

**MINUTES OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15
NOVEMBER 2018
2.00 - 4.15 PM**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes

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Present

Councillor Gwilym Butler (Leader)

Councillors Julian Dean, Rob Gittins, Simon Harris, Dan Morris, Harry Taylor and Paul Wynn

26 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Boddington, Paul Milner and William Parr. Councillor David Vasmer attended as Substitute for Councillors Boddington.

27 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

28 Minutes from the Meeting held on 6th September 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th September were confirmed as a correct record.

29 Public Question Time

Mr Malcom Andrew of the Trefonen Rural Protection Group asked the following question:

We would request that your Committee undertake a review of Cabinet decisions relating to the *Hierarchy of Settlements*, and in particular the wording of Para 5.40 relaxing the Lower Hub Threshold criteria. We have raised our concerns on this matter to Cabinet, but these have always been rejected on the basis that the document was “approved” by Cabinet on 18th October 2017, and therefore it stands as correct; and that our only recourse would be to submit our concerns to the Inspector at Examination stage. We consider that to be far too late in the process, and that it should be reviewed sooner rather than

later. Our concerns stem from the 18th October 2017 Cabinet when two documents were supposed to be considered:

- a) Consultation on Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development – *for Approval for Consultation*; and
- b) Hierarchy of Settlements Assessment – *for Approval*

but they were taken together and ‘nodded through’ without any explanation of the Hierarchy of Settlements and particularly the new Threshold wording contained within it.

Cllr Macey says that an objective assessed methodology is in “the report” but no details are given, and the Chair “asks if everyone happy for the report to go out for consultation” singular report and no vote. We therefore believe that Cabinet Members thought the *Hierarchy of Settlements* was for “Approved for consultation” whereas it was taken as “Approved” outright. We raised this concern at the time but were told that it had been properly “Approved”, which we still believe was not the case. That “Approval” has been relied on subsequently to avoid review of the Threshold wording included within it.

Whilst initially we had concerns on the scoring of differing levels of service (e.g. Library 3points irrespective of main hub, village branch or mobile service), Officers have confirmed that this has been applied consistently, and that on that basis settlements can be compared in their Table 10 scoring. Unfortunately, due to poor data, that Table was not accurate and therefore the “3point Gap” selected by Officers to set their Threshold might not actually exist. We have shown that and been pursuing this since Oct 2017 and look forward to the release of the updated Table 10 with the new consultation so that it can be reviewed.

Taking the Methodology as being correct and that the scores will be accurate, our main concern still remains - the Officers’ determination of the Lower Hub Threshold. The Hub Definition within the initial *Issues and Options* Para 4.5, the *Preferred Options* Para 6.4, and *Hierarchy of Settlements* Para 5.34 Table 6, requiring both employment and peak time public transport has been relaxed within *HofS* Para 5.40 to fit the results – with settlements proposed as Hubs that do not meet the Definition. We are well aware of the risks of an “out of date” Plan, which is why we keep raising the point of concern to be addressed sooner rather than later, but the response has been consistently “no – its ‘Approved’ – you can appeal to the Examination Inspector”.

We are not asking for a wholesale review of the *Hierarchy of Settlements*, just that the wording of Para 5.40 setting the Lower Hub Threshold is reviewed to match the approved Hub Definition criteria.

We believe that these concerns have an impact on numerous smaller rural settlements proposed as Hub settlements, not just our own, and that it warrants scrutiny and correction.

Please will the Place Overview Committee undertake a review of Cabinet decisions relating to the *Hierarchy of Settlements*, and in particular the wording of Para 5.40 relaxing the Lower Hub Threshold criteria so that it conforms to the approved

Definition requiring both employment and peak time public transport, as other services and facilities cannot compensate for not having these key elements.

We are sure that you are well aware that it is crucial that the Review process and draft Plan are seen to be “sound” when it reaches Examination Stage. Therefore, we believe it is vital to address these points now as part of the next stage of consultation rather than risk having them identified as failings at a key stage later in the process, with the overriding risk of an “out of date” Plan. We would request your support.

The Chair responded that there is a mechanism in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules included in part 5 of the constitution of the Council which provides for Cabinet decisions to be reviewed by a Scrutiny Committee. This mechanism requires that the decision is “called-in” by Members within 5 working days of the date on which the decision is published. The decision was taken in October 2017, it was not called in and has, in accordance with the constitution, been implemented. A review of this decision by the Place Overview Committee is not therefore possible.

As previously explained in response to several previous public questions to Cabinet, and as acknowledged by TRPG in their request to the Place Overview Committee, there is an established process for Shropshire Council’s preferred approach to be tested through the formal examination of the Local Plan by an independent Government Planning Inspector, who will consider whether the methodology which the Council has adopted is reasonable and appropriate. As part of the Local Plan Review process, there remain further formal consultation opportunities during which TRPG can register a formal objection to the Council’s approach for subsequent consideration by the Inspector.

In response to a Member’s query, the Head of Economic Growth confirmed that a consultation of the Local Plan was being undertaken and there was a mechanism in place where the issue raised in this question could be investigated. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Local Plan Review was an item on the Committee’s work programme. Members agreed that this could be considered as part of this work.

30 Member Question Time

There were no Members’ questions.

31 Skills Training

Corinne Brown, Business Development Manager of the Shrewsbury Colleges Group gave a presentation to Members [copy attached to signed minutes]. She explained that her role was as an advocate for employers in the college system and that the college’s offer strategy was based on the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership [LEP] and Shropshire Council key priority sectors. She continued that the college concentrated its resources in areas that were not adequately covered by private sector training. The college recognised the importance of delivering the training required by the employers in a manner they recognised and received support from manufacturers to do this through the provision of equipment and resources. It recognised that it could not work in isolation and worked in collaboration with other providers to ensure provision across all sectors.

The college dedicated a significant proportion of its resources to the sectors of Advanced Manufacturing (engineering) and Construction. With more limited provision for Environmental Technologies and Services, Food and Drink, Tourism, Health and Social Care and Creative and Digital Industries, as these were well covered by other providers.

Members noted that Construction offered 53% of courses and demand continued to grow from both large employers and sole traders.

In response to a Members question regarding rural transport, Ms Brown agreed that this was a problem for the county. The college provided a bus service but could not assist apprentices getting to their place of work. Members noted that there was a hardship fund which could assist students in financial difficulties.

Ms Brown agreed that the peaks and troughs of the construction industry caused problems with staff retention for the college, as during times of low demands the construction industry tended not to invest in employee training and college staff had to be released from their contracts but had to be recruited when the market experienced an upturn.

Members commented about the lack of the agriculture sector on the list, Ms Brown responded that this sector was served by specialist providers. In response to a Members query she agreed that this sector was still predominantly male as was the engineering and construction industries, and work was being undertaken with schools to promote these sectors to girls.

In response to a Member's query about maintaining high levels of employment practice for all apprentices, Ms Brown responded that with both work experience placements and apprenticeships students were visited in the work place, interviews were conducted without the employer being present and checks were made to ensure that students were receiving the minimum wage and not being expected to work excessive hours. A health and safety risk assessment was also conducted before every placement.

The Director for Place commented that the West Midlands Combined Authority had recognised that advances in technology by 2040 would result in most jobs being very different with a new range of skills required for the developing technology. He observed that there was a strong environmental technology sector based in the region. He expressed concern that jobs in the Food and Drink, Tourism sector which accounted for 7% of the Shropshire economy was perceived as a poor career path. Ms Brown responded that these were National issues and there were barriers to overcome to enable them to be addressed.

Members noted that the proposed Local Housing Company being established by the Council required workers with strong skills and the Director of Place suggested that a dialogue should be entered into about the role of apprenticeships and possibility of the renovation of former Council buildings as part of the project.

Members commented that the presentation was based on the Shrewsbury area and suggested that provision in the rest of the County should be considered.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and that the Committee consider training provision across the whole county including provision for agriculture, food and health care.

32 **Securing Investment in Shropshire**

The Head of Economic Development advised Members that the Shropshire had to compete both nationally and internationally to attract and retain companies to support economic growth in Shropshire. This was done through a targeted approach linked to the key sectors, sites and corridors identified by both the Council and Marches Local Enterprise Partnership [LEP].

The Business Growth and Investment Manager explained that there were three target areas:

- Key accounts;
- Inward investment; and
- Lead Generation.

He continued that the Key accounts were either in the top 100 businesses in the County defined by turnover and staff numbers, or identified as the fastest growers, this included an international company which had located its fifth unit in Craven Arms. Members agreed that it was vital for companies to be able to attract and retain the right staff. The Head of Economic Growth suggested that this need for appropriate housing and facilities was identified and provided for through the Local Plan and that it was vital that Council policies showed co-ordination.

Members noted that Members of the Shropshire Business Board jointly delivered the new Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy and acted as business ambassadors for the County both nationally and internationally.

The Business Growth and Investment Manager explained that the current Invest in Shropshire brand had been in place for around ten or eleven years and was looking dated. Work was being undertaken to redesign the brand to make it more commercial and interactive. Prototype leaflets reflecting the new brand had been launched and feedback on them was being sought. This project was to be extended to the refresh of the website and social media offerings in the new year.

The Head of Economic Growth explained that MIPIM was a four-day conference and exhibition hosted in France in March. This was the construction industry's largest conference. Officers had attended in 2018 in partnership with the Midlands Engine. This had been an opportunity to establish new relationships with contacts across the property industry. In response to Member's question the business Growth and Investment Manager explained that contacts made at MIPIM did not have immediate impact but that was where the dialogues began that could be developed. Members observed that they received criticism over the Council's attendance at the conference and it was suggested that more information on the benefits of attending could be conveyed to Members.

In response to Members' comments about difficulties encountered by companies wishing to relocate to the county and trying to negotiate their way around different parts of the Council. The Director of Place agreed that there was more to be done to

increase collaborative working, to remove blocks currently in place and to create a 'can do' culture.

Members observed that the current Economic Growth Strategy was sector driven and did not differentiate between the needs of companies in rural and urban areas. The Business Growth and Investment Manager agreed that the nature of the rural economy differed from that of the urban areas, but both were equally important in the development of the County's economy and both had different challenges to be met.

RESOLVED: that the contents of the report be noted and that continued support and feedback be given to the activities of the Business Growth and Investment team as part of the Economic Growth service with the aim to develop a more co-ordinated and co-operative service for businesses.

33 **Place Shaping, Households and Accessible Green Space**

Outdoor Partnerships Manager introduced this report and presentation [attached to the signed minutes]. Members noted that all residential developments were required to contribute to community infrastructure needs including the provision of public open space. The Countryside and Development Manager explained that the current policy set out the provision of 30m² of public open space per bed space provided but this only tended to apply to developments of ten or more houses, and the financial contrition was often made to an area not associated with the development that generated it. The result being that many developments had no easy access to open public space.

The Countryside and Development Manager continued that as part of the Local Plan Review a mapping exercise for public open space had been undertaken and had found that these spaces were often small, not connected and difficult to access and manage. The Biodiversity Data Officer confirmed that the mapping exercise had been done in collaboration with the Biodiversity and Ecology teams as well as other interested parties. He continued that the mapping process could be used to develop a policy that would ensure all local residents had access to green open space and the benefits it provided. This policy could be used to underpin discussions with developers on the provision of formal green space with perpetual access. Formal arrangements are important for security of provision.

Members noted that the development of a green infrastructure mapping system assessed local community green space needs on a wider catchment area than had previously been used and the development of the Local Plan would provide developers with clearer guidance on the amount, quality and connectivity of open space required around proposed development sites to meet future open space standards.

The Director of Place observed that the Place Plan process could be used to unlock a shared vision for all communities and identify the resources that would be need to achieve this vision.

Members noted that the provision of green space had defined health benefits which supported the work of the Public Health Directorate and reduced costs. Members also observed that there were links with the Neighbourhood Plans and it was important that all Council policies and procedures worked together.

In response to a Member's question about difference in policy between rural and urban areas, the Countryside and Development Manager confirmed that under the current standard there was a difference between the two, however, standards with the new mapping process were yet to be agreed and Central Government was expected to provide national standards for public open space provision, which would need to be taken into account.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and the topic be added to the work programme.

34 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2018-2019

RESOLVED: that consideration of the work programme be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

35 Date/Time of the Next Meeting of the Committee

Members noted that the next meeting of the Place Overview Committee was scheduled for 10.00am on Friday 14th December 2018.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: