



County Councillor Report Jan 2026 – Sharon Ritchie-Simmons

Presented to Highley Parish Council

Date: Tuesday, 2nd February 2026

Division: Highley – Shropshire Council

This report provides an overview of my work during January 2026. During this period, I have undertaken a significant volume of resident casework, officer engagement, escalation and follow-up across highways, transport, environmental matters, planning enforcement and committee responsibilities.

Much of this work involves sustained intervention to progress long-standing issues, clarifying responsibilities between teams and ensuring resident concerns are formally logged, assessed, and acted upon.

Several matters outlined below pre-date my election and have required renewed escalation to unlock stalled progress, clarify responsibility between services, and ensure resident concerns receive active officer attention rather than remaining unresolved.

RESIDENT CASEWORK

This area of work has required sustained engagement with residents and officers, detailed guidance on statutory processes, and continued follow-up to progress matters beyond initial reporting.

1. Overgrown Conifer Trees – Borle Brook Court

A resident raised serious concerns regarding exceptionally tall conifer trees causing damage, safety risks, and access restrictions. The trees are significantly overgrown and overhang neighbouring boundaries, restricting access to an alleyway and causing damage to fence, soil, plants, and a neighbouring vehicle.

Ground maintenance for communal areas is undertaken separately, however responsibility for the trees rests with the private property owner. Limited trimming has been conducted but has not meaningfully addressed the height or overhang.

In progressing this matter, my role has focused on guiding the residents through a complex statutory process and ensuring they are properly supported where the Council's direct enforcement powers are limited. This has included:

- Provided detailed advice in line with Government "Over the Garden Fence" guidance.
- Explained informal resolution requirements before Council intervention and clarified what action the Council can and cannot take under legislation.
- Set out the High Hedges process, evidential requirements, and escalation route.
- Confirmed Shropshire Council's High Hedges complaint fee (£350)
- Provided a structured escalation checklist and draft neighbour letter.

Case remains open pending the outcome of informal engagement. This case is complex due to private landownership, statutory process requirements, and limited immediate council powers, requiring careful guidance and staged escalation rather than direct enforcement.



2. Dirt Track Access – South Farm to Highley Park Homes

Residents raised concerns regarding the un-surfaced pedestrian track linking South Farm (near the bus shelter), Netherton Lane and Highley Park Homes. The route floods regularly, becomes impassable in winter, and is the primary safe walking route to the bus stop, particularly for older residents. In addition, increased vehicle use — including traffic misdirected by satellite navigation — has further degraded the surface and worsened drainage issues.

In response, I asked for this route to be formally assessed rather than treated as an informal or low-priority path. This has required clarification of mapping, ownership and responsibility, as the track sits across different boundaries and does not fall neatly within a single service area. I have also highlighted the vulnerability of residents who rely on this route daily, particularly during winter months when alternative safe access is limited.

I have requested that officers consider whether surfacing or other mitigation options could be explored and drew attention to comparable surfacing works that have been delivered elsewhere. I have not yet received confirmation on next steps and will continue to chase this to ensure the issue does not stall due to uncertainty over ownership or departmental responsibility.

3. Footpath Safety – Telephone Exchange

Concerns were raised regarding the condition and safety of the footpath adjacent to the telephone exchange. Part of this footpath — between Hawthorn Drive and Yew Tree Close — has already been resurfaced. However, the remaining section, running from the carriageway at Hawthorn Drive to the main road, had not been addressed and was presenting ongoing safety concerns for pedestrians.

Through investigation with Highways, it became clear that this second section had not been identified on Highways' mapping as falling within their ownership or maintenance responsibility, which explains why it had been excluded from previous works.

Following my intervention, Highways have now confirmed that this section of footpath does fall under their responsibility. The mapping issue has been corrected, and the omission has been formally remedied. I ensured the issue was logged on FixMyStreet to secure formal assessment and tracking, and Highways have confirmed that remedial works will be scheduled when highway works recommence from March onwards.



TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

Transport issues raised by residents have required sustained engagement with operators and escalation within the Council to ensure concerns are formally pursued rather than treated as isolated complaints.

1. 125 Bus Service – Timetable Change (Ongoing Since September)

Residents have raised ongoing concerns since September about the revised 08:21 Highley–Bridgnorth service, which is causing late arrival at work compared with the previous 08:08 departure.

This issue has required sustained follow-up to ensure it was treated as a formal service concern rather than an isolated complaint. I initially raised the matter directly with the bus operator following repeated resident approaches and continued to pursue it when no resolution was forthcoming.

As a result of continued escalation, the issue has now been formally taken forward by Shropshire Council's Transport Team, who are actively engaging with the operator to review the timetable.

My role has been to ensure that resident concerns were consistently raised, evidenced, and escalated to the appropriate level within the Council so that they are actively pursued rather than remaining unresolved.

HIGHWAYS AND MAINTENANCE

Much of the highway-related work this month has focused on challenging delays, clarifying responsibility between teams, and ensuring agreed actions are delivered where safety concerns remain unresolved.

Alongside individual reports, I have continued regular engagement with Shropshire Council's Highways team during January to review outstanding issues, challenge delays where works had not progressed as agreed, and ensure priority items remained visible within the service. This included follow-up discussions, clarification of responsibility, and escalation where safety implications were ongoing.

1. Parking Congestion and Road Safety

Parking congestion in Highley is not confined to a single location and requires both enforcement and broader traffic management consideration. During January, I have engaged directly with Traffic Management and Parking Enforcement officers to review visibility, access and safety concerns across multiple streets, and to explore whether longer-term layout changes could help reduce conflict and congestion.

I have requested a Traffic Management review and targeted Parking Enforcement attention for:

- Barke Street
- Orchard Street
- Coronation Street
- Church Street (including Whitley Gardens access)
- Woodhill Road (single-file traffic and pinch points)

These discussions have covered both immediate enforcement measures and longer-term layout options. One potential solution under discussion is using the slip road behind the Castle Inn as part of a one-way movement arrangement through that section of Woodhill Road. This remains at an early feasibility stage.

Progress in this area has required direct engagement with both Traffic Management and Parking Enforcement to move discussions beyond enforcement alone and toward longer-term solutions that address recurring congestion and safety risks.



2. Surface Water Flooding – Severn Centre

A long-standing surface water issue has developed following resurfacing works at either end of the carriageway, resulting in water pooling in the untreated section between them. Residents raised concerns regarding the persistence of standing water and the safety implications.

In response, I raised this issue directly with Highways and requested that the cause and responsibility be investigated. As a result of this escalation, it was confirmed that the pooling relates to the interface between recent resurfacing works and existing drainage behaviour, rather than a separate drainage failure.

Following this, Highways confirmed that further carriageway works are scheduled, with the contractor expected to return to site this week to address the section where water is pooling. Pavement works will follow separately, as different tarmac materials are required for the carriageway and footway.

3. Hitchens Way – Road Adoption

Concerns were raised regarding the non-adoption of Hitchens Way, resulting in uncertainty over responsibility for maintenance, repairs and future works. I referred this to Shropshire Council and requested a formal review of the road's adoption status.

This work has included examining historic correspondence indicating that adoption was anticipated as part of the original development, and clarifying the respective responsibilities of the developer, the planning authority, and Shropshire Council as the highway's authority. Road adoption must be initiated by the developer and does not occur automatically, which can lead to delays unless actively followed up.

Following my request, the Highways team has contacted the relevant organisations to confirm the current position and establish whether adoption was agreed in principle and, if so, what actions are required to progress it. This clarification is essential to ensure residents have a clear route for maintenance and escalation.

I will continue to monitor this matter until the adoption status is fully resolved.

4. Netherton Lane – Road Condition and Construction Impact

Concerns were raised about damage to Netherton Lane caused by construction traffic associated with nearby development works. I escalated this to Planning Enforcement and requested a formal assessment of the carriageway condition.

Following this escalation, a Planning Enforcement Officer conducted a site visit, confirming the presence of cracking and potholes. The site owner has subsequently agreed to carry out the necessary repairs.

My role has included escalating the issue to the correct service, supporting the inspection process, securing the owner's commitment to undertake remedial works, and monitoring progress to ensure completion. I am also exploring potential future HGV restrictions to help protect this rural road.

I will continue to follow up until repairs are delivered and the impact of construction traffic is fully addressed.



5. Hedge Trimming – Woodhill Road / Castle Inn Slip Road

Hedgerow trimming on the slip road behind The Castle Inn has been a recurring concern since June due to visibility and safety risks. Scheduled works did not take place as expected last week, so I escalated the matter with Highways and emphasised that further delay was unacceptable.

Following this escalation, the South Shropshire Highways Technician confirmed that the trimming was completed today.

During this process, it was established that part of the hedgerow is privately owned. Highways contacted the owner, who recently inherited the property and advised they have no current funds for maintenance. Despite this, Shropshire Council undertook the trimming in the interests of public safety while making clear that the owner is responsible for ongoing upkeep.

Highways also engaged workers at The Castle Inn regarding maintenance of hedging around the wall and fence area. Contact was attempted with the site manager, and a formal letter is being issued to ensure required works are completed.

This outcome reflects persistent follow-up to secure delivery after an initial delay, while also clarifying future maintenance responsibilities.

6. Cycle Track Maintenance – WV16 6BN.

Maintenance concerns were raised regarding a section of cycle track at WV16 6BN. Initial assumptions suggested this might be the same stretch of track previously discussed by the Parish Council in relation to potential adoption; however, through follow-up work I have clarified that this is a different section entirely.

This required further investigation to avoid the issue stalling due to incorrect assumptions about ownership. I have logged the matter for inspection and confirmed that it does not relate to the section previously considered by the Parish Council. I have also initiated enquiries to establish whether Shropshire Council holds responsibility for maintenance and, if so, which officer and service area should take ownership of the issue.

This remains an open case at an early stage. I am continuing to pursue clarity so that responsibility is properly established and the issue can progress rather than being delayed by uncertainty over ownership or remit.



PLANNING

Planning matters in January have required my sustained engagement with Planning Enforcement. Shropshire Council has only three Planning Enforcement Officers covering the entire county, each with caseloads of more than fifty active cases. Despite this, the officer responsible for Highley has conducted site visits to these below and is actively reviewing these three local cases as urgent priorities.

1. Silverwoods

A Planning Enforcement Officer has visited the site and identified carriageway damage to Netherton Lane. I have also now received a new planning application proposing replacement of caravans with permanent lodges.

This follows earlier discussions where I raised concerns with enforcement that residents believed lodges (not caravans) were being constructed. The officer previously advised that wheeled structures would be considered caravans; however, this new application represents a potentially significant change. I have continued liaison with the Planning Enforcement Officer following the site visit and receipt of the new application. I will continue to monitor both the enforcement position and the live planning application to ensure any material changes from what was originally approved are carefully considered.

2. The Malt Shovel

Multiple resident concerns have been raised with me regarding the development at The Malt Shovel relating to damage to plants and trees and the condition and impact on the bridlepath during work. These issues I have raised with Planning Enforcement and are being assessed alongside site activity to determine whether any breaches or remedial Action are required. I will be following up matters are next week with Planning Enforcement to determine whether remedial action or enforcement is required.

3. The Castle Inn

Concerns include prolonged unacceptable working practices, overflowing or absent skips, rubbish on the public highway, smoke from fires, and a wooden fence affecting visibility, which may represent a planning breach.

The stone wall on the east side of the Castle Inn should be reinstated to preserve the integrity of this historic building. These matters are being reviewed alongside highways safety issues.

These concerns have been raised collectively with Planning Enforcement to ensure the overall condition, compliance and impact of the site are reviewed holistically rather than in isolation.



COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

Alongside ward-based casework, my committee focuses on scrutiny, financial realism and ensuring that service changes are operationally deliverable and transparent to residents.

1. Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

I attended the Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which examines waste, highways, transport, flooding and environmental services.

Agenda and reports for this meeting: <https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/documents/g5255/Public%20reports%20pack%2029th-Jan-2026%2018.00%20Economy%20and%20Environment%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

Meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Tvjk8QqXk0>

Food Waste Collection

Three options were considered:

1. Do nothing, 2. Fortnightly collection, 3. Weekly collection

My view was if residents are required to separate food waste, option 3, weekly collection is the most suitable option but highlighted that if we agreed to find the funding from the Burden Fund we'd be diverting funding from another funded burden initiative – robbing Peter to pay Paul, without clarity on what that burden funding was originally intended for. I proposed we did not implement any legislated food waste collection until the government provided the funds to do so into our General Budget.

The committee was split with a further option proposed to fund a bi-monthly food waste collection by pillaging the burden fund. It was agreed that both options will be presented to Cabinet for decision.

1. Audit & Governance Committee

I will be attending the Audit & Governance Committee next week.

Agenda and reports for this meeting:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=5326&EVT=101&DT=A>

This committee oversees audit, governance, risk, financial management, and accountability across the Council.

ONGOING WORK

Across all the above areas, my role has been to ensure resident concerns are properly understood, escalated to the correct teams, and followed through until resolution. Many of these issues are not quick fixes and require sustained engagement, challenge and ongoing monitoring to prevent them becoming stalled or deprioritised once logged.

Alongside the specific issues outlined above, I continue to:

- Log and monitor FixMyStreet reports
- Chase delayed Highways Action
- Advise residents on planning and enforcement processes
- Liaise with officers across multiple departments
- Follow up on transport, safety and environmental concerns



LOOKING AHEAD

UPCOMING COUNCIL MEETINGS

- **Audit & Governance Committee – Thursday 5 February 2026, 10:00 am**
Agenda and reports can be accessed via the council website, and this meeting will review audit, governance, financial risk, and corporate assurance matters.
- **Full Council – Thursday 26 February 2026, 10:00 am**
The next full council meeting after January where all members of Shropshire Council will meet to consider key council business, decisions, and motions.

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