

# Local Plan and CGR working group

## DRAFT: Report on an application for a Community Governance Review

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document is presented in support of a request from Bridgnorth Town Council for a review of Governance arrangements of the Town and its adjacent parishes.
- 1.2. The request is being submitted in the light of earlier residential development of the Town of Bridgnorth having extended beyond the Town's existing boundaries. This trend was forecast to continue under the Site Allocation and Management of Development plan (SAMDev) where sites were allocated in a neighbouring parish to meet the needs of the settlement of Bridgnorth for additional housing and employment land up to 2026. Additionally, Bridgnorth Town Council is aware of the Town's further likely development needs up to 2036, currently being examined under the Local Plan partial review.
- 1.3. Guidance from the Local Government Boundary Commission [1, paragraph 15] states that:

*"... over time communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours. In such circumstances, the [principal] council should consider undertaking a community governance review, the terms of reference of which should include consideration of the boundaries of existing parishes."*

### 2. History

- 2.1. Bridgnorth's town boundaries were last extended to encompass new housing to the East of the town, on and around Lodge Farm, in the 1970s. As far as we are aware, there has been no other review of the boundaries of Bridgnorth Town since the reshaping of local government under the Local Government Act 1972. Electoral arrangements for Bridgnorth Town Council were examined by the Local Government Boundary Commission in 1999 in connection with a review of Bridgnorth District Council. Electoral arrangements and division boundaries for Shropshire Council were defined in 2008.
- 2.2. A review is long overdue. Guidance from the Local Government Boundary Commission [1, paragraph 26] also states that:  
  
*"Principal councils should exercise their discretion, but it would be good practice for a principal council to consider conducting a [Community Governance] review every 10-15 years."*
- 2.3. On 6th October 2015, Bridgnorth Town Council requested that Shropshire Council carry out a Community Governance Review relating to its area and that of Tasley Parish Council. Tasley had been the focus for housing growth in the Bridgnorth settlement for quite some time and the draft local development plan (SAMDev) allocated further land for development, within the boundary of the

parish of Tasley, to meet the bulk of the Bridgnorth area's housing and employment development needs up to 2026. The lack of suitable development land within the Town Boundary has long been recognised and prior to SAMDev the previous local plan (the Bridgnorth District Local Plan to 2011) had also allocated the bulk of proposed development to sites in Tasley and those sites were duly built upon, such that there is no meaningful physical boundary or separation between the 2 parishes. At the time of our previous request, SAMDev was moving towards formal adoption and was adopted by resolution of Shropshire Council on 17th December 2015.

- 2.4. In considering our request, Shropshire Council officers and members of their Community Governance Working Party recommended that, due to the scale of the review required and the contentious nature of the proposals there was insufficient time before the upcoming Local Government Elections in May 2017. Whilst it was initially recommended that a review be scheduled for after the May 2017 Council elections, the proposal decided by Shropshire Council was:

*"That the request from Bridgnorth Town Council to carry out a Local Governance Review with regard to its boundary with the Parish of Tasley be refused and that the possibility of undertaking a Community Governance Review in respect of Bridgnorth Town Council be considered again after the ordinary elections of Councillors due to be held in May 2017."*

### **3. Current Development Plans**

- 3.1. The anomalies which existed at the time of the 2015 application remain unresolved, and a partial review of Shropshire's Local Plan is now being carried out to define how the County will grow up to 2036. Relevant factors in the Bridgnorth area are:
- a) The sites allocated for development in Tasley under SAMDev remain available for development but this has not happened due to the circumstances of the company which owns the land. It is not clear when these difficulties will be resolved.
  - b) During adoption of SAMDev, the Government appointed Inspector examining the Plan noted that Bridgnorth should have significant potential for economic growth and that its development options were constrained by the West Midlands Green Belt. A requirement to review the Green Belt boundaries during consideration of SAMDev's successor plan was recommended. Such a review is in progress.
  - c) It is currently suggested that the settlement of Bridgnorth will require sites for 1500 new homes over the 20-year period from 2016 to 2036, together with a sufficient allocation of employment land to enable population growth and employment growth to be balanced. After allowing for the housing land at Tasley already allocated under SAMDev, and a modest windfall allowance from redevelopment of sites within Bridgnorth Town, sites to build 912 homes remain to be identified and allocated. There is also a requirement to allocate additional employment land. There are few options for development within the Town boundary, and the town is already short of open space. It is evident that sites outside the current Town boundary will be proposed. The level of development planned, and where it is located will have a significant impact on Bridgnorth and the services to be provided

by the town. A cogent response to the proposals can only be made by considering the development and its impact over the wider area.

- d) Currently, nearly all land within Shropshire to the East of the existing built up area of Bridgnorth is within the Green Belt and this precludes nearly all development. The notable exception is Stanmore Industrial Estate, which is a major employment site; it is not within the Green Belt and is allocated for employment development under SAMDev. It appears that permission may be sought to remove some land from the Green Belt to facilitate the Town's further development.
- 3.2. It is evident that the current local plan review will further exacerbate the position of substantial population growth outside the Town's existing boundaries (potentially both to the West and the East) but reliant on the infrastructure and public services provided from within the Town.
- 3.3. Detailed options for site allocation in the Local Plan are expected to be published for consultation in September 2018, and the revised Local Plan is expected to be submitted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate at the end of 2019 for adoption late in 2020. Thus, a review of the Town boundaries over the next 12 months would allow revised boundaries to be in place to support the governance and support of the resulting development under the revised Local Plan.

#### **4. Governance implications of the development plans**

- 4.1. The proposed level of development is based on the future needs of the existing Town and its population. In particular, it is intended that future development will allow younger people in the Town to be able to work and afford a home in the area. As such, existing residents of the Town have a strong interest in how new housing and employment development in **and around** the Town, its associated infrastructure, and its impact on existing Town facilities and infrastructure, are progressed.
- 4.2. Assuming the updated Local Plan is adopted by the end of 2020, and subject to any phased release of land included in the plan, sites allocated for development may be eligible for the granting of planning permission from adoption. Major housing and employment developments will require careful planning and significant community engagement, including with town and parish councils. In particular, town councils will need to consider whether they need to reshape their services to support population growth, and should be involved in specifying facilities such as open spaces and play areas within new developments if they are going to take on responsibility for them.
- 4.3. New development will generate infrastructure (financial) contributions from the developers, to be used to facilitate the development and mitigate its effects. To the extent that infrastructure improvements are needed within the Town to support development on its peripheries, Bridgnorth Town Council will be able to put forward proposals for funding using the developer contributions generated and included in the CIL Local fund. This would, however, generally be one-off capital funding and not provide a revenue stream to pay for any ongoing running costs.

## 5. Request and Timescales

- 5.1. Given the above case for a single parish-tier council for Bridgnorth and the extended development area, to service residents' needs and represent their interests, Bridgnorth Town Council requests that Shropshire Council carry out a Community Governance Review of Bridgnorth and neighbouring parishes on which development is anticipated. The review should determine parish-level boundaries to align with the Town's needs for housing development and employment for the next 30 to 50 years.
- 5.2. In the meantime, we intend to work closely and constructively with Shropshire Council and neighbouring parishes to support the Local Plan Review process and ensure that a good level of community engagement can be evidenced. In particular, we are inviting (following the precedent set in the earlier stages of the Local Plan Review process) all parishes immediately adjacent to Bridgnorth to contribute to a joint working group.
- 5.3. Given the proposed adoption of the revised Local Plan towards the end of 2020, it would be desirable for new representational arrangements to be in place at the latest from the scheduled local elections in May 2021.
- 5.4. We note that the Legislative Reform (Community Governance Review) Order 2015 states that (Article 10):  

*"... [the time period to conclude a Community Governance Review] is reduced from 12 months starting on the day that the review commences to 12 months from the day of receipt of the petition or application."*
- 5.5. We believe that a Community Governance Review, with a requirement for a significant degree of public engagement, will take most of the 12-month period, as previously suggested by Shropshire Council officers.
- 5.6. We consider that costs to Shropshire Council, and timescales, may be reduced by leveraging the current work on the review of the Local Plan and Green Belt review, at a time when relevant information will be to hand.

## 6. References

- [1] "Guidance on Community Development Reviews", The Local Boundary Commission for England, March 2010.

## 7. Figures

Figure 1 shows the current town boundary and the boundaries of adjacent parishes.

Figures 2 and 3 show existing developments in Tasley Parish that extend the built-up area of Bridgnorth to the West. Note that the only access to Tasley Park, in Figure 2, is through Bridgnorth.

Figure 4 shows the area around Stanmore Industrial Estate, to the East of Bridgnorth, in Worfield Parish. Land in the surrounding area may be released from the Green Belt, extending development around Bridgnorth to the East..

Figure 5 shows additional areas within and outside the Development Area that have been granted planning permission. Note that those to the West are in Tasley Parish.

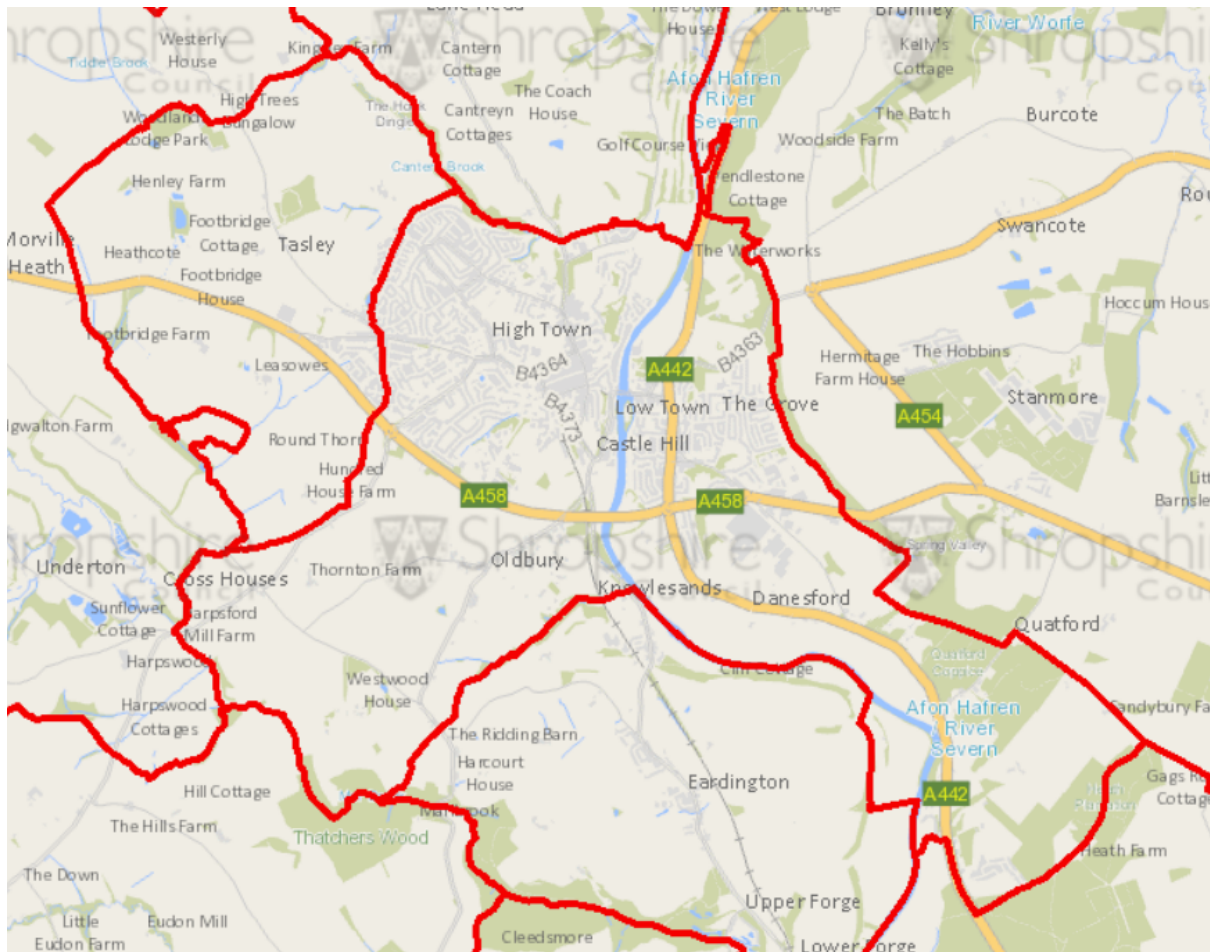


Figure 1: Boundaries of Bridgnorth Town and adjacent parishes.

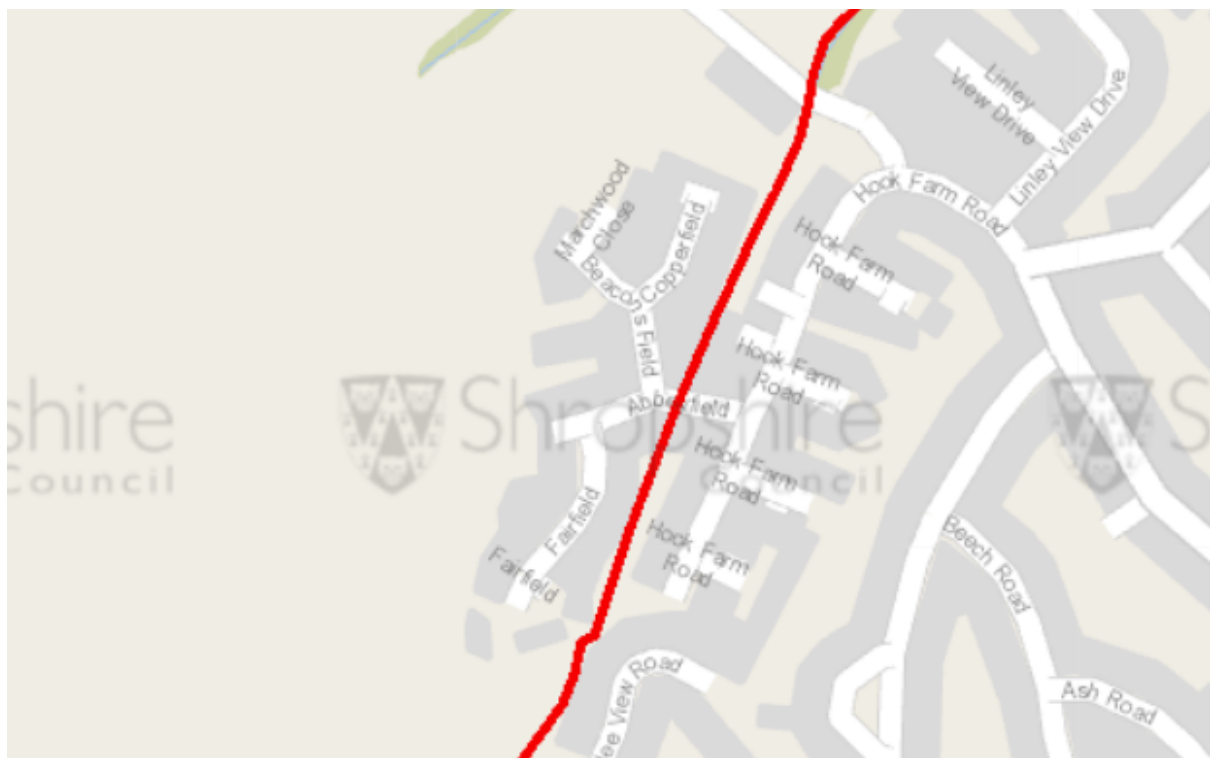


Figure 2: Development to the West of Bridgnorth Town boundary.



Figure 3: Second development to the West of Bridgnorth Town boundary.



Figure 4: The Hobbins and Stanmore Industrial Estate (SAMDev 2014).



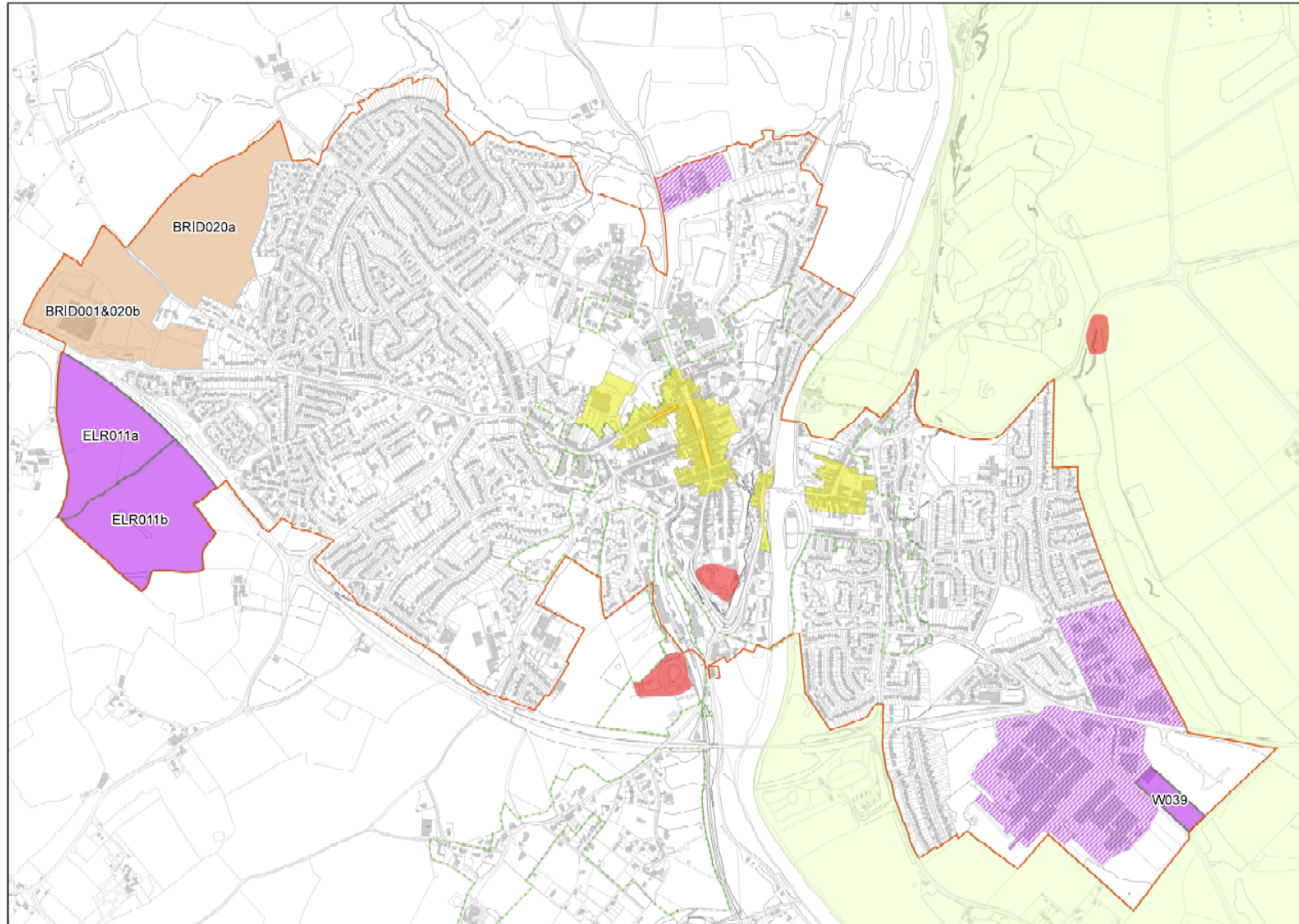


Figure 5: Development area and planned development extending beyond Town boundary (SAMDev Shropshire Council 11/2/2014)