

Bridgnorth Town Council

Meeting: Planning Committee Monday 20th March 2023

Agenda item:

Presented by: Counc. D Cooper.

Topic: Shropshire Local Plan Review update – for information.

Background

1. When Shropshire's SAMDev plan was adopted in 2015, it included a commitment on behalf of Shropshire Council to conduct an early review of Shropshire's Local Plan. The review commenced in 2016, and a draft updated Local Plan (covering the period 2016 to 2038) was submitted for Examination in September 2021. The full draft plan can be accessed at: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/21100/sd002-draft-shropshire-local-plan.pdf>
2. Prior to submission, the draft plan had been subject to several rounds of public consultation by Shropshire Council. Most of these were at the "Regulation 18" stage (consultation about what should be in the Plan); in respect of Bridgnorth, this particularly included that Shropshire Council's preference was for a single large development to meet most of the area's housing and employment requirements to 2036 (later extended to 2038). During the course of the Regulation 18 consultations Shropshire Council initially preferred a Green Belt site at Stanmore for a Garden Village development, this was subsequently amended to a preference for a Garden Village development S of the A458 at Tasley.
3. The final formal consultation prior to submission was a "Regulation 19" consultation (about the soundness and legal compliance of the whole draft plan. Bridgnorth Town Council agreed a submission to the Regulation 19 Consultation at its meeting on 26 January 2021; this expressed concern about the soundness of the plan and whether it was legally compliant. Particular aspects of concern were the proposed scale of development around Bridgnorth, infrastructure, and the choice of site. The Town Council's objections can be found at <https://www.bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/66/2021/01/Appendix-A-3.pdf> and <https://www.bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/66/2021/01/part-b-representation-form-1-Legal-Compliance.pdf>
4. The Examination, by 3 Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State, began in November 2021. The purpose of the Examination is to examine the "soundness" and legal compliance of the Plan; Shropshire Council will only be able to adopt the Plan if it is sound and legally compliant. Deficiencies noted during the Examination process may be addressed by modifications: Main Modifications may require additional public consultation.
5. The Examination involves 2 stages of hearings, which are held in public. Stage 1 deals with Shropshire-wide matters relevant to the whole plan and its soundness, Stage 2 will relate to localities and include matters relating to individual sites.
6. During the Stage 1 hearings issues relating to Shropshire's Duty to Co-operate with neighbouring planning authorities were raised, and these resulted in additional hearings taking place in January 2023.

7. The Inspectors have now issued their interim Stage 1 findings; although Hearings are still to be held on matters relating to Minerals and Waste (scheduled for May 2023), the Inspectors have advised that further work needs to be done by the Council, and main modifications proposed, before they will be able to move to the Stage 2 hearings. The text of the Inspectors' interim Stage 1 findings is at <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/25337/id28-inspectors-interim-findings-letter-15-feb-2023.pdf>

Areas of Concern

8. Many of the concerns relate to the calculation of the Local Housing Need for Shropshire and the way in which a proposed provision to meet the anticipated Unmet Housing Needs of the Black Country Authorities of 1500 homes has been reflected in the draft Plan. Similar concerns have been expressed over the employment land requirement and acceptance of a requirement for 30 Ha of employment land to meet needs which the Black Country authorities anticipate not being able to meet within their areas. This cuts across many aspects of the plan e.g.:
 - a. The Sustainability Appraisal of the plan was conducted before the provision for meeting the Black Country needs was included and it should be redone.
 - b. The Council has been invited to reconsider how it calculates Shropshire's own housing needs to align with the plan period to 2038
 - c. There is a specific requirement to reconsider the geographical distribution of development across Shropshire and to identify specifically which sites contribute to meeting the Black Country needs. The Inspectors note that this may require more sites being needed in the parts of Shropshire nearest the Black Country.
 - d. The issue may affect the proposed release of Green Belt land.
 - e. There is likely to be a need to review the plan after adoption in the light of further clarification of Black Country needs as the planning process in those areas progresses.
9. Other areas of concern include:
 - a. The provision of Gypsy & Traveller sites
 - b. Nutrient Neutrality in the River Clun catchment
 - c. The proposed release of the RAF Cosford site from the Green Belt
 - d. Whether there needs to be a specific target for specialist/ older persons' accommodation within the plan
 - e. The deliverability of the proposed Tern Hill Strategic Settlement within the plan period.
 - f. The Infrastructure Plan and funding.
 - g. The detailed wording of some Strategic policies.
10. The Council asked the Inspectors to confirm that it has a 5 year land supply within the plan process, the Inspectors say they are unable to do this as the procedural requirements for doing so have not been met. The Council has subsequently published its 5 year supply statement and asserted that it does have a sufficient supply of land developable over the next 5 years.

Timescale

11. Shropshire Council wrote to the Inspectors on 9 March 2023 indicating that it intended to respond in full to the points raised by 30th June. Should there be any requirement for further consultation, or a need for Bridgnorth Town Council to make submissions to further hearings, what would be required will not be clear until Shropshire Council responds further with details of the Main Modifications it proposes to make.

Recommendation

That the Planning Committee note the Inspectors' interim findings and that this will require a response from Shropshire Council in the form of proposed Main Modifications, and agrees that it will maintain a watching brief pending Shropshire Council's proposed response, with the intention of making recommendations to the full Council about a proposed response to any proposed Main Modifications.