

Shropshire Climate Action Partnership. Statement on Findings of Independent Critical Assessment on Proposal for the Construction of a 'Shrewsbury North West Relief Road' (SNWRR)

The proposed scheme for the SNWRR that has been assessed is that scheme set out in the planning application by Shropshire Council (SC) submitted on 19 February 2021ⁱ.

This statement presents the findings of the Independent Critical Assessment (ICA) completed by Shropshire Climate Action Partnership (SCAP) on 28 March 2021 and approved for publication by SCAP on 14 April 2021.

The ICA followed the process set out in ICA Procedure Version 7 approved by the SCAP Steering Group on 10 March 2021, for analysis of the facts related to significant projects.

The purpose of an ICA is to provide an objective statement supported by robust evidence to inform decision-makers (and other interested parties) about the likely impact of a particular policy or initiative on Shropshire's aim of reaching Net Zero Carbon by 2030 and the county's capacity to do so.

SNWRR Scheme Outline

The SNWRR is proposed

*'to provide a new, single carriageway road linking the northern and western parts of Shrewsbury. It will include a new bridge over the River Severn and its flood plain, and a new bridge over the Shrewsbury-Chester railway line. The SNWRR will connect the A5 at Welshpool Road roundabout in the west to the Ellesmere Road roundabout in the north'*ⁱⁱ.

The SNWRR Road scheme comprises

*'construction of 6.9km single carriageway (7.3m wide) road; severance of local roads and footpaths; provision of combined footway/cycleway; erection of three bridged structures over carriageway; diversion of existing bridleway/footpath via an underpass; climbing lane on westbound approach; 670m long viaduct; bridge over railway; two flood storage areas; provision of two new roundabout junctions and improvements to two existing roundabouts; associated traffic calming measures, landscaping and drainage schemes'*ⁱⁱⁱ

Likely carbon footprint of the construction and operation of the SNWRR

The key relevant facts are:

- 1 The estimated embodied carbon in the SNWRR construction phase is about 70,000 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e)^{iv}
- 2 A projection of possible carbon emission reductions due to the operation of the SNWRR suggests that it will take until at least 2070 to 'offset' the construction phase emissions.
- 3 SC proposes that the carbon emissions associated with the construction can be 'offset' by carbon capture activities elsewhere.

Context

The ICA is undertaken within the context of the carbon budget for Shropshire county consistent with preventing catastrophic climate change^v, and the declaration of a climate emergency by SC on 19 May 2019. In particular:

- 1 The Zero Carbon Shropshire Plan (ZCSP) sets out a linear reduction pathway for the carbon footprint of Shropshire county to net zero carbon Shropshire by 31 December 2030. The ZCSP demonstrates that even with a massive wholesale shift away from current car use, the carbon budget for Shropshire to keep within Paris Agreement limits will be exceeded before 2030. It is therefore necessary to find additional reductions and avoid any changes that lead to increased emissions during this period.^{vi}
- 2 SCAP has published a White Paper on 'Offsetting'^{vii}. The relevant findings are presented here along with a statement of implications for the SNWRR project:
 - a) *'it costs considerably more to try and capture carbon than it costs to avoid emitting it in the first place'*. The motorist does not yet factor in this cost when planning journeys by car, but it is Government policy that such costs will be recognised in the future, and emerging Government policy reflects this in placing new priority on 'Active Travel', with a new target for walking and cycling to increase to 50% of all journeys in towns by 2030^{viii}. The traffic projection for the SNWRR proposal has not yet been updated to reflect this, but work done elsewhere^{ix} shows that

these policy changes will lead to a reduction in motor vehicle traffic. Just as with all other proposals that pre-date the declaration of climate emergency, the costs and benefits of the SNWRR proposal will need to be reviewed in the light of the climate emergency situation and the need for reduction of carbon emissions to take higher priority to achieve a sustainable future for Shropshire.

- b) *'Offsetting capacity is far less than our current or likely reduced emissions so it is vital to consider the most essential activities first in terms of setting any realistic carbon budget'*. In terms of hierarchy of needs, food production and heating of homes will need to take precedence over new highways projects. A radical proposal for a new 'Marches Forest', increasing woodland by 80,000 acres over the next ten years is given as an example of the ambitious scale of one of the best potential carbon capture opportunities in the county, yet this would represent less than half the capacity needed to offset the footprint of Shropshire diets even if we all became vegan, let alone all the other essential needs such as heating homes and making clothes. It is therefore clear that there is not sufficient carbon capture capacity left for the SNWRR development carbon to be 'offset'.

Key findings of the ICA analysis

The key findings are:

- 1 There is insufficient 'offsetting' capacity available in Shropshire and elsewhere for even the most fundamental stuff of life, so it must be recognised that none of our less essential activities such as new highways can be 'offset' and our efforts must be directed to avoiding them and replacing them with sustainable zero carbon activities. The earth does not have the capacity for any such additional polluting activity to be offset. We therefore disagree with the premise that *'the construction can be 'offset' by carbon capture activities elsewhere'*.
- 2 SCAP recognises that substantial harm to biodiversity is likely to be caused by the construction of the proposed road, as reported by Shropshire Wildlife Trust^x.
- 3 Shropshire Climate Action Partnership analysis of the evidence shows that the SNWRR is not compatible with achieving net zero carbon Shropshire by 2030.
- 4 SCAP recognises that there could be other evidence including an updated, post Covid, traffic projection that will affect the overall case for the project, but we are not aware of any scenario that could lead to the SNWRR causing reduction in carbon emissions. As set out in the ZCSP, there is an over-riding emergency response needed for carbon footprint reductions. The full response to this emergency has yet to be developed, but in the meantime any proposals such as this SNWRR which predate the recognition of the climate emergency should be reviewed in the light of these changed circumstances.
- 5 SCAP recommends in response to the climate and ecological emergency that updated traffic projections and transport strategy for Shropshire (and recognising that in Shropshire, transport is one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions) be used as the basis for adopting plans that help Shropshire achieve net zero carbon by 2030.
- 6 Proposals for significant increases in carbon footprint (which this SNWRR proposal represents) will make it impossible to achieve a sustainable future for Shropshire.

In conclusion, the result of our ICA shows that:

Implementation of the SNWRR proposal will impede Shropshire's aim of reaching Net Zero Carbon by 2030.

Approved by Shropshire Climate Action Partnership for publication on 14 April 2021. This is an independent critical process and does not claim to reflect the views of all our partners, members and supporters.

ⁱ <https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/> enter planning reference: 21/00924/EIA

ⁱⁱ <https://shropshire.gov.uk/roads-and-highways/shrewsbury-north-west-relief-road/overview/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=QOXI5QTD06Z00&activeTab=summary>

^{iv} Professor John Whitelegg, Foundation for Integrated Transport, 2021. An estimate of the embodied carbon associated with the total life cycle of materials and construction of the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road. Also <https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=QOXI5QTD06Z00&activeTab=summary>

^v <https://zerocarbonshropshire.org/zcsplan/>

^{vi} <https://zerocarbonshropshire.org/zcsplan/>

^{vii} "Carbon Offsetting" & it's potential to help achieve Net Zero Carbon Shropshire. White Paper by Shropshire Climate Action Partnership published 29/3/2021.

^{viii} https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904146/gear-change-a-bold-vision-for-cycling-and-walking.pdf

^{ix} <https://cat.org.uk/info-resources/zero-carbon-britain/research-reports/zero-carbon-britain-rising-to-the-climate-emergency/>

^x <https://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/shrewsbury-north-west-road>