Helpful but only with appropriate use and renovation as a listed frontage and interior.	Great sensitivity needed and expertise in remodelling inside and out.	
Darwin Square	Some potential in part of it but detailing will make or break it.	Great care necessary in design. Unlikely to have sufficient traffic reduction.	More detail needed eg sectional analysis needed. Concern for listed wall.
Use of Library building	One of Shrewsbury's gems.	Office use is inappropriate.	Must remain for info/education. etc
Development of Meadow Place	Good for 'movement'. Potentially new vistas.	Unclear details as yet! Developments could mask, rather than reveal views.	Could conceal open views and potential damage to a stretch of the town wall.

## The Northern Corridor

This section is also proposing a lot of development, partly connected to that of the Station Quarter and partly to new housing areas around Bagley Brook, in spite of the barrier of the railway line. At the same time the Flaxmill Project proposes new housing around the Flaxmill.

**General comment 1. All the proposed new developments in the various parts of the town assume generous increases in the town population and ease of funding. Obviously not all will necessarily come to fruition. However, we read about providing places for “attractive urban living and working opportunity” but nothing about schools, health-care**

**facilities, or local playgrounds, etc. We believe that a part of the Masterplan's guidance should be to reserve land for these functions, to indicate this on the plans and to provide for all aspects of infrastructure, including broadband, etc.**

The Flaxmill-Maltings is already connected to the town centre and increase of active travel along this axis will be welcome. However, at the town end, improvement of the railway bridges and the underpass is an essential long term issue. Ideally a second underpass towards Coton Hill, parallel to the existing one should be aimed for, in order to properly satisfy existing and the new proposed traffic arrangements (pp.48,58). The two long foot and cycle connections between the Flaxmill and the centre are welcome. A cross connection of the two in the middle is also needed to link the two leisure facilities shown (p.84), i.e. Saw Mill Leisure Park and Beddow Park.

### The Northern Corridor

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral/Conditional</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Canal route	Excellent idea to re-instate space Encourage active travel	Leave opportunity for canal re-instatement.	
Bagley Brook	Opens pleasant opportunities Encourage active travel	Balance regarding density of housing	
New multi-storey car park	Very good position for needed parking for town	Access needs careful detail and to be hidden.	Too far as a railway station car park
Station Plaza, Howard Street	Could be very positive	Needs enough space for transport hub	

## The West End

The context analysis refers to Mardol and Claremont Hill, but not the heritage importance of Belmont Bank, Barker Street and Hill's Lane. As well as the four landmark buildings (plan p.98), we would add Morris's building by Welsh Bridge.

The principle of removing open-air parking facilities is significant, but needs to be counterbalanced with a corresponding creation of places outside the loop in addition to the existing ones. A gradual approach may help to test the idea. To significantly reduce the number of car parking spaces (surface or otherwise although increasingly electric) in the loop, to some 1200, while increasing the number of homes by some 1900 may be unworkable for the residents. (p. 158)

**General comment 2: On promoting active travel, outdoors activities and several new squares, it is necessary to consider the reality of the English weather. In spite of climate warming, rainy and cold days are frequent for much of the year. Therefore, we cannot assume regular activities and spaces, in the West End or elsewhere, which at times may remain unused. Large squares and paved areas could make a place feel empty, losing its medieval feel and diluting its public realm activities. This could be mitigated with smaller spaces and much more 'greening'. We urge moderation and realism as even post pandemic street café culture will have limits. Plans must be adaptable.**

The aspiration of converting the Market Hall to have a street level presence, is great in principle but sensitive in practice. Unless done well, there is huge danger that it may lose its rural character and look like a supermarket. This is a job for the relevant community to be engaged with and help design.

An innovation area could be a good idea, although there are few positive ideas in development yet. Mixed uses of education, innovative science/IT/entrepreneur business could be mutually helpful (free broadband would be an enticement). A health and wellness communal hub at the Quarry would also be very welcome. However, replacing the existing pool with a new one should only be considered if it can be proved that upgrading the existing one would not cost more and be less sustainable. These are projects that need to fully involve the relevant communities.

Of concern is the shape of the proposed low traffic zone, which excludes Mardol, Pride Hill and High Street, instead of covering the whole of the loop area.

The idea of housing in front of Rowley's House is probably preferable to surface car parks but it would need highly skilled design in order to complement the many buildings - from different centuries - which surround the area on all sides and should provide adequate breathing and appreciation space near the landmark building.

**General Comment 3: There is a need to ensure that all new developments, are designed to a very high standard and to be appropriate to the historical context, their immediate surroundings and the Conservation Area. This could be achieved in various ways, such as the one proposed by the Big Town Plan 2018 (although ignored in later versions), of a Shrewsbury Test, a formal Design Code, a Design Guide, with a Design Panel and/or Architectural Competitions.**

**General comment 4: We saw how disastrous some replacement ideas were in the 1960s, so for that reason, as well as the serious concerns about high carbon emissions from replacing buildings, we urge preservation and retro-fitting wherever possible, also including the Shirehall. This principle does not feature in the masterplans. Notwithstanding this, we can also see that there could be a place for modern designs if they are respectful, not overpowering and of high quality.**

Proposals concerning the Victoria Quay are welcome as they would offer more opportunities to utilise the natural asset of the river (in spite of the recurring flood risk). However, moderation and sensitivity are needed here too as the river is narrow, shallow and water activities are limited. Its attraction is its natural nature. This could be eroded by swathes of terraced paving and spectator facilities and there is the inherent danger of an inducement to enter the water.

## The West End

Proposal	Positive	Neutral/Conditional	Negative
Victoria Quay Riverbank	Improving pedestrian and cycle access to extend quarry to Welsh Bridge	Over-development of Shrewsbury's natural asset.	Danger of over commercialisation
Quarry health facilities	Excellent for townspeople	Should involve public involvement in the design	
Market Hall open at street level	Excellent idea if it can be done without diluting the current offer	Must involve community planning.	
Barker/Bridge Street	Reduce surface parking. Reduce open space.	Under-developed opportunities Very high quality design needed.	Rowley's House context
Innovation Area	This could be very valuable to the town	As yet too few ideas.	

## Abbey Foregate

The masterplan makes some useful and reasonable proposals to enhance the setting of the Wildlife Trust's premises, the English Bridge Workshop buildings and the Shrewsbury College, from which the existing link to the railway station will be helpfully improved. (visions 1-3)

However, the proposal to replace the two national supermarkets with housing will ignore the interests of the many local residents (vision 4). They serve thousands of residents of east Shrewsbury, many of which live within walking distance from the two supermarkets. This section of the population would then be forced to drive to Meole Brace Retail Park or elsewhere to the north of town. **This is a badly judged proposal.**

The proposed new traffic arrangement around today's gyratory system could indeed free the railway arches for open air uses, a café, pedestrian approach and the like. It also could link up with the Wildlife Trust territory, the greened Abbey Pulpit area (referred to below), and even the Abbey precinct, which already has some leisure functions. As such it could be a useful and positive proposal, although it would create two new complex crossroads with many traffic lights.

Not so welcome is the idea of a multi-storey car park plus housing, instead of the existing surface car park, which would obstruct views of the Abbey. More preferable and sustainable would be an effective greening of the car park, next to the suggested new public space around the Grade 1 Listed Building of the Abbey Refectory Pulpit.

A second proposed access to the car park from Old Potts Way could be obstructive to traffic, unless combined with the existing access to the supermarket. As for housing, if the car showrooms were to move away, it remains as a marginal option, but only as subject to the previous general comments and to securing all the vital services within walking distance. According to the Local Plan this distance is 480 metres.

**General Comment 5: Shrewsbury is partly known for its skyline(s). We have no issue with tall buildings in general. However, there has already been pressure in Old Coleham for high developments that could affect this. Both the proposed multi-storey car park and some proposed housing blocks on Old Potts Way, could amend this town asset. Heights, views, skylines and their articulation are very sensitive. The danger is that such features could take a lesser priority.**

Vision 5, suggests an improved Rea Brook Walk: a good idea. It could also have a branch leading to the cinema and restaurants. Other welcome ideas are a better use of the Abbey green and the tree planting of Abbey Foregate, as it once was.

**General Comment 6: There is a concern about the accuracy of, and deductions made from, traffic modelling. There are questions that the assumed reductions in town centre traffic will be sufficient to enable some of the proposals. We have not seen that the modelling has taken enough account of the whole of the town's movements, nor of more recent changes to a) the town's fast growing population (25% in a decade), b) recent changes in movements due to the pandemic and c) those due to the demise of the retail sector. The NWRR produces yet another unknown, suggesting that a number of different patterns may need to be elaborated with their implications for enabling Town Centre changes.**

## **Abbey Foregate**

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral/Conditional</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Enhancing setting of Abbey, etc.	Positive ideas for Abbey area	Much rests upon Abbey Foregate traffic reduction. Is a Plan B needed?	
Activating the viaduct	Good idea. Commercial potential		
Improved college setting and link north to railway station.	Good to improve link to railway station.		
Housing on Old Potts Way	Opportunity for innovative living spaces	Danger of gardenless dwellings, dominant skyline and lack of some basic services within walking distance	Consider displacement of existing uses. Retain a supermarket
Improved Rea Brook Walk	Excellent improvement ideas	Good to link with undervalued railway station.	

## **Historic Quarter (Not of course the only area containing significant historic heritage)**

It is not clear why the overall area of this quarter excludes some important parts of the medieval town such as Belmont, Town Walls, Claremont Hill etc. There are of course no specific proposals for that part of the town, but the description 'historic quarter' should best reflect the real historic quarter.

Aspiration 1. The plan on page 130 mainly records existing assets, such as landmark buildings, squares and footpaths, with the addition of a Darwin Square, divided by the carriageway. It proposes the improvement of all, without suggesting how.

Aspiration 2. It supports the idea of filling in gap sites and suggests a new building on a small site along St. Mary's Place. This could actually create a better streetscape, provided it is feasible and sensitively designed.

Aspiration 3. This is a proposal of new housing in the Wyle Cop car park. There are several question marks about this scheme. Will the existing parking places be replaced outside the loop? Will the proposed houses have garages and therefore create equivalent traffic? What measures will be taken to defend the proposed houses from flooding? Will not effective flood defences make most of them too expensive?

On the other hand, the idea of creating a new footpath higher and parallel to the existing towpath and so avoiding the recurring flooding of the latter is a positive one. Also positive is the creation of a new gate-building on Wyle Cop at the start of the footpath and the possible access to the proposed housing. (p.136)

Aspiration 4. Revitalising the Parade. This is welcome but not easy, in view of many efforts in the past. The suggested direct connection with the riverside via new riverbank terraced gardens is promising.

Aspiration 5. Re-purpose and improve Princess House in the town Square. Yes, but not in the way the relevant drawings are suggesting. The meaningful and visual focus of the Square is and should remain the Old Market Hall and not a large self-promoting modernistic unit.

**The above comments on the proposals for the Historic Quarter are some initial thoughts because the proposals appear somewhat general, requiring more clarification. In depth study is needed for this part of the town, which represents a main feature of attraction for Shrewsbury. (also see below)**

### The Historic Quarter

Proposal	Positive	Neutral/Conditional	Negative
Improve pedestrian experience. New routes?	Helpful although proposals for this seem ineffective	Avoid discredited pedestrian priority streets with 20mph limit. (We have commented elsewhere about our misgivings on a Darwin Square.)	Reduced parking for residents, locals and workers. More up-to-date traffic analyses needed before some proposals are viable.

Fill gaps and improve St Mary's Church setting	Could be positive if done well.	Few opportunities so of limited help	Unclear proposals
Riverside homes following removal of NCP car park.	Excellent proposal only if there is sufficient flood mitigation.	Ensure adequate alternative parking (and e/v points for residents)	Reduction of 'greened' area.
Parade improvements and riverside terraces	Excellent proposals	Retain essential parking for locals. Include maintenance conditions.	Few real ideas for changes.
Improve Princess House	Needs doing. Reopen the shut.	Very sensitive. Architectural Competition? Community voice.	Highly unpopular image given so far.

### **Frankwell and Riverside**

This area is included in the Masterplan Vision Document but has nevertheless been the subject of a separate master-planning study. The resulting report is now made public and available for public consultation. The Civic Society will make more detailed comments from that in due course. That said, it is our opinion that any actions currently taken must have a practical immediate outcome. The proposed demolition of the former Riverside Medical Practice building is a case in point. Shropshire Council wish to demolish this practical, modern building with no indication as to the purpose other than its demolition. It may well be part of a proposed development of the Riverside/Smithfield area but that, by its nature, will be some way off. In the meantime, what is to happen for an indeterminate period? Further BTP work of this nature should be suspended until Shropshire Council can demonstrate that it can deal practically with work of this nature.

### **Next Steps**

The final section of the report includes a recommended programme for implementing the proposals up to 2025!

The programme's timeline is very over-optimistic and does not allow time for proper public, or other, scrutiny, or enable financial investment at the suggested pace.

**We are disturbed by the fact that one of the proposed Spotlight Projects, the re-purposing of the Pride Hill shopping centre, has already been started by Shropshire Council. There is a view to move Council offices into it and perhaps later into a new Riverside Development. This is being done without public consultation and scant due diligence. Together with the planned abandonment of the Shirehall, these are precipitous moves. For over half a century, The Shirehall has been a focal point for the County. For the town it has created a unique ensemble of landmark buildings together with the Doric Column of Shrewsbury. We hope the Shirehall will not be sacrificed to support the Riverside Development.**