

# **Public meeting to discuss the bus project and the future of buses in Shropshire at the Severn Centre, Highley, Shropshire on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

## **John Whitelegg**

The meeting was organised by the local independent Shropshire councillor, Dave Tremellen after the bus campaign asked him (and other councillors) for his views on the future of buses in Shropshire

Councillor Tremellen responded with comments on budget cuts and the difficulties faced by Shropshire Council when it has to make cuts which include cuts in bus support. After several e-mail exchanges Councillor Tremellen wrote an article on the bus project for the parish magazine in Highley and organised the public meeting and invited John Whitelegg to make a presentation.

Approximately 30 people came to the meeting (Including two Shropshire Council councillors) and John explained the background to the campaign, the importance of buses in achieving a wide range of climate emergency, congestion busting, public health and rural community viability objectives. John countered the budget/austerity point by referring to Cornwall County Council. Cornwall has to deal with the same budget/austerity context but does so much better than Shropshire e.g.

- Excellent publications and timetables
- Satellite linked real time information systems
- A very attractive bus station in Truro (Shrewsbury bus station is poor quality)
- A 7 day bus timetable (Shrewsbury bus station is shut on Sundays and public holidays and there are no buses). There are buses to very small villages in Cornwall on a Sunday and none to Highley

There was a very intensive Q&A session and members of the audience asked what we could do about students attending 6<sup>th</sup> forms, schools and colleges who are “hit” with an annual bill of c£700 for the school year for using public transport to get from home to school/college. We will include this in our work.

There was a lively discussion about linking public transport to the discussion of NHS facilities especially hospital attendance and linking it to the tourist economy

There was a lively exchange with a councillor about the priorities of Shropshire Council in putting £17 million of its own cash into a new road in Shrewsbury (The North West Relief Road) whilst not funding buses at the same level as Cornwall and making cuts. The independent councillor in the audience was strongly in favour of the new road and John offered to present a briefing to a group of councillors on the evidence for and against road building as a measure that does improve the local economy

There was a lively exchange about funding and John explained that there was a great deal of potential to increase co-operation with community transport organisations, hospital travel arrangements and structures modelled on the West Oxfordshire Community Transport organisation. The improvements we need do not have to be 100% funded by Shropshire Council

Everyone present was given a printed copy of the report and our contact details and asked to contact us with specific suggestions for bus routes, access to hospitals, 7 day bus services and any other matters