



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
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SHROPSHIRE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW: Pre Submission Draft (Regulation 19)

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The principle purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the Pre-Submission Draft of the Shropshire Local Plan and to trigger a period of public consultation in line with Government Regulations. On a directly related issue, the report also seeks approval in principle to accept an element of unmet housing need from the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA), and for this housing to be incorporated into the overall housing requirement for Shropshire to 2038.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Shropshire Local Plan is to plan effectively for growth over the long term, in this case to 2038. The Plan should respond to local issues, including settlement and site specific evidence and from public consultation responses, but should also respond to national policy and guidance. As such the Plan establishes a long term housing requirement for the county to 2038, based in part on the nationally defined housing need for Shropshire, but also taking into account localised factors, in particular the need to support economic growth and to deliver more affordable and lower cost housing. Additional employment and necessary infrastructure improvements are planned alongside housing development in seeking balanced and sustainable growth.
- 1.3 The Pre-submission version of the Local Plan has been informed by four previous stages of public consultation since 2017 as part of the 'Regulation 18' stage of preparation. These stages have sought views on a range of issues including County wide growth proposals; the distribution of that growth; settlement specific strategies; proposed site allocations to guide future growth; and the inclusion of a number of 'strategic sites' on land outside recognised settlements for large-scale mixed-use development. Alongside this the Council have developed a range of evidence base documents to inform proposals.
- 1.4 The Pre-submission Draft of the Plan represents the Council's 'Regulation 19' version of the Plan. In line with national regulations the Council will seek representations through a consultation process on the Pre-Submission Draft Plan. The public and other stakeholders will be asked to make representations by considering whether the pre-submission version of the Local Plan is 'sound' based upon a set of nationally prescribed criteria. It is the intention to seek a period of eight weeks for this consultation period, which is in excess of national minimum requirements.

2. Recommendations

- A. That Cabinet approves the Pre-Submission Version of the Local Plan for a period of public consultation in order to seek representations on the soundness of the Plan;
- B. That Cabinet agrees the principle of Shropshire Council accepting up to 1,500 dwellings from the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) as part of the Duty to Cooperate, and for these to be incorporated into Shropshire's overall housing requirement up to 2038 and to be distributed in accordance with the overall Strategic Approach to the distribution of growth.
- C. That authority is delegated to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning Development to make additional minor editorial changes to the Pre-submission Version of the Local Plan ahead of its publication for public consultation, and to agree associated documents for publication, including the Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulation Assessment and the Consultation Strategy.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 The current Local Plan Review is designed to help ensure that the Local Plan remains the starting point and platform for planning decisions during the period to 2038. Local Planning Authorities should ensure they have an up-to-date Local Plan and for this process to enable an ongoing housing land supply sufficient to accommodate at least five years' worth of the area's housing requirement. Whilst the Council's current Core Strategy and SAMDev Plans (combined equating to the Local Plan for the area) are considered up-to-date, there is a risk that should the Local Plan not be reviewed in an appropriate timescale, the ongoing ability for the Council to manage growth in a plan-led manner will be weakened.
- 3.2 The pre-submission version of the Local Plan is a statutory stage of plan making and should represent an advanced and fully formed version of the Plan. This is the first occasion the emerging Local Plan has been published and consulted on in its full format, incorporating the various elements of previous stages of consultation into a single document. The four previous stages of consultation (listed in para 1.3) were part of the more informal Regulation 18 stage of preparation and focussed on specific issues. These stages have allowed the Council to respond where necessary to consultation responses and additional evidence, and to develop the Local Plan into the Pre-Submission version.

- 3.3 If agreed, the Council will consult on the Pre-Submission Draft version of the Local Plan in summer 2020. In accordance with most up-to-date plan preparation timetable, agreed in April 2020 in light of the Covid 19 national emergency, it is proposed to seek Full Council approval to submit the Local Plan to the Secretary of State in December 2020 for Independent Examination. It is anticipated the Examination process will last at least 12 months, and it is therefore hoped to move to adoption of the Local Plan in early 2022, subject to a successful Examination process.
- 3.4 It is considered the significant amount of consultation carried out thus far has helped to inform the plan's preparation in a meaningful and constructive manner and reduced the risk to the Council of a challenge on the Plan's soundness on these grounds. However, given the high level of interest in the Plan and the nature of the issues it deals with, it is considered there is a significant likelihood the consultation on the pre-submission version of the Plan will generate a significant level of response. This should not be considered a risk in its own right, and indeed ensuring the public and other stakeholders have a meaningful opportunity to comment on the plan is essential to its 'soundness'. Instead the risk lies in the resource implications of a high response level, and the resulting consequences on plan preparation timetable. There is little to mitigate this risk.
- 3.5 The key purpose of the Regulation 19 consultation stage is to allow consultees the opportunity to make representations on the 'soundness' of the Local Plan. All representations made will be considered by a Planning Inspector appointed to independently examine the Local Plan, currently scheduled to take place in 2021. Ahead of the submission of the Local Plan for examination, scheduled for January 2021, the Council's ability to respond to representations made through the consultation is more limited than at the Regulation 18 consultation stages. Indeed, whilst the Council will be able to agree minor modifications to the Local Plan ahead of its Submission to the Secretary of State this does not extend to making more significant changes, such as the inclusion of an additional site allocation.
- 3.6 However, if, through the Regulation 19 consultation process, it is decided there is a need for the Council to make a significant change to the Plan, the Council does have the ability to propose these changes as long as these are subject to a period of consultation through a further Regulation 19 consultation exercise. Again the risk to the Council in this scenario is one of timeframe, and a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) setting out the Local Plan preparation timetable would need to be agreed. The extensive consultation the Council has carried out at the Regulation 18 stages has mitigated this risk, but it should be recognised that there is always the possibility of new evidence being presented through the Regulation 19 process which could lead to a need to propose a more significant alteration to the Plan.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 Planned growth provides the best possible opportunity for Shropshire Council to harness growth potential by providing a stable platform for investors and developers. Growth also provides an opportunity to secure contributions to help maintain and improve local facilities, services and infrastructure. New growth simultaneously imposes an additional burden on local services and

provides opportunities to secure investment to improve local facilities which are the responsibility of Shropshire Council and other public service providers.

- 4.2 The Local Plan process is subject to a number of costs, both during preparation principally due to the need to commission evidence base documents to inform both site allocations and development management policies, and through the Examination process, principally through the cost of the Planning Inspectorate. These costs are both necessary and unavoidable in the pursuit of a 'sound' Plan.
- 4.3 Equally there is a financial risk to the Council of not pursuing a review of the Local Plan in a timely manner, most notably through the likelihood of increased levels of planning appeals as a result of increased challenges to the integrity of the currently adopted Core Strategy and SAMDev plan.

5 Background

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that the planning system should be genuinely plan-led, and that up-to-date Plans should provide a positive vision for the area; a framework for addressing housing need and other economic, social and environmental priorities. The NPPF also states that Plans should be a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.
- 5.2 Whilst Shropshire currently has an up-to-date Local Plan through the adopted Core Strategy and SAMDev documents, there is clearly a significant onus on authorities to regularly update these plans in order to keep them up-to-date. The need for an early review of the Local Plan was also a requirement of the SAMDev Inspector's Report in 2015. However, it should equally be recognised that Plan making does take time; an inevitable consequence of necessary and constructive community engagement, and the need for policies and proposals to be supported by robust evidence. With this in mind, the Council began an early review of the Local plan in 2017, with the Pre-Submission draft (Appendix 1) being the consolidated outcome of this process.
- 5.3 The Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan contains the following broad elements:
- Strategic approach to growth and distribution of development;
 - Localised Strategies for individual settlements;
 - Strategic Sites;
 - Development Management policies to guide all development

Strategic approach to growth and distribution of development

- 5.4 Policy SP2 of the Pre-Submission Draft of the Local Plan sets out the overall growth aspirations for the County between 2016 and 2038 of around 30,800 new dwellings and around 300 hectares of employment land, equating to around 1,400 dwellings and 15ha of employment land per annum. This represents a marginally lower growth level than that proposed in the

Preferred Scale and Distribution of Growth consultation carried out in early 2018, and is broadly in line with past rates of growth seen in the County.

- 5.5 This level of housing growth proposed across the 22 years covered by the Plan Period seeks to respond in the first instance to the most up-to-date calculation of housing need in the County as a basis, currently 25,894 dwellings over the Plan Period, and then accommodates an additional uplift in this capacity in order to respond positively to the overall 'high growth' strategy. It is considered this uplift will further support the delivery of family and affordable housing to support local needs; increase the opportunity for specialist housing and the needs of other groups; support the diversification of the workforce; support greater opportunities to support the Council's wider economic growth aspirations; and support the opportunity for the Council to respond positively to appropriate cross boundary needs.
- 5.6 The approach to distribution of development reflects the Council's previously stated preferred option, favouring an 'urban focussed' approach. It is considered that by virtue of the infrastructure and services Shropshire's largest settlements generally provide, there is a greater opportunity to deliver larger scale mixed use schemes, in doing so providing better conditions to support additional employment delivery and providing a better balance of growth.
- 5.7 It is a requirement of Local Planning Authorities to undertake a duty to cooperate with neighbouring and closely related Local Planning Authority areas. Council officers have been engaged in discussions with these areas over the course of the plan preparation process. Ahead of the proposed submission of the Local Plan in January 2021, a series of Statements of Common Ground will be prepared and agreed with these areas.
- 5.8 Based upon the discussions to this point the only cross boundary issue requiring recognition and intervention in the Local Plan is with the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) as part of the ongoing preparation of their Black Country Local Plan. The issue relates to the lack of capacity in the ABCA area to accommodate all their defined housing and employment needs in their area in a sustainable manner. This has resulted in ongoing discussions and agreement with a number of surrounding Planning Authority areas to accommodate varying amounts of this unmet need.
- 5.9 Effective and on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities is an important part of plan-making as part of the Duty to Cooperate. With this in mind, and further to discussions with the Black Country Authorities, it is proposed that the Shropshire housing requirement of 30,800 dwellings incorporates 1,500 dwellings to support the housing needs of the emerging Black Country Plan, resulting from constraints to their housing supply opportunities to 2038. It is considered this offer responds positively and constructively to the needs of ABCA, an area with close links to Shropshire, and provides an opportunity for Shropshire Council to accommodate this need as part of its overall housing requirement, and to distribute this need in line with its agreed pattern of development outlined in Policy SP2 of the Local Plan.

Localised Strategies for individual settlements

- 5.10 In following the urban focussed approach the majority of the County's growth is captured in settlement specific strategies for Shropshire's network of Market Towns. For the majority of areas this includes proposed site allocations and guidelines on how development on these sites will be managed. It should be remembered that whilst the allocation of a site provides an 'in principle' support that development in this location can be supported, these will continue to be subject to the grant of future planning approval. Where local communities are currently preparing Neighbourhood Plans this has been reflected within the proposed strategies.
- 5.11 Whilst the focus of the plan is on the urban area, it continues to be important to plan effectively for Shropshire's rural areas, but in doing so recognising that growth opportunities in these areas should be more closely aligned with the ability of villages to provide a standard of services and facilities. For this reason the Council opted early in the plan preparation process to provide a consistent methodology to the identification of Community Hubs, assessed through the Hierarchy of Settlements document. The conclusions of this process are included in schedule SP2.2 of the Pre-Submission Draft Plan, which identifies those areas which are proposed to act as Community Hubs. Policy SP7, along with individual Settlement specific policies, seeks to provide a framework for how development will be managed in these areas effectively and in keeping with the local character.

Strategic Sites

- 5.12 The Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan proposes to allocate three strategic settlements/sites at the following locations:
- The Former Ironbridge Power Station which will form a new strategic settlement;
 - Clive Barracks, Tern Hill which will form a new strategic settlement; and
 - RAF Cosford which will facilitate MOD use and associated activities

Former Ironbridge Power Station

- 5.13 The former Ironbridge power station occupies a 350 acre site south of the River Severn near Buildwas. The power station ceased operation in 2015 and was purchased by Harworth Group in 2017 with a view to regenerating the site. The proposed inclusion of the site for inclusion within the Local Plan was consulted on as a preferred option in summer 2019. An outline planning application was subsequently submitted to the Council in December 2019 for a major mixed use development including 1,000 dwellings. Whilst the planning application is yet to be determined, it remains appropriate for the Council to continue to seek the site's inclusion within the Local Plan. It is expected that subject to the grant of planning approval, the site will be fully developed by the end of the plan period. The proposed development guidelines for the site are included in Policy S20 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan

Clive Barracks, Tern Hill

- 5.14 Clive Barracks is a 50 hectare military site on the A41 near Market Drayton which is currently home to the Royal Irish Regiment. MOD announced the intention to redevelop the site in March 2016, and have subsequently confirmed they now plan to complete the vacation and disposal of the site by 2025. The proposed inclusion of the site for inclusion within the Local Plan to form a significant mixed use proposal was consulted on as a preferred option in summer 2019. Local engagement on the site up to this point has helped to shape the proposed development guidelines for the site, which is proposed to provide employment land and around 750 homes as part of a new settlement, together with local services and facilities. Given the timeframe of the proposed disposal of the site, it is expected that around 600 homes will be delivered during the plan period to 2038. The proposed development guidelines for the site are included in Policy S19 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan.

RAF Cosford

- 5.15 The national defence review has confirmed RAF Cosford as a key Ministry of Defence asset, but it is considered the potential for the area to meet its future operational defence requirements is restricted by its Green Belt location. Having considered the impact on national Green Belt objectives, as well as the benefits of doing so, it is considered there are exceptional circumstances for the site to be released from the Green Belt. In summary the strategic site will build upon its existing role as a centre of excellence for both UK and International Defence Training, host a specialist aviation academy, support opportunities to co-locate other Ministry of Defence units and activities, facilitate the intensification and expansion of the RAF Museum Cosford and allow the formation of a new headquarters for the Midland Air Ambulance Charity. The proposed development guidelines for the site are included in Policy S21 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan

Other Strategic Site Considerations

- 5.16 As part of the Strategic Sites consultation in summer 2019 the Council confirmed it was considering the potential inclusion of land north of Junction 3 on the M54 within the Local Plan. The land, which covers around 400 hectares and lies wholly within the Green Belt, is being actively promoted to include around 3,000 dwellings and 50ha of employment land, as well as the inclusion of local facilities and services. Whilst the Strategic Sites consultation in 2019 clearly established the site was not at that stage preferred for development, given the scale of the proposal the Council nevertheless considered it was important to seek community views.
- 5.17 In weighing up the site specific considerations, both positive and negative, and giving consideration to the consultation responses on this matter, it is considered there is insufficient justification to progress an exceptional circumstances argument for the release of this land from the Green Belt. The site is therefore not included within the Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan.

Green Belt Release

- 5.18 Green Belt is perhaps one of the most widely known designations in the planning system. Green Belts cover parts of many local authority areas; in Shropshire's case significant areas in the east of the County are covered by the West Midlands Green Belt designation. The key purposes of the designation is to check unrestricted sprawl; prevent neighbouring towns merging; to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and to assist in urban regeneration.
- 5.19 Permanence is a key feature of Green Belt boundaries, and their extent should only be altered where exceptional circumstances apply. It is however, appropriate for Local Plans to review Green Belt boundaries when required, and in Shropshire's case this was prompted in 2015 by the conclusions of the SAMDev Inspector's Report, which instructed that a review of Shropshire's Green Belt be carried out as part the Local Plan review process. To this end, in 2017 the Council commissioned a Green Belt Assessment in order to assess the extent to which the land within the Green Belt in Shropshire performs against the purposes of Green Belts (outlined in para 5.18). This was followed in 2018 by the publication of a Green Belt Review, which provides an assessment of the harm to the Green Belt purposes should particular parts of the Green Belt be released. The Council therefore have a comprehensive evidence base with which to support decision taking.
- 5.20 It is important to note that before seeking to release land from the Green Belt, the NPPF places a clear need for the strategic policy-making authority to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. In addition to accommodating the needs of RAF Cosford, and having considered local circumstances of need, the Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan proposes the removal of land from the Green Belt for allocations for employment development within the plan period to 2038 in Shifnal and Bridgnorth, and for mixed use and housing development in Alveley. The Draft Plan also seeks the removal of land from Green Belt for to act as 'safeguarded land' for potential development beyond the plan period in Albrighton, Shifnal and Alveley.
- 5.21 The council are aware there has been a particular focus recently on development options at Bridgnorth, which acts as Shropshire's third largest settlement but which is constrained by Green Belt on its eastern side. In 2018 as part of the Preferred Sites consultation the Council proposed the allocation of land at Stanmore, within the Green Belt, for a new mixed use Garden Village in order to meet the growth requirement for the town within the plan period. Whilst a full exceptional circumstances argument was not advanced at this point, it was felt this option represented a sustainable option for the town, in part given the lack of reasonable alternatives available being presented in non-Green Belt locations. It is acknowledged there was a significant level of opposition to this proposal expressed through the preferred options consultation process.
- 5.22 In March 2020, the Council became aware of a new major development option for the town being presented by Taylor Wimpey. This proposed the inclusion of land to the south of the A458, which falls principally in the Tasley parish area, for the creation of an alternative Garden Village of a similar scale

and nature to the Stanmore proposal. This land is not within the Green Belt. This has been a significant new consideration in the process. In meeting the policy requirements of the NPPF concerning the release of Green Belt, it has been necessary for officers to reassess the continued suitability of the Stanmore proposal. This further site assessment process will be included in the evidence base material upon publication of the Pre-Submission draft for consultation, but in advance of this Appendix 2 of this report specifically sets out the officer considerations and conclusions on this issue.

- 5.23 In summary, having considered the competing site proposals against a full range of material issues, it is recommended that the Tasley Garden Village proposal should be preferred for development to support a comprehensively planned mixed use development to meet the housing needs of Bridgnorth over the plan period. Conversely, it is now recommended that the majority of the Stanmore proposal should remain designated as Green Belt and should not be identified for future development. The exception to this is land north and west of the existing Stanmore Industrial Park, where it continues to be considered the release of land from the Green Belt would be beneficial in supporting the future expansion needs of the Industrial Park to meet employment requirements.
- 5.24 It is acknowledged this is a significant change of position from that proposed in the Preferred Options document in November 2018. However, it remains necessary for the Council to be responsive to new evidence and site promotions throughout the plan making process. In this instance, the impact on the objectives of the Green Belt is a significant policy consideration which has been taken into account, but equally the wider site assessment process leads to the conclusion that the Tasley Garden Village is capable of delivering a sustainable mixed use scheme. Whilst it is acknowledged Taylor Wimpey have carried out localised engagement on the proposal during May and June, the community will have the opportunity through the Regulation 19 consultation process to have their say on the soundness of the Plan to Shropshire Council.

Strategic and Development Management Policies to Guide New Development

- 5.25 The NPPF states that Local Plans should contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, and that a development plan must include strategic policies to address an area's priorities for the development and use of land in its area. A local Plan can also include a series of non-strategic (or detailed) policies to address other more specific issues.
- 5.26 The Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan contains 35 Strategic and Development Management policies, covering a wide spectrum of issues and considerations relevant to the pursuit of sustainable development including climate change; supporting high quality design; managing development in the countryside; delivering affordable housing; ensuring a suitable mix of tenures in new residential development; and managing and minimising flood risk. When adopted these policies will replace the current development management policies in the Core Strategy and the SAMDev Plan.

- 5.27 Whilst the Local Plan should be the starting point for taking decisions on planning applications it does not sit in isolation. To this end many of the proposed development management policies make reference to other strategies being prepared by the Council, including the adopted Economic Growth Strategy 2017-2021, and the emerging Housing and Climate Change Strategies. In doing so these strategies will be a material factor in decision making.

6 Next steps

- 6.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the Pre-Submission Draft of the Local Plan, along with the associated documents will be published for consultation for a period of eight weeks. It is proposed this consultation will begin on Monday 3rd August and run until Wednesday 30th September, subject to the considerations outlined in para 6.2. Throughout the plan preparation process officers have sought to engage constructively with communities, Parish and Town councils, and elected representatives on emerging preferred options. Whilst in many cases this has led to a consensus of opinion on issues, it is recognised there remains areas where there is likely to be opposition to proposals and that in some areas elected representatives have voiced their objections to proposals included within the Pre-Submission Draft Plan. The statutory consultation process is an opportunity for communities, Parish and Town Councils and elected representatives to submit their comments on the soundness of the Plan, and these will be considered ahead of the proposed submission of the Local Plan to Government for examination in January 2021.
- 6.2 The Consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft of the Local Plan must meet the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, as a minimum. For clarity this means the Pre-Submission Draft of the Local Plan must be made available for inspection at the Council's principal office (in this case Shirehall) and at such other places within the authority area as the Council consider appropriate, which has in previous stages of consultation been libraries. It is acknowledged that due to the Covid 19 national emergency there have been restrictions placed on public access into Council premises, and it is recognised that this will need to be addressed as a matter of priority before the consultation can begin. Consultation arrangements must also meet the requirements of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). A significant number of organisations and individuals will continue to be notified directly of the publication of the consultation documents in accordance with the SCI. Electronic responses are encouraged to reduce printing and distribution costs and to reduce the time spent collating and analysing paper responses.

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

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning

Local Members

Appendices

1. Shropshire Local Plan 2016-2038: Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan plus associated mapping
2. Assessment of Garden Village Proposals in Bridgnorth