

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

OBJECTION FROM THE LONGDEN VILLAGE ACTION GROUP.

Representing the residents of Longden Village.

Dear Sir,

**Matter 3. Point 15.** “ *Is the Community Hub and Community Cluster approach to development set out in Policies SP8 and SP9 justified and effective and consistent with national planning policies*”

The Longden Village Action Group and the large majority of residents of Longden village feel strongly that the Hubs and Clusters system is not justified, not effective and is flawed. Longden is an excellent example of how the system does not produce development policies that reflect what local people want.

We have been explaining to the Council that we should not be a Hub , in the large measure because we do not fulfil the ‘*services*’ test that the Council applied when deciding on the Hub or Cluster status of a settlement, and because of the way the Council has treated us when we were not so designated.

We now believe the system is flawed as it is not sufficiently flexible to accurately take into account changes in circumstances that might affect any particular settlement.

This was demonstrated with our reply to the Council in September 2020 (A digest of the full report has recently been sent to your selves for perusal).

The Councils ‘system’ is not *weighted* and adjusted to reflect the size of the services, and also, most importantly, the capacity to expand to cater for more residents. That is to say, for example of how the system is not weighted- other villages in the area have brick built substantial libraries and are given 3 points, whereas Longden has a mobile library which attends once every two weeks for ten minutes and also gets 3 points. The same applies to the very small post office (4 points), (Which has now closed and this alone should remove us from the points total) that used to serve over the counter of the small village shop (4 points) (Which has now moved into a section of the local Public House). Also the village primary school and nursery (4+4 points) which is now full to capacity and oversubscribed.

There are many other examples of this ‘unweighted’ approach in this small rural village, which has always been a ‘rural cluster’, consisting of approximately 135 residential dwellings.

With regard to being regarded as a *Community Hub* rather than a *Community Cluster*, we are provided with a ‘development boundary’ and a ‘settlement housing guideline’. The development boundary is drawn fairly tightly around the existing development of the village, and we are not sure where 50 dwellings could be accommodated. We have however, noted that Policy SP7.4 says that the market housing outside settlement boundaries will be strictly controlled in line with Policy SP10, and will only be considered potentially acceptable where there is clear evidence that the residential guideline for the settlement appears unlikely to be met over the plan period.

At present, and for many years, Longden has been classified as a *Community Cluster* for which there was no development boundary. Our experience of the manner in which the County Council Officers viewed Longden when we were classified as a Community Cluster, was what they encouraged, and recommended approval for, housing developments that would have significantly expanded the population of the village without any thought about the level of 'services' that exist. Luckily, the Council's Planning Committee at the time, rejected the Officers' advice in each case and refused permission for the developments. That, though, led to the Village Action Group in association with the Parish Council, having to fight three appeals, two of which were public inquiries. All the appeals were dismissed. We are however, concerned that the drawing of a boundary line coupled with a guideline figure of 50 dwellings might lead to further applications for development on the fringes of the village, but outside of the development boundary, and then the Council's Officers might use Policy SP7 to justify significant developments outside of the village and its development boundary, on the very land that was subject to the appeal dismissals of just a few years ago.

In conclusion, the residents of Longden have elected to remain a Cluster because they feel that applying the cluster policy SP8 is best suited to Longden and will enable the village to retain its rural character whilst embracing sustainable levels of growth.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Paul. J. Arnold. Chair, Longden Village Action Group.

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