



Cabinet | May 6th 2026

Item

Public



Local Plan – Notice of Intention to Commence Plan Making and Scoping Consultation

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Councillor David Walker		

1. Synopsis

This report seeks the approval of a new Plan-Making timetable and Project Initiation Document aligning with Government expectations and approval to issue a Notice of Intention to Commence Plan Making on the Council’s next Local Plan (scheduled to formally commence in September 2026) following the completion of a mandatory ‘scoping’ stage. It also seeks approval to undertake public consultation on a ‘Scoping Document’ and associated documents between May and July.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. The Council are at the very start of the process to prepare a new Local Plan for Shropshire. This report sets out a number of documents associated with the first stage of this new process – known as the ‘notification and scoping’ stage. This includes the publication of a new Plan making timetable (appendix 1), and seeks approval to consult on a ‘Scoping’ document (appendix 4) and a draft Community Hierarchy (appendix 5) for public consultation.

- 2.2. National Planning regulations and guidance has been subject to several recent high profile changes, including to the manner in which Council's prepare Local Plans. It is proposed the Council undertake the preparation of the new Local Plan in line with the new plan-making arrangements, which is characterised by a more efficient 30 month preparation and adoption process following an initial 'notification and scoping' stage of at least four months.
- 2.3. The Local Plan will be vital in providing the vision, objectives, and long-term spatial strategy for the sustainable development of Shropshire to 2046, and as such is an opportunity to give spatial expression to a number of related Council strategies and objectives, including the emerging Corporate Plan and the 'New Direction for Shropshire' paper published in 2025.
- 2.4. This report seeks approval to commence the 'scoping' stage by approving the Notice of Intention to Commence Plan Making (Appendix 2).
- 2.5. The purpose of the scoping document is to seek stakeholder views at the outset of the plan making process. This includes, but is not limited to, local residents, parish and town councils, infrastructure providers, statutory agencies, local businesses, developers and agents.
- 2.6. The scoping document therefore purposely **does not** define either a future spatial strategy or future site allocations; these issues will be addressed in future consultation stages once we have gathered initial thoughts and collected additional evidence. Nevertheless, the scoping stage is an important first step in the Local Plan preparation process and one where the views of stakeholders can meaningfully shape the future direction of the Local Plan.
- 2.7. This Cabinet report also seeks approval for the publication and consultation of a draft 'Community Hierarchy', which is the first step in a process of defining a spatial strategy for the distribution of growth in the Local Plan.
- 2.8. Following the conclusion of the notification and scoping stage, and subject to passing an initial self-assessment readiness 'Gateway' check, the Council will formally commence plan making in September 2026 in line with the agreed plan making timetable.
- 2.9. The Local Plan will, as a minimum, need to enable the delivery of Shropshire's housing needs, as calculated using the national standard methodology, as well as providing land allocations and policies for other evidenced need, such as for employment land. It also has the opportunity to provide new local planning policies to enable the sustainable delivery of proposed site allocations, although it should not duplicate policies already provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

3. Recommendations

That Cabinet

- 3.1. Agree the publication of the **Plan-Making Timetable (Appendix 1)** and that any subsequent changes to this timetable are delegated to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.
- 3.2. Agree the publication of the **Notice of Intention to Commence Plan Making (Appendix 2)** in May 2026.
- 3.3. Agree the **Local Plan Project Initiation Document (PID) (Appendix 3)**, including the governance and decision making arrangements included in Figure 4.1 of the PID, and that any subsequent changes to the PID are delegated to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.
- 3.4. Agree the publication of the **Local Plan Scoping Document (Appendix 4)**, the **Draft Community Hierarchy (Appendix 5)**, the **Draft Site Identification and Assessment Methodology (Appendix 6)** and the **SEA Screening Report (Appendix 7)** for public consultation in line with the engagement strategy outlined in the PID, and that any minor changes to these documents ahead of publication are delegated to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.
- 3.5. Agree that delegated responsibility is given to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, for the preparation and consultation of an SEA/SA Scoping document within the Local Plan ‘notification and scoping’ stage.
- 3.6. Note the **Equalities, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) Stage One Screening Record** (Appendix 8)
- 3.7. Agree, that delegated authority is given to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning to agree the completion of Gateway 1 (Self- Assessment) upon the completion of the ‘Scoping’ stage, in order to commence the formal commencement of the plan making in September 2026.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Section 9 of the Local Plan PID (Appendix 3) covers identified risks and mitigation measures for the Local Plan process.
- 4.2. As set out within the PID’s Risk Management Log there are a number of significant risks identified that could impact upon the delivery of the Local Plan, and overall it is considered programme of work within a more condensed timeframe will be realistic, but extremely challenging.

- 4.3. 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, which could curtail many of the proposed mitigation measures. Resourcing is clearly an area where the Council does have a large element of control, and it is considered this is an area where many of the proposed mitigation measures sit.
- 4.4. As a result of the work undertaken in late 2025 and early 2026, most notably around early pre-plan making evidence base collection, and the external funding received from MHCLG in to support the implementation of Plan making (totalling £178k), there are currently no 'red' risks identified which require immediate senior management action. However, there are a number of areas which require continued management monitoring. These will be kept under regular review as part of the ongoing project management of the Local Plan.
- 4.5. An initial Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been undertaken at this point and included as Appendix 8 to this report. Further ESHIAs will be carried out at timely stocktake moments during the Local Plan process. As the Local Plan process is a matter of significant public interest, with ongoing consultation and engagement throughout the regulatory stages of Plan-making, it will be important to utilise specified periods of public consultation alongside the continuous efforts of the Council to listen to and account for the needs of diverse communities and stakeholders across what is a large and sparsely populated rural county.
- 4.6. At this stage, ahead of the proposed consultation, initial assessment is that there is potential for a Neutral to Low Positive impact across all nine Protected Characteristic groupings for whom we are obliged to have 'due regard' in our decision-making processes, as per the Equality Act 2010. This could potentially rise to medium positive for those in the intersecting groupings of Age and Disability. There is likewise potential for a Neutral to Low Positive impact for the additional groupings of people that we think about in Shropshire, of Social Inclusion, Carers, and Young People Leaving Care. The Council also considers those in the grouping of veterans and serving members of the armed force and their families, in a separate grouping, in order to visibly demonstrate that 'due regard' is being given to people in this grouping, as per the requirements of the Armed Forces Act 2021.
- 4.7. Our additional categories help us to seek to ensure that we consider the needs of the following: rural households; households on low incomes; households in fuel poverty; and those we may consider to be vulnerable. This includes refugee families, people living in fuel poverty, people fleeing domestic violence, and those who are rough sleepers or at risk of homelessness for what may be a variety of circumstances. For these additional categories, there is also potential for the impacts to increase to Medium Positive, particularly given efforts envisaged to improve health and wellbeing outcomes across communities.
- 4.8. These positive impacts will be achieved through an inclusive vision, measurable outcomes and spatial strategy that is responsive to the characteristics of Shropshire and supports the delivery of development that meets the housing, employment and infrastructure needs of all groups in our communities.
- 4.9. It is expected that the next Shropshire Local Plan will positively contribute to the health equality of all groups in Shropshire. The vision, measurable outcomes and

spatial strategy will be informed by and responsive to the characteristics of Shropshire, particularly its rurality and the pockets of socio-economic deprivation across the county. It will also set out to be responsive to the needs of all groups within our communities. At this stage, there are considered to be Neutral to Low positive impacts to be achieved directly on an individual's health/mental health/wellbeing, indirectly on an individual's ability to improve their own health/wellbeing and directly on the community, in regard to the social, economic and environmental living conditions that would impact health, with potential for this to increase to Medium Positive. It will be important to ensure that opportunities are taken throughout the Local Plan process in regard to addressing the wider determinants of health, tackling inequalities, and empowering communities to take proactive steps to improve health and well being, not least through consultation and engagement with agencies involved in these endeavours.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):
- scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope of activities,
 - delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2. Section 6 of the Local Plan PID (Appendix 3) covers financial resourcing and management. The Local Plan process is a matter of significant public interest, and is defined by a prescribed regulatory framework and national expectations in terms of output. This process includes a number of financial implications, which it is largely the responsibility of the Council as Local Planning Authority (LPA) to fund.
- 5.3. The Local Plan process is split into two distinct elements; preparation and examination. In line with the proposed plan making time table (appendix 1), the preparation element is due to formally commence in September 2026 and last for 24 months. This follows a mandatory process of 'scoping', beginning in May 2026 and lasting four months.
- 5.4. The plan preparation process is driven by evidence collection and prescribed stages of public consultation, as set out in the proposed Local Plan timetable. It is envisaged that during the remainder of 2026 and the first half of 2027, the Council will need to commission external consultants to support on several aspects of evidence base collation. The Council recently received £108k from MHCLG as a Local Plan Implementation Fund, and this has been ringfenced to support the commissioning of necessary evidence. This is in addition to the £70k of support

the Council received in February 2025 which has been used to commission a new Green Belt Study to support ongoing Local Plan work.

- 5.5. This external funding has been very much welcomed, however there remains a likelihood that additional funding will be required during 2026 and 2027. It is envisaged this will be supported by the Planning Policy consultancy budget, with wider funding sources to be further explored, including from wider Planning service income where appropriate.
- 5.6. Section 7 of the Local Plan PID (Appendix 3) covers the expected evidence base requirements of the Plan. Whilst the evidence burden upon an LPA has long been an area of financial outlay in the preparation of a Local Plan, the Council will be using as much existing available evidence as possible, whether this be evidence collected to support the now 'withdrawn' Local Plan in 2025, or evidence collected by other areas of the Council. The collection of new evidence will therefore be targeted and proportionate, but must be to a level to enable the preparation of a 'sound' Local Plan with minimal risk.
- 5.7. The examination of the Local Plan, expected in late 2028, is a cost covered by the Local Planning Authority. This is primarily to fund the cost of the Planning Inspectorate in examining the Plan. The Council does not have any discretion in the number of Inspectors appointed as this is a matter for the Planning Inspectorate.
- 5.8. It is important to note the new plan making system expects a much shorter and focussed examination process, with this process now envisaged to last six months, rather than the average of over a year from the 'legacy' plan making system. This is likely to have a positive impact on the Council's financial outlay, although it must also be stressed this process has not been tested in practice and therefore at this stage it is difficult to assess the likely financial burden to the Council.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. The new Local Plan will need to adequately plan for new housing and employment growth over a 20 year period, as well as any other land uses where evidence indicates a need. It will also need to develop new planning policies to support the implementation and delivery of site allocations in a sustainable manner. The new Local Plan will need to in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which continues to include a policy of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as well as specific policies on meeting the challenge of climate change.
- 6.2. The Council are at the earliest stage of plan making, and therefore at this time there are no firm proposals for either future site allocations or new planning policies. However, as part of the Scoping consultation a new draft 'community hierarchy' has been prepared (appendix 5) and subject to Cabinet approval will be subject to public consultation. This seeks to provide a starting point for the future distribution of development. It uses the new DfT connectivity tool, which seeks to 'score' settlements based upon their ease of connectivity to a range of services and facilities, using non-car-borne transport modes. Section 7 to this report expands upon this.

7. Background

- 7.1. Planning has seen some significant changes at the national level in the past few years. Most recently, the Government has introduced a new Plan-making system in March 2026 and enacted the Planning and Infrastructure Act in December 2025.
- 7.2. Central to these national changes has been the objective to utilise the important role Planning has to further stimulate economic growth and to support a positive and plan-led approach to ensuring a sufficient supply of housing to meet the needs of current and future populations.
- 7.3. It is important to remember that a Local Plan covers a number of policy areas, including but not exclusively dealing with new housing provision. It is ultimately a document designed to manage land use change over a minimum 15 year period (from adoption), in a manner which responds to the evidential needs of communities. The Local Plan will therefore be vital in providing the vision, objectives, and long-term spatial strategy for the sustainable development of Shropshire to 2046.
- 7.4. The remit and scope of a Local Plan is driven to a large degree by the expectations and requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published by MHCLG. The NPPF has recently been subject to a national consultation proposing some notable changes to its content and layout. It is expected the final version of the NPPF will be published by the Government in summer 2026.
- 7.5. Policy PM2 of the draft NPPF includes the following requirements for the preparation and of a Local Plan:
 - 7.5.1. Setting out a spatial strategy, policies for the minimum amount of development to be provided, land allocations and broad locations for growth, and designations for a period of no less than 15 years from the point of adoption;
 - 7.5.2. Identifying the contributions expected from development towards meeting affordable housing requirements and on and off site infrastructure; and
 - 7.5.3. Establishing planning policies only where these support the delivery of specific allocated sites.
- 7.6. The draft NPPF requires the preparation of a Local Plan in 30 months, following the completion of at least a 4 month ‘scoping’ period at the start of the process. The recently published Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 (the Local Planning regulations) provide the prescribed regulatory stages of plan-making, and it is important the Council follows this carefully. To support the implementation of the new plan making system, MHCLG have usefully published an online ‘roadmap for plan making’ which provides additional guidance on the delivery of a Plan and the processes involved.

- 7.7. The first important step in this process is to publish a plan-making timetable in line with Regulation 8 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. The proposed plan-making timetable is included as Appendix 1 to this report and Recommendation 1 seeks Cabinet agreement of this timetable for publication.
- 7.8. There is an expectation the Council will monitor progress against the plan-making timetable on a monthly basis, as such recommendation 1 seeks approval for any subsequent changes to the plan-making timetable to be delegated to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, in order to avoid any unnecessary delays to the programme.
- 7.9. The Plan Making Timetable sets out a programme for the preparation and adoption of three documents, these are:
- 7.9.1. The Shropshire Local Plan (2046);
 - 7.9.2. The associated Policy Map; and
 - 7.9.3. The updated Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule.
- 7.10. The timetable for the preparation and adoption of the next Shropshire Local Plan reflects national expectations of achieving this in a 30 month timeframe, plus an additional minimum 4 month ‘Scoping’ stage at the beginning of the process.
- 7.11. The new plan-making system includes three specific stages of consultation and a number of ‘Gateway’ assessments, whilst the Plan is in preparation and ahead of its submission for independent examination. The below table provides a summary of the stages of the new plan-making system and when the programme envisages these occurring during the preparation of the next Shropshire Local Plan:

Consultation: scoping May-Sept 2026	Seeking views on what the plan should contain and how we should engage with stakeholders going forward. This is to occur during the notification period.
Gateway 1: self-assessment Sept 2026	Involves the Council undertaking a self-assessment of its readiness to start the 30-month plan preparation process.
Consultation: content & evidence May – June 2027	Minimum 6 week consultation. Seeking views on the proposed vision, objectives and spatial strategy. This stage will include initial policies and draft site allocations.
Gateway 2: independent review July-August 2027	Seeking observations and advice from the Planning Inspectorate to support early resolution of any potential ‘soundness’ issues and progress towards meeting Gateway 3 requirements.
Consultation: proposed Local Plan April – June 2028	Minimum 8 week consultation. Seeking views on a fully formed draft Local Plan.
Gateway 3: stop or go July – August 2028	Planning Inspectorate to decide whether the draft Local Plan meets prescribed requirements and ready to be submitted for examination.

	Prescribed requirements relate to legal compliance, availability of submission documents and whether we and the Local Plan are ready to proceed.
Submission August 2028	Formal submission of the draft Local Plan for examination. Triggers commencement of the examination.
Examination August 2028 – February 2029	Undertaken by the Planning Inspectorate to assess whether the draft Local Plan is legally compliant & sound – meets the tests of soundness in national planning policy. Those who have made representations on the plan during the consultation on the proposed Local Plan will have the right to present their views to the inspector.
Adoption March 2029	Subject to conclusions of the examination and decision of full Council. Adoption brings the next Local Plan into effect.

- 7.12. Whilst the Policy Map is identified as a separate entry on the plan-making timetable, it is directly linked to the preparation and adoption of the next Shropshire Local Plan, as its role is to indicate spatially where the policies of the next Shropshire Local Plan will apply. As such, it follows the same preparation and adoption timeframe as the next Shropshire Local Plan.
- 7.13. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule sets out the financial charges placed upon new development to help fund infrastructure. The current CIL Charging Schedule was adopted in 2012, with rates increasing in line with indexation in the following years. It is considered the preparation of a new Local Plan is an ideal time to commence a review of the CIL Charging Schedule given the shared evidence requirements, most notably an updated Viability Assessment. It is however important that the next Shropshire Local Plan is at a suitably advanced stage to inform progress of the CIL Charging Schedule, with at least draft policies and draft site allocations identified. As such, the proposed timeframe for the review of the CIL Charging Schedule anticipates the submission for independent examination occurring in February 2028, roughly six months before the submission of the next Shropshire Local Plan for examination.
- 7.14. Appendix 2 of the report sets out the Council’s draft ‘Statement of Intention to Commence Plan Making’ in compliance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. The purpose of this notice is to formally signal the intention to commence preparation of the next Shropshire Local Plan. Its publication ‘triggers’ the minimum 4 month notification period. Recommendation 2 of this report seeks agreement to publish this notice.
- 7.15. Appendix 3 of the report is the proposed Project Initiation Document (PID) for preparation of the Local Plan. The purpose of this document is to set out the project management framework, and provides clarity on the intended scope, governance arrangements, resources and timelines. Recommendation 3 of this report seeks Cabinet agreement to publish this Project Initiation Document. As the Project Initiation Document aligns with and complements the plan-making timetable, recommendation 3 seeks approval for any subsequent changes to it to

- be delegated to the Interim Service Director for Place Shaping in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, so as to avoid any unnecessary delays to the programme.
- 7.16. Appendix 4 to this report consists of the draft ‘scoping consultation’ document. Recommendation 4 of this report seeks approval to publish this document for public consultation in line with the engagement strategy outlined in the PID.
- 7.17. This ‘scoping consultation’ will be for a minimum of 6 weeks and is intended to happen during the 4 month ‘scoping’ notification period. It would constitute the first of three formal stages of consultation to inform preparation of the Shropshire Local Plan.
- 7.18. The purpose of the scoping document is to seek stakeholder views at the outset of the plan making process. This includes, but is not limited to, local residents, parish and town councils, infrastructure providers, statutory agencies, local businesses, developers and agents. The document therefore purposely **does not** define either a future spatial strategy or future site allocations; these issues will be addressed in future consultation stages once we have gathered initial thoughts and collected additional evidence. Nevertheless, the scoping stage is an important first step in the Local Plan preparation process and one where the views of stakeholders can meaningfully shape the future direction of the Local Plan. As such, the document raises a number of questions the Council is particularly seeking feedback on, including:
- 7.18.1. The key priorities for the **vision** and **measurable outcomes** for the delivery of the Local Plan.
- 7.18.2. The key considerations for the future identification of a **spatial strategy** to manage the level and distribution of development in Shropshire.
- 7.18.3. The **approach to identifying and assessing** potential site allocations.
- 7.18.4. Matters that would benefit from being addressed by **local planning policies** to complement new national decision-making policies.
- 7.18.5. How we should effectively **engage** communities and wider stakeholders during the plan-making process.
- 7.18.6. The **evidence** required to support the next Local Plan.
- 7.19. Importantly, as this first consultation seeks views on the ‘scope’ of the next Local Plan, it **does not identify proposed options** – including on the approach to the levels and distribution of growth and **does not include draft site allocations**.
- 7.20. A summary of each of the areas addressed in the proposed ‘Scoping Consultation’ document follows:

Beginning to Develop the Vision and Measurable Outcomes

- 7.21. The vision of the next Shropshire Local Plan will set out our aspirations for Shropshire over the period to 2046, whilst the measurable outcomes will support the monitoring of progress towards delivering the Local Plan vision.
- 7.22. The ‘Scoping Consultation’ document identifies initial considerations that we believe will inform the development of the vision and measurable outcomes, informed by consideration of:
- 7.22.1. The requirements of national planning policy.
 - 7.22.2. Collected evidence particularly where it identifies ‘baseline’ conditions and any local issues and opportunities.
 - 7.22.3. Other Council strategies, including the administrations ‘New Direction for Shropshire’ and the emerging Corporate Plan.
 - 7.22.4. Analysis of Shropshire’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
 - 7.22.5. Responses to consultations on the Scoping document.
 - 7.22.6. Technical assessments undertaken to inform the next Local Plan.

Beginning to Develop the Spatial Strategy

- 7.23. Whilst the context of plan making and expectations on housing growth have recently changed, Local Plans should still advance a strategy build around ensuring sustainable development, improving the lives of communities and protecting important environmental assets. Having a Local Plan in place will allow an area to grow in a managed way and also provides a greater element of certainty to communities about what to expect.
- 7.24. The Spatial Strategy is central to the delivery of the Local Plan. It will establish clear expectations for the **amount and distribution of development**, whilst also identifying **locations that should be conserved or enhanced** for specific purposes such as landscape conservation and habitat improvement.
- 7.25. The ‘Scoping Consultation’ document **does not** identify the spatial strategy, rather it identifies what we believe are the key considerations to develop this as part of the next stage of plan making. We are therefore seeking views on whether we have identified the correct issues, and if there are any other issues we should be considering.
- 7.26. With regard to the amount of housing development to be planned for within the spatial strategy, the ‘Scoping Consultation’ document indicates the starting point is local housing need, which Government has made clear in their recent draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the minimum amount of housing areas should be planning for.

- 7.27. Using Government’s standard methodology, we have calculated the current local housing need for Shropshire as **2,030 dwellings per annum**. This represents a significantly higher housing need than planned for through previous Local Plans. Future employment needs will be informed by a new Economic Development Needs Assessment, to be commissioned by the Council in the spring.
- 7.28. Importantly, the ‘Scoping Consultation’ document also identifies and seeks views on other considerations relevant to the spatial strategy. These include:
- 7.28.1. The infrastructure capacity of settlements to be informed by ongoing discussions with infrastructure providers;
 - 7.28.2. The deliverability of development, reflecting viability and market conditions;
 - 7.28.3. The need to conserve and enhance important natural, built and historic environmental assets, which contribute to Shropshire’s unique character.
 - 7.28.4. The specific housing needs of groups in our communities, recognising the critical role of affordable and specialist housing.
 - 7.28.5. Supporting economic growth and creating the right conditions for inward investment.
 - 7.28.6. Consideration of supporting unmet needs from adjoining and closely related authorities, where fully evidenced and sustainable to do so.
 - 7.28.7. Responses to the ‘scoping’ consultation and emerging evidence.
- 7.29. A **draft Community Hierarchy** has been prepared (appendix 5 of this report) to complement the Scoping document. Recommendation 4 of this report seeks approval to publish this document for public consultation.
- 7.30. A ‘Community Hierarchy’ involves an assessment of *specific and consistent criteria* on the characteristics of an area, and is an important first step in the preparation of a spatial strategy by categorising Shropshire’s many and varied communities. **However, it does not in itself establish growth requirements for settlements – this will be for a later stage of plan making once the Council has considered a range of other relevant issues, including infrastructure constraints.**
- 7.31. The draft Community Hierarchy uses a methodology which combines an analysis of the size of a community (using population and dwelling stock data) and an assessment of it’s connectivity to services, informed by the Department for Transport (DfT) Connectivity Tool. The DfT tool provides an assessment of the ability for those living and working within a community to access a variety of employment, services and social engagement opportunities through sustainable transport modes.
- 7.32. The DfT Connectivity Tool has been developed nationally to support plan making and to provide a robust and consistent measure of the ease of connectivity to

services and facilities. It uses information on potential travel destinations, the transport infrastructure network, and willingness to travel data in order to provide a consistent 'connectivity score' using non-car-borne transport.

- 7.33. Using defined thresholds, a range of community categories have been identified, ranging from Shrewsbury as the largest and most connected community, a range of Principle and Key Centres, through to a number of rural communities. In order to distinguish more effectively between Shropshire's many and varied rural communities, the Community Hierarchy proposes three different categories of rural area: primary, secondary and tertiary connected villages.
- 7.34. The Council are particularly interested in hearing consultation responses on the draft Community Hierarchy. Once we've assessed feedback later in the 2026, and made any appropriate changes, the Council will use the final version of the hierarchy alongside wider evidence to begin establishing growth strategies for communities. These will be consulted on in 2027.

Beginning to develop future site allocations

- 7.35. Site allocations consist of specific areas of land designated in a Local Plan for a particular form of development or land-use. Site allocations will form an important mechanism to support the delivery of the vision, measurable outcomes and spatial strategy.
- 7.36. The 'Scoping Consultation' document **does not identify any proposed allocations**. Rather, it seeks views on the forms of development for which allocations are required.
- 7.37. To support this, the Council have prepared a draft methodology for how we intend to assess site options as part of the plan making process. The draft Site Identification and Assessment document is included as appendix 6 of this report, and recommendation 3.4 seeks approval to publish this document for public consultation alongside the 'Scoping Consultation' document.
- 7.38. The future identification of preferred site allocations will be informed by the outcome of the 'call for sites' exercise carried out by the Council in autumn 2025. Information from the call for sites will be made available as part of the consultation on the scoping document.

Developing Local Planning Policies

- 7.39. Planning policies set out the standards and expectations of development proposals, supporting the delivery of the vision, measurable outcomes and spatial strategy.

7.40. The ‘Scoping Consultation’ document does not identify proposed planning policies. Rather, it seeks views on what issues would benefit from being addressed in local planning policy as we develop the Local Plan. It should be recognised that there is a general expectation from Government that new Local Plans will contain fewer policies as many policy areas are addressed at the national level in the updated NPPF. However, there remains scope to develop genuinely local policies to complement the NPPF, and we are particularly interested in hearing feedback from communities and other stakeholders on this matter.

Undertaking Effective Engagement

7.41. Engagement is critical to informing the preparation of the Local Plan. To facilitate effective engagement the ‘Scoping Consultation’ document outlines and seeks views on the proposed approach to engagement during the plan-making process.

Evidence

7.42. The ‘Scoping Consultation’ document identifies the existing and emerging evidence base available to inform the next Shropshire Local Plan. It then identifies additional evidence that it is proposed to be progressed during the plan-making process seeking views on this evidence and whether any other areas need to be addressed.

7.43. As part of the plan-making process, it is necessary to conduct an environmental assessment in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004). The first stage of this process is Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening to determine whether further SEA assessment is required.

7.44. An SEA Screening has been undertaken (appendix 7 of this report) which concludes that further SEA will be required during the plan-making process. Recommendation 3.4 of this report seeks approval to publish this document alongside the ‘Scoping Consultation’ document.

7.45. The next stage of this process is for the Council to prepare and consult on an SEA Scoping document (note - this is different to the Local Plan Scoping document). We are currently awaiting further information from Government regarding the expected scope of this assessment, and therefore to avoid aborted work, recommendation 3.7 of this report requests delegated authority for officers, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to prepare this report and to consult on it during the Notification and Scoping Stage.

8. Conclusions

8.1. The Council are at the very start of the process to prepare a new Local Plan for Shropshire. This report sets out a number of documents associated with the first stage of this new process – known as the ‘notification and scoping’ stage. This includes the publication of a new Plan making timetable (appendix 1), and seeks approval to consult on a ‘Scoping’ document (appendix 4) and a draft Community Hierarchy (appendix 5) for public consultation.

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

Local Member: All

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Plan Making Timetable

Appendix 2 – Notice to Commence Preparation of the Local Plan

Appendix 3 – Plan Project Initiation Document

Appendix 4 – Shropshire Local Plan – Scoping Consultation

Appendix 5 – Draft Shropshire Community Hierarchy

Appendix 6 – Draft Methodology – Site Identification & Assessment

Appendix 7 – SEA Screening Assessment

Appendix 8 – Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment