

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

Submission to Inspectors. Stage 1 Hearing Statement

Longden Parish Council

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”*

Longden Parish Council have repeatedly consulted with residents and have aligned themselves with the Village action group and the majority of residents in opposing the designation of the village of Longden as a hub.

We are very concerned that our detailed and well documented objections to this plan have not been acted upon by Shropshire Council and have not been incorporated into modifications to the plan that would have made this Hub and Cluster approach more flexible and suitable and sustainable for every settlement and which would satisfy NPPF. Designating Longden as a Hub using a very blunt and inflexible *services and facilities* test is wrong and does not adequately and fairly score the amenities/services in the village.

Longden has endeavoured to satisfy the recent SAMDev scheme and nearly 90 properties have been built within the Parish when 50 were expected under SAMDev. Longden village has seen an increase in building and there are at present 135 dwellings. The implementation of this new local plan would increase this by 50 homes a 35% increase! This goes against the SC core strategy objective 3, that seeks to support rural communities by the delivery of local housing-*appropriate to the role, size, and function of each settlement.*

The infrastructure, road links and amenities are such that the present level of housing is close to the limit of capacity for the existing facilities. The road network is inadequate and has not been improved for decades. Visits to primary care services, supermarkets etc involve travel by car through single track roads as there is no suitable direct bus service. This is directly against SP3, sustainability objectives S05,S06 & S012 which seek to minimise car travel and Shropshire Council has no infrastructure plan to support this development. Communities are genuinely concerned that overloading the primitive and inadequate highways will endanger and curtail residents' amenities and rural life.

The Hierarchy of Settlements methodology states that settlements within the hub category are considered to provide a combination of services and facilities including *significant employment opportunities*. Longden Village has very few employment opportunities, the small shop and public house do have some part time employment opportunities, but these are limited. Other than that, there is no employment apart from on the land or working from home! Agriculture is becoming more mechanised, and employment therein is in fact reducing. Surely a major factor in designating a settlement as a hub should be that there are employment opportunities available and that workers should not have to use the already overloaded road network to reach available employment from their dwellings.

At first sight, the Hierarchy of Settlements categories seem very appropriate and suitable for the needs, but the “tests” used to categorise settlements into hubs is far too basic and inflexible and do not show much common sense! To apportion points for facilities is suitable and adequate, but to give the same number of points for massively varying quality of service and facility is blatantly wrong. For example, the library bus usually visits Longden for 10 minutes in the middle of the day every other week. This was given 3 points in the Hierarchy assessment. This is the same number

of points that were given to Pontesbury who have a brick-built library building, fully staffed and open 6 days a week! To align these two facilities equally is completely ridiculous.

Other “tests” Such as the retail outlets where a Post Office gives 3 points and a shop a further 3 points gives Pontesbury six points although there are several shops, a supermarket, butcher, chip shop and a Post Office and a population of 1897! Compared with Longden which has one tiny general store which up until recently was also the Post Office generating a similar 6 points on the Hierarchy listing and a population of 332. These two examples illustrate how completely flawed this Hierarchy of Settlements scoring scheme is. A more flexible and detailed scoring method is needed and an opportunity for common sense to play some part!

Referring to the Post Office in Longden, this a facility that has now ceased trading full time, does that mean that the Hierarchy of Settlement score should be reduced? A method of reviewing the amenities of settlements frequently and modifying their expectation and capability to accept further housing, either increased or reduced, should be built into the Shropshire Plan.

Longden has been given a development boundary close to the existing buildings, with no areas included that might allow future development. This in itself might open the door to developers advancing schemes to meet the housing allocation, but outside the development boundary as there is no scope for development within it! Cross subsidy schemes might also be favoured, and these are comparable as the building of suitable affordable housing outside the development boundary would also allow further open market development. What we do not want is an unplanned and ad hoc approach leading to the highly valued agricultural land around the village that we have fought to preserve, in the future becoming housing estates by the back door.

At present, and for the past 7 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 thus, was that they encouraged, and recommended approval for, housing development 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 Officer's 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 concerned that the drawing of a boundary line coupled with the guideline figure of 50 dwellings might well lead to further applications for development on the fringes of the village but outside the development boundary, and then the Council's Officers might use Policy SP7 to justify significant development outside the village and its new development boundary, on the very land that was subject to the appeal dismissals of just a few years ago.

If Longden were not designated a Hub and no housing guidelines were set then we could accept windfall housing for identified local needs for affordable homes for local people which could be met by the Rural Exception Policies under DP4, DP5 and DP7. This might increase the size of the village, but it could be controlled and would meet the needs of residents.

Paul Carter. Chair Longden Parish Council