

Shropshire Local Plan Review Examination

Stage 2: Matters, Issues and Questions

Matter 2: Development Strategy

Hearing Statement on behalf of the Trustees of the Late Mrs V M Davies

Wednesday 16 October 2024

1.0 Introduction.

1.1 The **ISSUE** raised by the Inspectors in Matter 2 is:

“Whether the Development Strategy is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.”

1.2 This Statement is prepared in order to set out the Trustees (the Representor) position with regard to the **ISSUE** raised by the Inspectors in Matter 2 and a number of policies contained in the Draft Local Plan Review, but most particularly the operation of Policies SP2, SP7 SP8, and SP10. The Trustees’ family owns land in and around Cockshutt, and their concern is with the potential effect that the abovementioned policies would have on Cockshutt village.

1.3 The Inspectors will recall that representations were made by Representor A0511 at the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan process and at the time of the Stage 1 Examination.

1.4 The main concern expressed at the time of the Stage 1 Hearing was not that the policies that related to the identification of villages in the County as Community Hubs and Community Clusters were inappropriate as a general approach to guiding development in the rural area of the County to identified settlements in an attempt to increase the sustainability of the rural area, but rather to register an opposition to the manner in which settlements were actually identified as being designated Community Hubs and Community Clusters, and the implications of those designations for the village communities concerned.

1.5 It is not proposed to simply restate the objections to the system of identifying villages as Hubs or Clusters that was undertaken in Stage 1 of the Examination, as the Inspectors will already be aware of them, but rather to bring the Inspectors up to date

with the changes that have taken place in Cockshutt in the 2-year period since the Stage 1 Hearing. These illustrate that the objections made at the time about the way villages were designated Community Hubs, Clusters or 'countryside' have already been found to be overtaken by events and are now even more pertinent.

- 1.6 A summary of The Trustees' objection was set out in the Stage 1 Hearing Statement, as well as the background to the objection which outlined the size and nature of Cockshutt. The background remains an important consideration.

2.0 Cockshutt Identified as a Community Cluster.

- 2.1 The Inspectors will recall that the manner in which Shropshire Council had identified Cockshutt as being a Community Cluster was based on a scoring system whereby points were awarded for various facilities that existed in the village, and then those villages that scored 48 points or more automatically became Community Hubs. Cockshutt's score of 46 points was calculated on the basis that it did not have a convenience store. On that basis it was classified as a Community Cluster.
- 2.2 At the time of the Stage 1 Hearing the village had a regular bus service, amenity open space and children's play space, an operational public house and a Post Office. It retains those facilities. However, the village now has a convenience store located within the village hall. This would be awarded 4 points in the assessment system.
- 2.3 The points score for Cockshutt, if taken in September 2024 would, then, be increased to 50 points – above the 48 point threshold and the village would, therefore, be automatically classified as a Community Hub rather than a Community Cluster.
- 2.4 The situation demonstrates the inflexibility of the Council's approach to village classifications, as the Council now regards Cockshutt as a Community Cluster and forcing significantly restricts the level of development that may take place in the settlement. Were it now to be recognised as a Community Hub, as its current points score would justify, it would be expected to accept a significant level of new housing development and be provided with a development boundary.

3.0 The Relevant Policies in the Draft Local Plan.

- 3.1 As far as development is concerned, Policy SP2.6: *Strategic Approach*, says that, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of rural communities, appropriate new development will be permitted in Community Hubs and Community Clusters. Clusters are said to "consist of settlements with aspirations to maintain or enhance their sustainability". Outside these settlements new development will be restricted to affordable local needs housing or appropriate rural employment and economic diversification.
- 3.2 The Draft Plan does not explain the process by which Shropshire Council assessed whether or not a settlement has "aspirations to maintain or enhance their sustainability". It may be that the Cockshutt community expressed a desire not to have any aspirations to maintain or enhance the sustainability of the settlement but there is no evidence of that in the Plan. In any event, that does not over-ride the fact

that the current level of facilities in the village, along with its significant existing population, makes it a sustainable settlement, with the facilities appropriate to a Community Hub.

- 3.3 Policy SP7: *Managing Housing Development*, indicates that the Council will give “positive consideration” to sustainable housing development where it does not conflict with the Local Plan policies. The Plan does not make clear what sustainable housing development is but, on the basis that Community Hubs are regarded as sustainable settlements, it would seem that housing in these settlements would be regarded as being sustainable. Development in Community Hubs would probably be regarded as sustainable, whereas development in a Community Cluster may or may not be so regarded.
- 3.4 Policy SP9: *Managing Development in Community Clusters*, says that such settlements are those with “aspirations to maintain or enhance their sustainability through modest levels of appropriate development”. Again, it is not clear how the Council will assess whether a village community has aspirations to maintain or enhance their sustainability, and that could prove difficult in many village situations.
- 3.5 Policy SP10: *Managing Development in the Countryside*, says that Community Hubs and Clusters will be the focus for development in the rural area, supporting the provision of new affordable housing for evidence local needs, and for local employment. It appears, then, that proposals for development outside the development boundary of a Hub or is not infilling development in a Cluster, are likely to be rejected.

4.0 Conclusion.

- 4.1 The Trustees, taking into account the concerns expressed in section 3 above, conclude that the policies that will govern the restriction on development that the Draft Plan suggests for Cockshutt, will not achieve the strategy set out in Policy SP2, and will not deliver sustainable development. Indeed, as it is clear that Cockshutt has been losing facilities over the recent past – it used, for instance to have a petrol station, a free-standing shop which became a fish and chip shop, and two public houses (now just one) and is in need of further development to retain that level of sustainability that it currently enjoys.
- 4.2 Cockshutt, whilst being designated a Community Hub for the life of the Core Strategy and SAMDev Plan, lost its shop. This is possibly because the local Parish Council did not show a willingness to accept anything but very small number of small-scale developments within the body of the village. This resulted in a reduction in the sustainability of the village. But that loss has now been regained.
- 4.3 No evidence or calculations appear to have been advanced in the Draft Plan that would demonstrate that the designation of Cockshutt as a Community Cluster, with the almost certain restriction on the provision of new housing, will lead to a more sustainable future for the village. This being the case it does not appear that the Local Plan will fulfil the requirements set out in Paragraph 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which include (amongst other things),

- i. Being prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development,
- ii. Being shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, etc.....,
- iii. Containing policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, and
- iv. Serving a clear purpose.

None of the above are evident in the policies referred to in Section 3 of this Statement.

5.0 Questions Posed by the Inspectors.

- 5.1 With regard to the specific questions posed by the Inspectors it is not thought that any of the policies in the Plan that are referred to above require alteration as a result of any further work undertaken so far by the Council, or that the issue of accommodating unmet housing need from the Black Country has any implications for the Policies referred to in this Statement.

6.0 Suggested Revisions to the Plan.

- 6.1 The Trustees would like to see,
 - i. The classification of Cockshutt as a Community Cluster reconsidered in the light of the current situation on the village, with a view to its re-designation as a Community Hub, and consideration should be given to the manner in which a reasonable amount of housing and employment development appropriate to its new designation can be accommodated in the Plan.
 - ii. The reconsideration of the policies that relate to housing development and housing in Community Hubs, Community Clusters, and the open countryside, to become much more flexible so as to allow movement between the various identified categories to be easier and more readily responsive to changes that are bound to take place within the Local Plan plan period. In fact to put into operation the aspiration expressed in paragraph 3.38 (explanatory note to Policy SP7) that requires plans to remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances.