

Attention: David Ward
Oswestry Civic Society

13 February 2018



Re: Oswestry 2050 – The Big Picture

Dear David

Thank you for inviting us to the Society's informative and thought-provoking "Oswestry 2050: The Big Picture" presentation.

It was very encouraging to see ideas for a long-term vision aimed at helping Oswestry grow and prosper in a sustainable way. We appreciate the thought given to preserving those characteristics which help make the town and surroundings distinctive, and to enhancing the sense of place for the local community.

We note the inclusion of a designated zone around Old Oswestry, proposed as 'country park', providing a green lung for the north of the town. We certainly believe that the heritage tourism potential of the hillfort and Oswestry's wider northern landscape, acting as an iconic entrance to the town, has been entirely missed by Shropshire Council in the past. In ensuring the best long-term legislative protection for the hillfort as a nationally significant heritage asset, we would favour looking also at other potential options for conserving its setting, and what the physical extent of this protection should be for posterity.

The Oswestry Heritage Gateway group has been highlighting the value of the town's northern corridor - from the Old Racecourse and Brogyntyn, through Old Oswestry and Wat's Dyke, across to Park Hall and Whittington - as an historic and green landscape, envisaging the development of sustainable transport links. So we strongly welcome your evolved thinking on the creation of a sustainable network of connections as part of town expansion.

We fully support the development of footpaths and cycle ways, existing and new, and especially running east to west, and public transport connections allowing ready flow between the various villages and communities. As well as the obvious environmental, safety and health benefits, this would deliver significant economic benefits not least by facilitating the exploration of the green, historic landscape and its multi-layered heritage by visitors.

As identified in your presentation, a future vision should capitalise on the potential benefits from the restoration of the Cambrian Heritage Railway line between Oswestry and Gobowen, especially with a stop for the hospital as part of that route.

We would also welcome a reduction in the speed limit along the whole length of the B5069, a route that has seen two fatalities, to make it safer for all – pedestrians, mobility scooter users, cyclists, and road traffic. As an historic road running through the heart of the northern gateway, flanked by the hillfort and Cambrian line, traffic calming would significantly enhance the experience of using this strategic link to explore the area's heritage and enjoy safer transit between the town and Gobowen.

In addition, we would like to see wild flowers seeded along the verges to make this historical route into the town more picturesque and beneficial for wildlife. Policies to sow native wild flower seeds next to roads have been successfully implemented by South Cambridgeshire District Council and Coventry City Council, for example.

The proposal of a new bypass route further east, as an alternative to dualling the A5, is also of great interest. One concern would be to avoid replicating the current barrier that the A5 causes to ease of movement east-west, as it would still sever Whittington from Oswestry unless the road was located east of the village.

In addition, the historic town centre itself should be a catalyst for regeneration, a theme currently absent from your vision. As a conservation area, and potentially a Heritage Action Zone, we feel strongly that any development strategy should also make the most of the town's historic credentials.

At present, the run-down nature of the town centre is not solely a result of declining retail, but also of longstanding neglect of properties for domestic living. Instead of only looking to create new housing, we would encourage the Oswestry 2050 plan to also promote the refurbishment of the upper floors of town centre properties for re-occupation as domestic units. Our historic building stock could help in solving future housing need if a creative approach, and the will existed, to make this part of the solution. It would also rejuvenate the town centre as an attractive place to live, providing balance to the satellite communities growing around the town.

We should champion the assets we have and find ways to adapt the historic building stock to become part of a vibrant 21st century town centre. We should preserve and enhance Oswestry's historic character and aesthetic charm, making it a place where people want to reside because of the quality of life it provides. This would support income generation for maintenance and improvement of the listed buildings and other historic structures within the town centre, and create a greater density of population using the local food, entertainment and retail outlets.

We truly appreciate the time, effort and passion that have gone into creating a vision for Oswestry 2050, and fully agree that a long-term strategy is needed. Hopefully it will open up further discussion with stakeholders, residents and Shropshire planners.

Though presented as a broad brush vision, there were many new and stimulating things to digest and consider. We have commented on just a few, but look forward to engaging in further stages as you progress with it.

Yours sincerely

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