

## Shropshire Council Local Plan Review

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### 1. Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- a) seek approval for the publication of a revised version of the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) (attached as Appendix A). The LDS is the 'Project Plan' that describes the current documents which make up the statutory Development Plan for Shropshire and the Local Plan documents that are to be prepared over the next 3-year period to replace existing policies;
- b) provide a summary analysis of the feedback received from consultation on the 'Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development' for the Shropshire Local Plan Review in December 2017. Shropshire Council consulted on the 'Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development' between 27<sup>th</sup> October and 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2017 and a summary analysis of the representations received is provided in this report.
- c) highlight the publication of the latest 'Authority Monitoring Report' (AMR) for 2016-17, which monitors the effectiveness of adopted planning policies and progress with the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Planning, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Duty to Co-operate.

1.2 Shropshire Council is required by legislation and national policy to make the LDS available on its website and to keep it up-to-date so that local communities and interested parties can keep track of progress with the Local Plan;

1.3 The current published version of the LDS was agreed by Cabinet on 21 June 2017 but needs to be updated to reflect the scale of the work required to assemble an appropriate evidence base for the Plan, together with the unanticipated impact of significant development proposals which have been promoted in response to the review process and recently announced changes to national planning policy. The updated LDS covers the period 2018 to 2021 and will be kept up to date by considering the need to revise it on an annual basis.

### 2. Recommendations

- A. That Cabinet approves the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached (Appendix A) subject to the need for minor amendments and editing;
- B. That authority is delegated to the Head of Economic Growth in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulation to approve and publish the final version of the document.

## REPORT

### 3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 There are significant risks that could impact upon delivery of the Local Plan to the schedules set out within this Local Development Scheme. In order to minimise possible impacts, risk management has been embedded in the Local Plan production processes in order that risk can be evaluated and where possible eliminated. The Risk Management Log (Appendix 2) of the LDS contains an analysis of the main areas of uncertainty and risk involved in reviewing and updating the Local Plan. Risks with a significant potential impact include: inadequate resourcing; staff turnover and recruitment difficulties; receipt of large numbers of objections generated by controversial site allocations; and delays generated by the Planning Inspectorate or further changes in national policy. Whilst proposed responses or mitigation measures have been set out, seeking where possible, to manage these risks, some areas of risk are outside the Council's control. In addition, financial pressures could curtail many of the proposed mitigation measures.
- 3.2 The risk assessment suggests that the Local Plan programme remains extremely challenging. For example, where individual project production milestones are missed it could be difficult to get "back on track" without impacts on other elements of the overall programme. Given however, that the production of a Local Plan is a statutory requirement in order to provide local planning policy coverage and deliver housing land, these risks must be accepted by the Council. The most fundamental overall mitigation measures that can be made are to ensure sufficient resources are available throughout the timescale of the LDS and build-in realistic document production timescales into this LDS at the outset.

### 4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the LDS itself, but financial implications potentially arise from slippage in the timetable leading to delays in Local Plan production with subsequent impacts on development management decision making, housing land supply and infrastructure funding and the delivery of Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy.

### 5. Background

#### *Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development Consultation*

- 5.1 Following approval from Cabinet on 18 October 2017, consultation documents for this initial stage of the Local Plan Review were published on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2017 for a period of 8 weeks. About 600 responses were received to the consultation and these will be used to inform the preparation of a final 'Preferred Options' document as described in the LDS in Appendix A. Analysis of the responses indicates that in most cases, a majority of respondents support the preferred approach. Responses to each of the questions posed in the consultation are summarised below:
- i. **Housing Requirement:** The Council received a good mix of views. A small majority stated their preference to see a lower housing requirement, whilst others saw greater benefit in supporting the preferred approach, even suggesting a higher requirement. Those respondents supporting the preferred approach noted that it is consistent with the Government's commitment to improving the rate of

housing delivery and would provide the greatest opportunity to address housing affordability, together with improvements to economic activity and productivity, increased education opportunities and up-skilling of communities. Other respondents were concerned that the preferred approach did not reflect the views of the majority of respondents to the previous consultation and that there was inadequate infrastructure to meet demand from new development. Some respondents were concerned that it was unclear how individual settlement guidelines have been derived and on what evidence they are based. An explanation of the status and contribution of 'strategic sites' such as Ironbridge Power Station and any 'Garden Villages' was requested, in particular whether housing and employment provided on these sites will be part of, or in addition to the levels for the rural area;

- ii. **Employment Land Requirement:** Respondents that supported the preferred approach of balanced growth suggested that a numerical 'jobs' target should also be identified. There was recognition that the preferred focus on principal urban centres and key investment opportunities in strategic corridors reflects the aspiration to increase economic productivity and growth, but the Plan needs to offer an appropriate range, choice and spatial distribution of readily available sites to provide opportunities for new investment and business expansion. Those respondents that did not support the preferred approach suggested that it should be made clear how it will achieve the 'step change' identified in the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy. Aspirations for a 'balanced growth' and delivery of an additional 72ha of rural employment development requires an understanding of the economic potential of rural areas and a flexible approach to the 'scale' of rural developments. Housing sites on the edge of larger sustainable settlements should be prioritised to ensure access to existing and proposed employment investment sites;
- iii. **Distribution of Future Growth:** A majority of those who responded supported the preferred 'urban focussed' spatial distribution. Many respondents supported the preferred approach because it is consistent with the findings of earlier public consultation and current national planning policy and because larger settlements provide for sustainable and efficient access to facilities and employment. Other respondents supported the overall approach of focussing on urban areas, but argued for different (and conflicting) distributions between individual settlements and classes of settlements;
- iv. **Settlement Strategies:** Key planning issues expressed across many of the settlements with strategies included the need for settlements to be planned for holistically with growth guidelines which reflect physical, heritage infrastructure and environmental constraints. There is a need to focus on the deliverability of current and future housing and employment allocations and adequate infrastructure capacity. The quality of development is a key consideration alongside quantity. Developer respondents generally indicated a preference for higher housing guidelines, whilst individuals generally indicated a preference for lower housing guidelines.
- v. **Proposed Community Hubs:** Many respondents agreed that the use of the standard methodology is a robust and objective way of ensuring that sustainable rural settlements are identified as 'Community Hubs' and supported the identification of specific settlements. The provision of both housing and

employment was considered important for long-term sustainability but the provision of appropriate supporting infrastructure was considered crucial. Other respondents were concerned that the decision about 'Community Hub' status should rest with the local community. The Hierarchy of Settlements Assessment was criticised by some respondents and a range of further refinements were suggested. Many of the respondents opposed the proposed identification or exclusion of specific settlements, with particular reference made to the services and facilities available and their overall sustainability credentials.

- vi. **Management of Development within Community Hubs:** Many respondents supported the proposed policy, including development boundaries, as it was felt they provided more certainty about future development. Some respondents sought clarification on how the development boundary will be defined; and how proposals outside the development boundary would be assessed. Other respondents requested clarification of key terms and expressed concern about the way in which cumulative impact is assessed. Some respondents felt that development in 'Community Hubs' should be restricted to meeting only identified local needs as informed by community wishes and a local housing needs survey.
- vii. **Proposed Community Clusters:** A number of changes were proposed to add new clusters and remove existing clusters. A significant number of proposals were made by other groups and individuals regarding changes to existing clusters, the removal of existing clusters and the formation of additional clusters. However, in the majority, these proposals did not provide an indication of community support for their proposals. Many respondents also used this question as an opportunity to make general comments on 'Community Clusters' including observations on the method of identifying clusters and the difficulty of determining whether to 'opt-in' without further information on the implications, particularly with regard to policies to manage development and likelihood of allocations.
- viii. **Management of Development within Community Clusters:** Support was expressed for key elements of the policy, particularly the requirement for sufficient infrastructure to be available and the need for compliance with policies on the built and natural environment. Some respondents considered that the diverse nature of 'Community Cluster' settlements should be taken into account for example to reflect Parish Plans and Village Design Statements. Some respondents were concerned that the current policy was too complex and open to interpretation and, as a result, would not provide enough control over development. Contrasting views were expressed about suitable scales and locations for development in 'Community Clusters';
- ix. **Managing Development in the Countryside:** Many respondents expressed support for the retention of the current policy approach which tightly controls development in open countryside. The lack of rural infrastructure, services and employment to support development and the challenges of an increasingly older rural population were recognised as key challenges. Some respondents suggested that development in the rural area should be viewed positively with the aim of improving rural sustainability and achieving innovative development. There was support for rural affordable housing provision on small scale affordable exception sites to cater for evidenced, local need.

5.2 A detailed summary of the representations is available on the Council's webpages using the weblink provided in the list of background papers below. Key stakeholders

such as parish councils and those who have previously registered to receive updates regarding the Local Plan Review will be notified of its availability.

### *Local Development Scheme*

5.3 The spatial planning system is based on a portfolio of Local Plan documents and other components. Some are mandatory, whilst local authorities have a certain amount of discretion over whether others are needed. The programme of Local Plan work must be set out in a project timetable or Local Development Scheme (LDS), which must be published, and then monitored and kept up to date. The revised timetable puts the formal submission back to December 2019 to reflect the scale of the work required to assemble an appropriate evidence base for the Plan, together with the unanticipated impact of significant development proposals which have been promoted in response to the review process and recently announced changes to national planning policy. The next step will be to prepare and consult on preferred site allocations for Shrewsbury, the market towns and the key centres, together with the preferred scale of growth, development boundaries and potential allocations for Community Hubs in October 2018.

5.4 The updated LDS (Appendix A) sets out:

- The Local Plan documents that are to be prepared by Shropshire Council over the forthcoming 3-year period to replace existing policies;
- The current documents which make up the statutory Development Plan for Shropshire, including the Neighbourhood Plans (not prepared by Shropshire Council) which have been adopted and are in force;
- The subject matter and the geographical area to which each of the proposed documents relates;
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that are to be prepared over the forthcoming 3-year period to clarify and provide further guidance;
- Which organisation is to lead the process of each document preparation and which, if any, are to be prepared jointly with other local planning authorities;
- The arrangements for monitoring of the Local Plan;
- A risk assessment which sets out an analysis of the areas of uncertainty and risk facing production of the Local Plan.

### *Authority Monitoring Statement 2016-17*

5.5 The latest Authority's Monitoring Report (AMR) covering the Shropshire Council area has recently been published on the Council's web pages. The AMR reports on Plan-making progress and assesses the implementation of adopted planning policies for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. Key headlines include:

- **Plan Making Progress:** Shropshire has an adopted Local Plan for the period to 2026, but has started a review to ensure that the Plan remains up to date. Shifnal and Much Wenlock have adopted Neighbourhood Plans and the parishes of Bicton; Burford; Market Drayton; Stoke upon Tern; and Woore have been formally designated for the purpose of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan;
- **Housing Delivery:** In 2016 – 2017 1,910 dwellings were completed in Shropshire. This is exceptionally high and significantly exceeds the annual

housing requirement of 1,390 dwellings. This includes the completion of 441 affordable dwellings which represents a significant increase from the previous year. Shropshire Council currently has 6.04 years' supply of deliverable housing land. 32% of housing development took place on Brownfield land in 2016-17;

- **Employment Land Delivery:** In the period 2006 – 2017, 108 hectares of employment land were developed for Class B business uses. The central and northern areas of Shropshire are key drivers for employment development and economic growth however; the south of the County also provides a relatively strong rate of employment development particularly from completions in the period from 2006 to 2017;
- **Environment:** In 2016/17 a total of 168 applications were refused on the grounds of not meeting the sustainable development and design requirements;
- **Duty to Co-operate:** Shropshire Council has been actively engaged in on-going collaborative working with neighbouring planning authorities and Government agencies and statutory undertakers in order to address relevant strategic and cross boundary planning issues;
- **Infrastructure Contributions:** During the period 2012 – 2017, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) has generated around £11.5m for investment in local infrastructure to address the burden imposed by new development. This has recently been explored by a member task and finish group and their recommendations are due to be considered at a future Cabinet meeting.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

1. Summary analysis of the feedback received from consultation on the 'Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development' for the Shropshire Local Plan Review in December 2017: <https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/9632/preferred-scale-and-distribution-of-development-consultation-response-summary.pdf>
2. Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) 2016-17: <https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/7231/amr-2017-18.pdf>

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder Planning & Regulation

**Local Members**

All

**Appendices**

- A. Draft Shropshire Council Local Development Scheme 2018