

BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
7th September

LJ/2021

26th August 2021

REPORT TO TOWN COUNCILLORS

AGENDA ITEM 14 – BRIDGNORTH HIGHWAYS DEPOT

AIM

1. To note correspondence from Shropshire Council regarding the planned closure of Bridgnorth Highways Depot and consider a corporate response.

BACKGROUND

2. The Town Council received an email via SALC from Shropshire Council on 17th August regarding the subject (extract enclosed).
3. The Town Mayor has written to the leader of Shropshire Council requesting a discussion on the matter.
4. The matter is the subject of much public debate and the Mayor has written to the Leader of Shropshire Council previously to express concerns and had asked for a meeting so that the Mayor might be understand the reasons

RECOMMENDATION

5. It is recommended that the Town Council RESOLVES that the Town Mayor write to Shropshire Council on behalf of the Town Council to express its concerns on the planned closure of the Bridgnorth Highways Depot along the lines of the wording below:

That the Town Council has serious concerns regarding the closure of the site and is extremely disappointed that little or no consideration was given to engaging the Town Council in advance of the announcement.

That the Town Council strongly objects to the planned closure of the Bridgnorth Highway depot because it is not clear that the desired cost savings have been measured against the loss of benefit. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the delivery of some critical assets particularly in times of high river levels and/or wintery conditions. We request that no decision is made until some formal and direct engagement with Bridgnorth Town Council occurs.



Lee Jakeman
Town Clerk

Enclosure.

1. Extract of email dated 17th August from Shropshire Council – Re: Bridgnorth Highways Depot Planned Closure.

Extract of email dated 17th August from Shropshire Council – Bridgnorth Highways Depot

Forwarded to Town and Parish Councils, Shropshire on behalf of Steve Smith, Assistant Director of Infrastructure, Shropshire Council

Dear town/parish council

Last month Shropshire Council announced plans to close our highways depots in Bridgnorth and Hodnet with operations continuing at the three main depots in Whittington, Shrewsbury and Craven Arms. This has raised a number of concerns and questions and we want to address these by explaining the reasons behind the proposals.

Whilst the council has been investigating with our contractor Kier whether there is still a need to maintain five depots with current delivery models, there are many good and sensible reasons why the council has had to fast-track temporarily moving operations from Bridgnorth and Hodnet. It's important that we explain these, to reassure those residents and councillors that have raised concerns about these proposals and to reinforce that this is not a cut in services for those areas. Service levels will remain at the very least the same as the last year but with an expectation that there will be improvements.

Having five depots in an area the size of Shropshire is something that may have been needed in years gone by, but this is no longer the case. The way that we work and the way we treat our roads has changed. There is no longer a one-size-fits-all approach to highways maintenance. We're now using more specialist techniques, delivered through our supply chains, so we have far fewer council and contractor staff than we once did.

The majority of work that takes place in the area that Bridgnorth and Hodnet serves is therefore not delivered by those depots but by others in the supply chain, and the staff in those depots therefore only undertake around 15% of the overall activity provided in their areas.

Indeed, there haven't been any Shropshire Council-employed staff in the Bridgnorth and Hodnet depots for about five years and, due to the relatively low numbers of contractor staff at those depots now, during the current pandemic, our contractor Kier has at times struggled to have sufficient numbers in these depots to provide the number of gangs to undertake all works required- which has created a large backlog of outstanding works.

In addition, a recent review of all five highways depots found that Bridgnorth and Hodnet are in a poor state of repair, there are permit compliance concerns with the potential for the depots to be shut down with immediate effect by regulators if these issues aren't addressed. However, to bring things up to standard would cost around £400,000 as Hodnet depot would require a complete rebuild and Bridgnorth would require the demolition of outbuildings and rebuilding of new facilities. This is money that could be far better spent on improving our roads.

In the last month issues with the Salt Barn at the Bridgnorth depot have also been identified, which means salt will need to be moved to other salt barns in the county. Salt has corroded structural steel and it could be unsafe to operate a loading shovel out of there and is unlikely that repairs will be able to be completed before the start of the winter services.

Street Scene services (fly tipping, grass cutting, hedge trimming) in Bridgnorth are operated out of the council's Canternbrook building so will not be affected. The flood defence response (including provision of

sandbags) can also be made available from those offices if needed and out of hours operations are already provided from Craven Arms, Shrewsbury and Whittington.

The focusing of operations from three depots in Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Craven Arms means that the council and Kier can be co-located so that there are better communications, oversight and consistency across the board, and will enable improvement in the quality of works and engagement with stakeholders. This approach has been demonstrated to be good practice across the country.

Rationalising teams also increases the operational resilience of the service during staff absences, as well improving the management of the health, safety and wellbeing of staff.

Each of the three remaining depots will be managed by an area manager from both Shropshire Council and Kier, supported by local technicians and supervisors.

No jobs will be lost, and modelling has demonstrated that there will be no detrimental impact on services to those areas currently covered by those depots. Indeed, it is typical of a council area of Shropshire's size to be serviced by two to three highway depots.

No decision has been taken to make these changes permanent, and they have been introduced purely to ensure continuing operational activity for those areas. However we will continue to review whether the limited monies available could be better spent on highways than maintaining the current number of depots and, if there is a business case to close depots in the future, this will be brought to Cabinet at the appropriate time.