



Committee and Date  
Shropshire Hills AONB  
Partnership

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Item

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Paper

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## DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOMES, CHURCH STRETTON

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### Summary

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has been consulted by South Shropshire District Council on two planning applications for affordable housing outside the development boundary in Church Stretton (an exception site). The first application is for 42 dwellings and the second is for 32. The scale of the proposals is such that both applications will be advertised locally as departures from the Local Plan.

Under the planning protocol, these applications fall into the category of 'exception sites for housing of more than 5 houses'. The protocol states that the AONB Partnership is likely to make a response to such applications and that Partnership members will be consulted. This paper forms the Partnership consultation.

### Background

1. Details of the proposal The site is located on the northern edge of Church Stretton, between Shrewsbury Road and the railway, to the east of the schools and adjacent to existing housing on Churchill Road. The grid reference is SO 457941 (see attached map). Development on the site is to be phased. The first proposal for 42 houses is a full planning application, the second for 32, is an outline application.
2. The first (full) application comprises 19 x two-bed bungalows, 3x one-bed flats, 16x two-bed flats and 4x 2-bed one to two-storey houses. The flats will form part of a central, horseshoe shaped, landmark building which has its open end facing east. The bungalows will be to the west, south and east of this central block and the houses to the north. The central block will be 10m (approx 33 ft) in height; the bungalows will be 6m (approx 19ft) in height. However, the central area of the site will be lowered by 2m to give a final height above the existing ground level of 6.75m (22ft) for the block of flats. By comparison the average lamp post is around 5.5m (18ft) tall.
3. The central block will provide replacement sheltered affordable housing for the residents of Windsor Place in Church Stretton. The bungalows are described as community care accommodation. All housing will be constructed to the Sustainable Homes Code 3 standard (for more information see [http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code\\_for\\_sust\\_homes.pdf](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code_for_sust_homes.pdf)). A mix of materials are proposed, ranging from mellow red facing bricks, pastel rendering,

timber to projecting bays and natural slate or mellow clay roof tiles. Lighting will be low pressure sodium lights affixed to buildings where possible.

4. An area of public open space is included in the full planning application. This will be created along the site's eastern boundary, adjacent to the railway line. It will comprise tree planting, a wetland area to take advantage of existing marshy ground and a small public green for the display of a public art feature. The applicants, South Shropshire Housing Association will prepare a landscape management plan for this area, to be implemented by their partners, First Response. An extension to the adjacent school playing fields within the north-western corner of the site will provide play and amenity space.
5. Access and drainage requirements are included in the full planning application. Entry to the site will be from the south, via Lawley Close. Surface water runoff will be collected using a gravity system and either harvested for re-use in the central block, discharged via a soakaway in the north west corner of the site or discharged to the wetland area. Foul water will be discharged by gravity to the public foul sewer in Lawley Close.
6. The full application is accompanied by a conceptual landscaping scheme showing structural planting around the site boundaries and internal areas of tree planting. The final species mix will be agreed between South Shropshire District Council and the applicant as part of any planning conditions. The landscaping and open space schemes will be implemented in the first phase of development.
7. The outline application is for 7x 2-bed houses, 20 x 3 bed-houses and 7x 4-bed houses with a mix of 1½, 2 ½ and 3 storey properties. These will be located to the east of the first phase, partly on the steeply sloping land facing the railway. More details will be submitted in a later application.
8. Site Description The site comprises 4 fields and forms an area of locally high ground to the north of existing bungalows. Two areas of steeply sloping land are a notable feature within the site. These fall away from a central high area in an east and north-easterly direction towards the railway – the lowest part of the site. The difference in height is approximately 8 metres and the gradient of the steepest slope is around 1 in 3. The gradients north, west and south from the middle of the site are much gentler (a fall of 4 metres over around twice the distance) but in nearly all instances, the surrounding boundaries are at a lower level than the site itself.
9. Livestock grazing is the current land use and hedges form the external and internal field. These are all in poor condition. The northern boundary hedge has been identified as having some ecological value. There are no public footpaths either on the site or in the vicinity.
10. The site is prominent in the local landscape and there are good views from it towards the railway and A49 in the east in particular and to the surrounding hills and parts of the town in general. Views of the site from the north are interrupted by trees, but from the A49 and railway, although filtered by hedges and trees, the site is obvious. Existing housing obstructs immediate views of the site from the south and west. Long distance views from the slopes and tops of the surrounding

hills will be available from various points, depending on local tree cover, but from these, the site is likely to be read as part of the settlement.

11. These applications have the potential to affect the following features of the Shropshire Hills AONB landscape:
  - Landscape character
  - Visual amenity
12. Impact on landscape character The character of the Shropshire Hills landscape - the sense of place and pattern of the landscape - is nationally valued. Changes to this character arising from planning proposals should be assessed to determine their significance.
13. The site is a locally prominent landscape feature in the AONB. Its character is defined by its dome-shaped topography which gives it an unexpectedly elevated feel within the valley base. Because of this, there are good views away from the site and towards it from the east in particular. To the south of the site, the bungalows on Churchill road appear to be almost dug into the slopes of the site and are well concealed in the local area. To the west, north and east of the site, the landscape has an agricultural feel, notwithstanding the railway, A49 and school playing fields.
14. A housing development on the site will introduce a man-made element into the landscape which will detract from this character. Although this is the case for almost all new development, this effect can be mitigated by screening with planting. In this instance, the combination of the buildings on the higher ground and steep slopes of the site, with proposals for planting at lower levels (the site boundaries and adjacent to the railway line) mean that at best, only partial screening is likely. This development will thus appear unusually prominent in the local area and will be at odds with the pattern of the immediate landscape. In addition, the screening function for the edge of Church Stretton that the site currently performs will be lost. Both these effects will have an adverse effect on the landscape character of this part of the AONB.
15. Visual amenity is a measure of the visual quality of an area as experienced by people. It is one among a range of considerations of a planning proposal in relation to the AONB and includes the effect on views within the AONB and to an extent, views into and out of the designated area. For the purposes of assessing the impact of a development proposal in the Shropshire Hills the following factors are taken into account:
  - The visibility of the development - with the assumption that the more visible the proposal, the greater the adverse effect.
  - The number of places from where the development is likely to be seen - with the assumption that the more view points there are, the greater the adverse impact
  - The number of people (both visitors and residents) who are likely to be able to see the development - with the assumption that again, the higher the number the greater the adverse effect.

16. The local prominence of the site is most pronounced when viewed from ground level. The height of the central block, positioned as it is on almost the highest area and even with a reduction of ground levels, will create a highly visible feature – indeed it is described as a ‘landmark’ building in the planning application. The second development phase, with 1½ to 3 storey houses on the steeper slopes facing the railway is likely to be very obvious when viewed from the A49 and the railway.
17. Ground level views of the development are likely from both the A49, the railway and to a lesser extent from the B5477. Views may be fleeting due to traffic and train speeds and in summer they are likely to be filtered at a lower level by existing hedges and trees- and in the case of the B5477, by buildings. However, the large numbers of people using the A49 and railway corridors (the A49 carries an average of 1,000 vehicles per hour) means that the proposal will be seen by a proportionately greater number of people. This proposal is thus likely to have a significant adverse impact on the visual amenity of the AONB.
18. **Policy background, AONB Position Statements and Government Policy**  
This application must be determined within a framework comprising policies from the Regional Spatial Strategy, Local Plan and any Supplementary Planning Guidance. The AONBs response to South Shropshire’s consultation on this Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance is also relevant.
19. The Regional Spatial Strategy  
**Policy QE1** deals with conserving and enhancing the environment and states that that (with emphasis of particularly relevant sections added in bold);  
*A. Environmental improvement is a key component of the Spatial Strategy in order to underpin the overall quality of life of all areas and support wider economic and social objectives.*  
*B. Local authorities and other agencies in their plans, policies and proposals should:*
- i) *support regeneration, by restoring degraded areas, conserving existing environmental assets, including the reuse of redundant and under-used buildings of merit, and creating new, high quality, built and natural environments, particularly within the Major Urban Areas;*
  - ii) **conserve and enhance those areas of the Region**, where exceptional qualities should be reinforced by sustainable use and management, **including the Peak National Park, the five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, the European wildlife sites, and the World Heritage Site (see Environmental Assets Diagram);
  - iii) *protect and where possible enhance other irreplaceable assets and those of a limited or declining quantity, which are of fundamental importance to the Region’s overall environmental quality, such as specific wildlife habitats (Annex B), historic landscape features and built heritage, river environments and groundwater aquifers;*
  - iv) *protect and enhance the distinctive character of different parts of the Region as recognised by the natural and character areas (Figure 4) and associated local landscape character assessments, and through historic landscape characterisation.*

*C. In bringing forward development, all agencies and developers should adopt high standards for sustainable natural resource use and management in line with policies such as QE3, QE9, EN1-2 and M3.*

20. 5.2 South Shropshire Local Plan and Interim Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance.

**Policy E1** deals with development affecting the AONB and states that;  
*Proposals for development will not be permitted which would adversely affect:*

- ***the character or natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to achieve the highest level of protection.***
- *the scenic quality and distinctive character of the South Shropshire Landscape outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;*
- *the character and appearance and setting of the District's historic parks or gardens of special historic or ecological interest.*

*In determining planning applications in the countryside the Council will have regard to:*

- *the suitability of the design, the quality of the proposal and the appropriate use of materials.*

**Policy SDS3 Settlement Strategy**

*Most new housing development will take place on appropriate sites within the development boundaries or specifically identified in policy S1 of the following towns and main villages in South Shropshire:•*

- *Craven Arms will be the principal centre for growth;*
- *Bishop's Castle, Burford, **Church Stretton**, Cleobury Mortimer and Ludlow will provide opportunities for more limited growth.*

*Within the settlements of Bucknell, Clee Hill and Clun infill housing development will be permitted within the settlement boundaries shown on the inset maps, of a scale which is in keeping with the character of the settlement.*

**Policy SDS7** covers affordable housing. The first part deals with affordable housing as part of market priced housing developments and states that:

*Affordable Housing will be provided throughout the District, through ..... 'Dwellings provided on new housing developments in other settlements listed under policies SDS3 irrespective of the number of houses proposed, where the need for affordable housing can be demonstrated by an up-to-date local needs survey. In these cases as well as in Church Stretton and Ludlow, the Council will negotiate for 50% of the development for affordable housing.*

The second part deals with exception sites such as this. It states that:

***Outside the towns and main villages listed in Policy SDS3***, affordable housing may be permitted on **small sites** not identified for development in the Plan (including building conversions) within and adjoining the villages named below provided that:

- *The development meets an identified local need as evidenced by an up-to-date local housing needs study; •*
- *It is subject to an agreement which ensures that it remains as affordable housing for local people in perpetuity;*
- ***It is in scale*** and character with the settlement it is located in;

### **Interim Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance.**

Section 6 of this document covers exception sites. It states that:

*Affordable housing proposals must comply with the criteria set out below:*

- *It meets identified local need, including the need of creating and or maintaining sustainable communities.*
- *It remains affordable in perpetuity and a Section 106 Agreement (Planning obligation) is entered into, ensuring that the affordable housing remains as such in perpetuity.*
- *It is within or adjoining a settlement, identified in the Adopted local Plan as amended (see Appendix C).*
- *The housing will provide an affordable housing solution to the persons who will occupy it.*
- *The persons to occupy each dwelling meet the definitions of 'local housing need' set out in Appendix B below.*
- ***The scale of any development under this policy must reflect the scale of the settlement in which it is proposed.***
- *There is general support in the local community for the proposal but identified local need must prevail over local objections.*
- *The relevant siting, access, servicing and design requirements of the Local Plan are met.*

The AONB Partnership's response to South Shropshire's consultation on their Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable housing states that:

*'Though the issue of affordable housing is not unique to the Shropshire Hills or to AONBs, we recognise that the issue is fundamentally connected with the AONB. The natural beauty of the area and the strict protection of it through planning both contribute directly to the affordability problem. While the AONB's purpose is principally to conserve and enhance natural beauty, the purposes of designation include a requirement take account of the economic and social needs of local communities, and we are particularly mindful of this requirement in our response to this consultation. The purposes of AONBs also support a sustainable development approach. In this **we recognise that vibrant and sustainable communities are an integral part of the countryside of the AONB. It is not intended or desirable that the existence of natural beauty and its protection have serious social consequences, and efforts to mitigate these are therefore supported.**'*

*.....'It may be deduced that the majority of new (market priced as well as affordable) housing will be provided outside the AONB. This would seem justified since although the AONB comprises around 67% of the total area of South Shropshire District, **only 39% of the District's population live within the AONB** (15,628 in the AONB within South Shropshire, of 40,410 in the District as a whole).'*

*'Though the adopted Local Plan has a general policy on the AONB, we would suggest that the housing policies in the guidance should **distinguish between those settlements identified for housing which are within the AONB and those which are not, and apply more rigorous standards in terms of scale, siting and design to those within. This applies especially to Church Stretton as the only town within the AONB.**'*

## 21. Summary of evaluation

The height of this development and its positioning on a locally prominent mound in the Church Stretton Valley mean that this proposal will have a significant adverse effect on visual amenity and an adverse effect on landscape character. Such effects are contrary to policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Local Plan.

At the same time, it must be noted that the AONB designation is not intended to have serious social consequences. In principle, the Partnership supports the provision of affordable housing within the AONB provided that this is in proportion to the population of the area and that rigorous standards of scale, siting and design are applied. The issue of proportion is addressed in the Local Plan and the discrepancy between these proposals and current policy is recognised in the advertisement of these applications as a departure.

## Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to endorse an objection to this planning application, on the grounds of an adverse effect on the character and natural beauty or the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

<b>List of Background Papers</b> Planning applications 1/08/20328/F and 1/08/20327/O, available for public inspection from South Shropshire District Council.
<b>Human Rights Act Appraisal</b> The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
<b>Environmental Appraisal</b> The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
<b>Risk Management Appraisal</b> Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
<b>Community / Consultations Appraisal</b> The content of this paper has been informed by discussion among some members of the AONB Partnership and Team.
<b>Appendices</b> Appendix 1 Map of proposed development