Consultation Document for the Bridgnorth Settlement

1 Summary

An independent Steering Group, formed with the support of local organisations and parish councils, has been asked to consider issues facing the town and to develop a plan for the settlement. As a first step, it has considered some of the more significant issues, with long-term implications. These are discussed in this Consultation Document, which is being published prior to consultation being carried out in late 2019 and early 2020. Our initial observations are that:

- Existing local infrastructure, transport links, public facilities and services are not capable of supporting much growth in population and business activity without significant investment. No such new investment has been proposed by Shropshire Council or other authorities to date.
- Over time, many local services have been relocated from Bridgnorth to other towns, forcing residents to travel to access them, whilst public transport provision has been reduced over the same period.
- We support Shropshire Council's policy of balanced growth, with at least one local job being created for each new dwelling built and would wish to avoid Bridgnorth becoming even more of a dormitory town, with people commuting some distance to work.
- We have not found any evidence that the development of additional commercial and industrial sites will automatically attract new business into Bridgnorth. From a business perspective, locations such as Telford or Wolverhampton offer better locations for many businesses. In addition, it appears that a significant percentage of Bridgnorth's existing commercial sites are currently vacant.

Our tentative recommendations for supporting the local economy are that:

- The hospitality, retail and tourism sector, which provides about a third of local jobs, should continue to be invested in and supported. Our focus should be to ensure that visiting and shopping in the town is a **destination experience**.
- Employment growth should also be sought in a range of business sectors, but especially in those that require modern office facilities, which are less reliant on good road connections and can employ skilled local people. Some of this development could be located in existing buildings close to the centre of town.

We present three scenarios for future growth for the town, ranging from continued growth at the current rate through to a period of fairly rapid expansion as envisaged in Shropshire Council's proposals under the Local Plan Review [1]. We will be seeking your views as to which of these options would be best for the community during subsequent consultation.

Note 1: This document has been produced by the Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group. It has not yet been approved by any of the local parish councils or supporting organisations, and does not imply their agreement with any of its content.

Note 2: This document is being issued for consultation purposes. Information in it has been collated from a range of sources, but cannot be guaranteed to be accurate. Indeed, some sources conflict with each other. One of the aims of the consultation is to allow the facts to be verified. Please let us know of any errors that you find.

2 Introduction

A Bridgnorth Plan is being developed, under the guidance of an independent Steering Group, formed with the support of a number of organisations and individuals in and around the town. The Plan is a revision of the previous Bridgnorth Town Plan. It will be completed during 2020 and will cover the settlement consisting of Bridgnorth and adjacent parishes.

It is intended to produce the revised plan in three phases:

1 Production of this Consultation Document, which summarises the main issues facing the town and potential solutions, and will form the basis for consultation.

2 Consultation with residents and local businesses. This will be through a combination of community meetings and an on-line survey, between November 2019 and early 2020. This will provide information to allow organisations and individuals to respond to stage 4 of Shropshire Council's Local Plan Review.

3 Completion of the Bridgnorth Plan during 2020, with further consultation on additional issues facing the town.

This Consultation Document has been produced fairly quickly by volunteers from across the Bridgnorth settlement, who represent a wide range of interests. It raises issues facing the town and surrounding area and presents a number of alternatives and potential solutions. We have avoided, where possible, coming to final conclusions so that residents and businesses can comment and make suggestions during the consultation phase.

The Bridgnorth Plan could be taken forward to become a Neighbourhood Plan. This would carry significant costs and require external examination. No decision has been taken as to whether to do this.

3 Bridgnorth

Bridgnorth is a prosperous, rural market town to the west of the Midlands conurbation. It is a historic market town with interesting topography, quirky travel systems, narrow streets, and numerous listed buildings, all of which help to attract tourists. Its High Street remains fairly vibrant, partly due to tourism. As in other towns, there has been some increase in the proportion of service companies, including hairdressers, betting shops and charity shops.

The town has little or no unemployment and has skill shortages in some sectors. However, over half of the working population commutes to work outside the town, the two most popular workplaces being Telford and Wolverhampton.

Public services have been gradually withdrawn from the town over the last thirty years, since Bridgnorth District Council was disbanded. Much responsibility for local governance, and the associated employment, has been moved to Shrewsbury. The old council offices, at Westgate, have been closed and planning permission has been granted for the site to be used for housing. The Further Education college closed and has been replaced by a supermarket. Young people increasingly need to travel to neighbouring towns for ongoing education, with many choosing to do so for their sixth form.

Industrial sites that were within the town have gradually become disused, with companies in the electronics and carpet manufacturing industries closing many years ago. The sites have all be replaced by housing. There are very few remaining brownfield sites available for development, with most new development being on small vacant pieces of land or in back gardens. The majority of any new development is already planned to be on greenfield sites.

The road network around Bridgnorth, leading to adjacent settlements, consists of A-roads that are already close to their capacities, especially at peak times. There have been no improvements to the road network since the bypass was built in the early 1980s. Both

Shropshire Council's Economic Growth Strategy [2] and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Transport Strategy [3] make no allowance for any significant improvement to the road network around Bridgnorth, proposing that the East-West and North-South transport corridors in the county, shown in Figure 1, should be enhanced. Bridgnorth is not identified as an 'opportunity town' by the LEP.

4 Sustainability and the environment

The UK Government, Shropshire Council and Bridgnorth Town Council have all recognised that a Climate Emergency exists. Steps must be taken to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and any new development must be, or be capable of becoming by 2030 at the very latest, net carbon neutral. Other pollutants, including particulates, volatile organic compounds, and ammonia, must be controlled. In addition, any changes or development should promote biodiversity and provide for wildlife corridors. Emissions from vehicles are considered in section 8.

5 Economy and Business

We consider this first, as it sets the scene for the subsequent sections, and for the section on the future growth of the town in particular.

Bridgnorth has a few large employers, a large number of smaller employers, a relatively vibrant town centre with a range of retail and service businesses, and a good day-time tourist and hospitality sector. It provides services to a large rural hinterland. The town has a number of approved employment sites able to support light-to-medium engineering facilities and service businesses. It has a shortage of modern office space capable of attracting companies operating in, for example, design, IT, professional services or finance.

In addition, as discussed above, it is not located close to good transport links and is therefore not a favoured location for distribution premises or companies handling quantities of materials or products. Both Telford and Wolverhampton have better logistical links and an abundance of commercial land available and buildings to rent, as well as brownfield sites available for development.

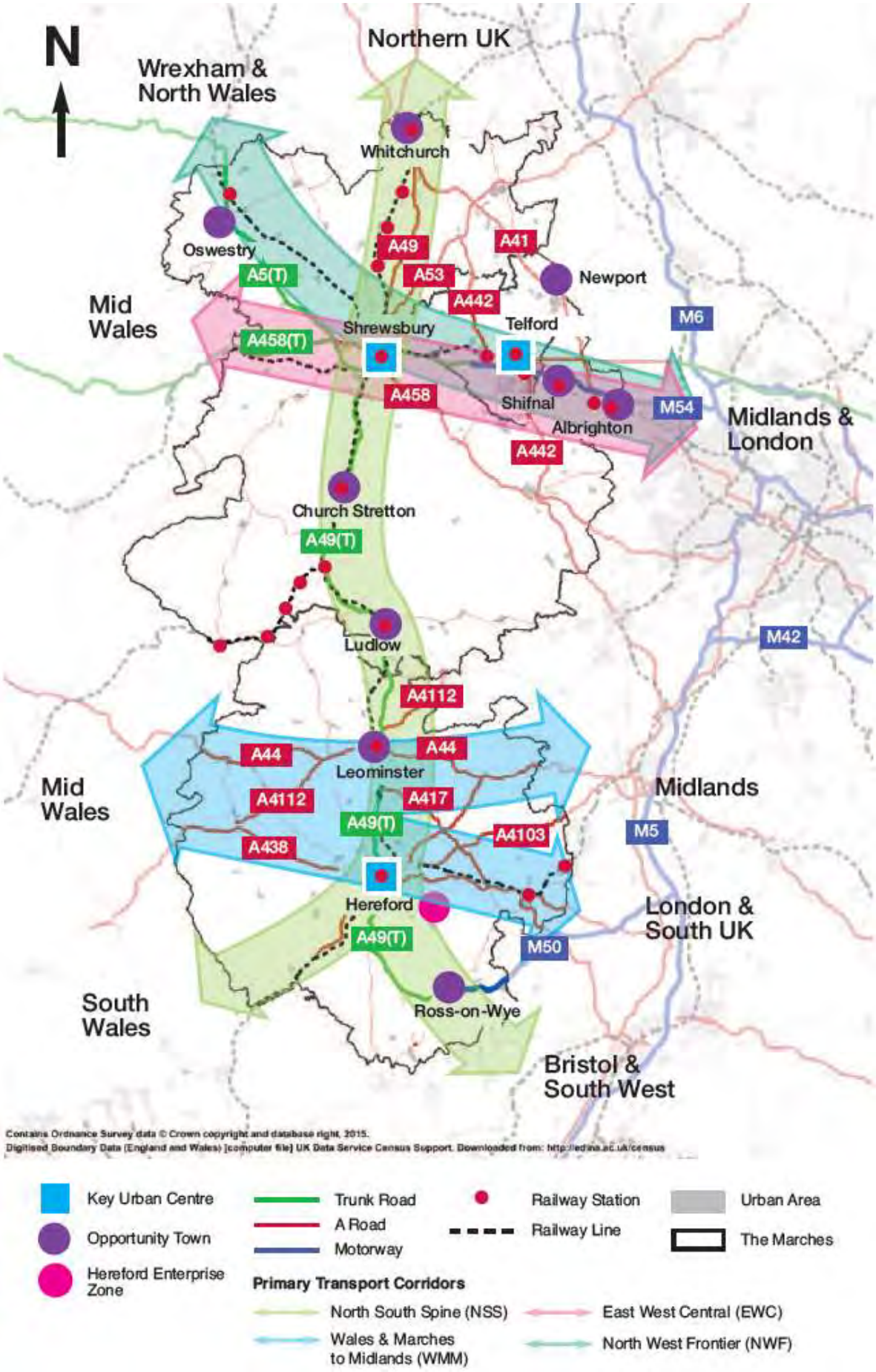

Figure 1: Transport corridors and opportunity towns proposed by the Marches LEP

5.1.1 Current population and employment

According to the 2011 census there were about 12,300 people living in the Bridgnorth settlement with about 5,900 of them being economically active. 11.6% of the population in Bridgnorth were self-employed and 4.2% worked from home. We estimate that there are about 13,000 people living in the settlement in 2019.

The approximate distribution of employment between sectors in 2017 is shown in Table 1.

Sector	Bridg-north	Shrop-shire
Retail, wholesale, accommodation and entertainment	34%	28%
Manufacturing, construction, motor trades and transport	26%	24%
Finance, business admin, IT, property, professional & technical	18%	16%
Health, education and public administration	19%	29%
Agriculture, fishing, quarrying and utilities	2%	2%

Table 1: Estimated distribution of employment between sectors in 2017 [4]

Employment in retail, hospitality and tourism is about one third of the total, which is a higher proportion that in the whole of Shropshire. It clearly contributes a lot to the economy of Bridgnorth, but is not the only sector that requires support and can contribute to prosperity.

Employment in manufacturing, construction, engineering and transport is about one quarter of the total. Professional and technical services account for a further 1/5 of the total. Both proportions are about the same as for the whole of Shropshire.

Employment in health, education and public administration has moved from Bridgnorth (presumably to Shrewsbury and Telford) since Bridgnorth District Council was disbanded and the Further Education college was closed. Employment in these sectors is now far lower than in the rest of Shropshire.

The remaining 2% of employment is in agriculture, extractive industries and utilities. However, some of the professional and technical services in the town will serve this sector.

5.1.2 Strategic issues affecting the need for employment land

The following strategic issues affect the need for additional employment land and for it to be successfully developed to provide more local employment:

- **Attractiveness to business.** Many firms, particularly those related to logistics and the handling and processing of physical goods, choose to locate close to the major transport network. As already discussed, there are no plans for a major investment in the road network to and from Bridgnorth. All the firms we have met with to date have indicated that they would not choose to locate in Bridgnorth. Other requirements include the provision of a more reliable electricity supply and high bandwidth internet connections.
- **Availability of appropriate sites.** There is a reasonable amount of existing space available for businesses to rent and already approved for development as employment land. However, any further development around Bridgnorth, beyond the existing estates, will have to be on greenfield sites. Whilst supporting an appropriate amount of development around Bridgnorth, we consider that preference should be given to the development of employment land on brownfield and existing sites in and around, for example, Telford and Wolverhampton.

5.1.3 Manufacturing, engineering, construction etc.

These sectors require premises to carry out operations and for storage. This will usually be located on an area designated for planning purposes as employment land. A number of large manufacturing companies are located in the Bridgnorth settlement, along with a large number of smaller engineering, construction and support services companies.

We believe that their main needs are for skilled staff, appropriate premises, good transport links, and provision of the necessary utilities (including energy and communications). The requirement for premises and the quality of transport links are discussed in separate sections below. A working group on Education and Skills has been formed and this will consider skills-related issues over the next 12 months.

There is always a limited demand for starter units for local people who wish to go into business on their own. We should continue to support small entrepreneurial light industrial units.

5.1.4 Office-based businesses

As they are least reliant on good transport links, we consider that office-based businesses are most likely to locate and thrive in Bridgnorth. We therefore tentatively recommend that emphasis should be given to providing modern office premises, with excellent telecommunications links, aimed at the digital economy, and related technology and service businesses. Rather that targeting specific industry sectors, we recommend providing modern and attractive facilities, with good parking, that can serve a wide range or office-based business sectors.

Opportunities that should be explored include the provision of purpose-built innovation facilities for design and development companies and rented office space (such as that at Lasyard House and offered by Regus elsewhere in the UK). Rented space would allow people living in Bridgnorth, but commuting to work elsewhere (in Birmingham for example) to work from an office in Bridgnorth for some of the week, thereby reducing commuting traffic whilst potentially reducing their employer's office costs.

We also note that the density of jobs (per hectare) is higher for office-based jobs than for other types of employment. As discussed below, this can reduce the amount of greenfield land required to support a given level of employment.

In addition, we might expect knowledge-based companies to create employment opportunities for higher-skilled, higher-paid, and often younger individuals. This could help Bridgnorth rebalance its demographic profile.

5.1.5 Retail, hospitality and tourism

As we have seen, retail, hospitality and tourism account for about one third of local jobs and are responsible for much of the town centre's vibrancy, avoiding the depressing effect of a boarded-up town centre. We recommend that all reasonable efforts should be made to encourage tourism into the town and investment be made in the required supporting infrastructure and amenities, whilst maintaining consideration for local residents.

High street retailing is under pressure from internet sales everywhere. The trend is for shopping to become an **experience** and this should be a strategic driver for retail in the town. This would be helped by ensuring that a range of shops are present and by making the town even more attractive to visitors.

The following issues, which will be consulted on, have been raised in discussions to date and many were raised in the previous town plan:

- How can the town adopt a "unified marketing strategy"? This could build on the previous success on the Great British High Street.
- How can the historic aspects of the town be promoted even more? There is concern that the town is looking increasingly shabby and uncared for, with litter, weeds and unrepaired street furniture. Litter is a problem, especially on Friday and Saturday nights, after the market. It often remains uncleared, especially from the car parks, on Saturday mornings.
- How can the High Street be made more attractive to visitors and pedestrians? One option is to aim for "safe, clean and tidy". This is discussed below in the section on the town centre.
- How can more retailers be attracted to town and existing ones supported? Business rates and rents are both issues. How can landlords be encouraged to upgrade premises, both externally and internally, to further improve the appearance of the town, to ensure premises are suitable for a range of retail uses and to make visiting the town an experience?
- A close working relation with Shropshire Council is vital. Business rates all go to central government and Shropshire Council. Could some be ring-fenced for use in Bridgnorth, to provide services that Shropshire Council are responsible for? The Town Council is funded by its precept on residents, not from business rates, but it does provide some support for business and tourism.
- On which days of the week do businesses do most of their trade? For many, this is on Saturdays, when there is the greatest shortage of parking space. However, other businesses do most trade during the week.
- How can the operation of the market be reviewed and improved? This is not an easy task in Bridgnorth, as no organisation[1] is responsible for the operation of the market, for historical reasons.
- Should businesses in the town centre consider implementing a Business Improvement District (BID)? (See https://britishbids.info.) Repayable loan funding is available and Shropshire Council should be asked for support. Alternatively, how could a 'High Street Manager' be funded?
- Some events are perceived to bring people to the town who spend in the shops. Others attract visitors who use hospitality businesses but spend less in other shops. Which events provide most benefit to the town?
- There is concern about the level of theft and unruly behaviour in the town centre. More visible policing is needed and better coordination with the CCTV system and with the shop watch and pub watch schemes. The police are keen to work with the community.

5.1.6 Proposals for the town centre

Issues and possible options for the town centre, on which we will consult, include:

- The majority view appears to be that the High Street should not be fully pedestrianised. It could be reconfigured in the 'Dutch' style, with less distinction between roads and pavements. Access for (increasingly low emission) vehicles would continue, with short-

[1] Neither the Town Council nor Shropshire Council have authority over the market.

stay parking and access for residents. We will consult on whether traffic access (except for residents) could be suspended on Saturdays.

- The provision of car parking close to the centre is critical to the commercial health of the town. Space lost to the proposed development on Smithfield should be replaced. Possible ways of providing such parking space are presented in section 8.4.
- A park and ride scheme is not considered the best means of providing additional parking for Bridgnorth, but may serve as a back-up option for the busiest periods and possibly to provide parking for people employed in the centre. It. If needed, funding should be sought from Shropshire Council, which we believe supports schemes in other market towns.
- Congestion in the High Street is increased by traffic using it as a through route from Northgate and Whitburn Street to Low Town, via New Road. Removing this flow of traffic would considerably enhance the High Street. In the long term, this might be addressed by providing new routes (see section 8.3). This would make the High Street far more attractive to visitors and shoppers whilst still allowing people to park briefly to shop and giving residents access. However, we acknowledge the potentially high capital cost. If (and only if) an alternative route were provided, the road to the side of the Town Hall could be closed to most (or all) traffic. The areas to the north and south of the Town Hall would be configured as short-stay car parking, subject to confirming feasibility.
- Stationary delivery vehicles cause congestion and pollution, with most premises having no rear access. One option would be to restrict allowed delivery hours, as occurs in many other towns. We also suggest that a central delivery point be considered, with deliveries to properties in the central area being made by local electric vehicles.

6 How much future growth?

There is no ‘correct’ level of growth for the Bridgnorth area, and we will be seeking your views during the consultation phase. This section provides relevant information on which to base any decision.

Some development around Bridgnorth will be required to meet local housing need and to provide for appropriate business growth. Additional housing could also be provided to meet demand across a wider area around Bridgnorth. However, development should meet, wherever possible, the following policies and guidelines:

- Development on brownfield sites should take priority and greenfield sites should only be developed if there is no reasonable alternative. Given the lack of brownfield sites around Bridgnorth, any additional development around the town will have to occur on greenfield sites. Priority should be given to developing brownfield sites in neighbouring towns.
- Development on the Green Belt should only be allowed under exceptional circumstances. Shropshire Council states that it will provide justification for such exceptional circumstances for land around Stanmore and the Hobbins and we assume that this will be required as part of the Local Plan Review.
- Any land that is not within the development boundary is not approved for development. Any subsequent extension (after the current Local Plan Review) of the development boundary onto greenfield land will have to be fully justified
- Development should make use of existing infrastructure, where possible. For example, logistics companies usually wish to locate close to major transport corridors.
- Development should be balanced, as defined by Shropshire Council, with any new housing matched by the provision of local jobs.

6.1 Housing need

This section assesses how housing need in Bridgnorth might grow over the period to 2036. Three growth options are presented so that you can understand the implications and express your view on which is preferable and why.

6.1.1 Forecast housing growth for the Shropshire Council area

Figure 2 shows three forecasts of the increase in the number of dwellings in the area covered by Shropshire Council[2], starting in 2016 when there were about 135,500 dwellings in the area.

1. Central government provides a guideline for Shropshire Council to achieve a specified level of housing growth, following the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This is based on a forecast from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to produce the forecast, as shown by the curve marked "Shropshire ONS".
2. Shropshire Council choose to start from a Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need (FOAHN) and include an adjustment to allow for more affordable housing. This results in the forecast shown by the curve "FOAHN 2017". Another reason why this forecast is larger than the ONS forecast is that it is extrapolated linearly from an early 10 years, and does not allow for any reduction in the rate of growth.
3. Shropshire Council than make some additional allowances, including adding a 'safety margin' to allow for some houses not being completed to schedule. This increases the planned requirement by a further 11%, to give the curve "SC Prediction". Note that this is significantly higher than the ONS growth forecast.

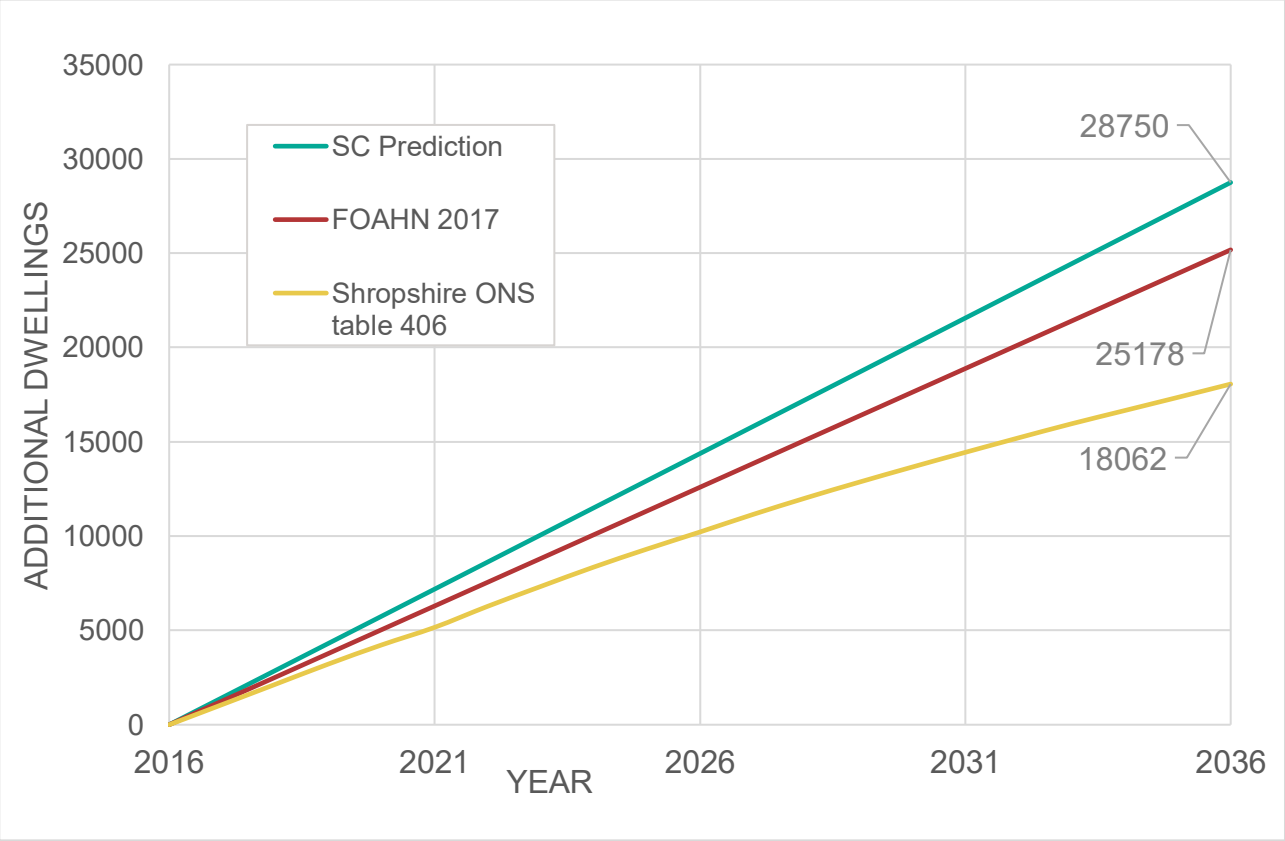

Figure 2: Projected increase in the number of dwellings in Shropshire

[2] For simplicity, "the area covered by Shropshire Council" is referred to as "Shropshire" in the remainder of this document, even though it does not cover the whole of the county of Shropshire.

These three forecasts illustrate how a wide range of different forecasts for the housing requirement for Shropshire can be produced and the uncertainty in any such forecast. We now consider how many of these additional dwellings might be located in the Bridgnorth settlement.

6.1.2 Housing need for the Bridgnorth settlement

We now present 3 options for the number of additional dwellings that may be required in the Bridgnorth settlement, through to 2036. The options considered are:

1. Based on the current Local Plan up to 2026, with the addition of the growth forecast by the ONS through to 2036.
2. A forecast up to 2026, made by Bridgnorth District Council in 2006, extrapolated to 2036.
3. The proposed housing requirement in Shropshire Council's Local Plan Review, currently under consultation.

Table 2 gives estimates and forecasts of the population of the Bridgnorth settlement (not just Bridgnorth parish) for the period from 2006 to 2036, along with estimates of the number of dwellings in the town. The forecast for 2026 is based on the current Local Plan. For 2036, forecasts are given for each of the three options listed above.

	2006	**2011**	**2016**	**2019**	**2026**	**2036: options**		
						1	**2**	**3**
Population	11,466	12,300	12,900	12,999	14,400	14,757	15,168	16,200
Dwellings	5,500	5,900	6,200	6,245	6,900	7,044	7,231	7,700

Table 2: Population of and number of dwellings in Bridgnorth

The Local Plan Review proposal (Option 3) forecasts an additional 656 dwellings and 1,443 people, compared to the extrapolation of the current Local Plan (Option 1).

We will consult on which of these rates of growth is appropriate for Bridgnorth, whether Bridgnorth is the correct location in which to construct the higher number of new dwellings, and on where in the Bridgnorth settlement any new dwellings should be built.

Table 3 gives a breakdown of the number of dwellings to be built for each option over time.

Option	SAMDev dwellings 2006-2026	Dwellings built 2006-2019	Dwellings to build 2019-2036	Total new dwellings 2006-2036	Dwellings above SAMDev	Dwellings per annum 2019-2036
1	1400	745 (57 / year)	799	1,544	144	47
2			986	1,731	331	58
3			1,455	2,200	800	86

Table 3: Forecast for the number of additional dwellings around Bridgnorth

Between 2006 to 2019, 745 new dwellings were completed, at a rate of 57 per year. Option 2 would see construction continue at about the same rate through to 2036. Option 1 would see the rate of build slow down, whereas Option 3 would see it increase significantly.

Note that there has been a slowdown in the rate at which houses were being completed in Bridgnorth, whilst the estate of a local landowner is settled. It is expected that building in the area already approved for development, under the current Local Plan (SAMDev), will proceed in the near future.

The growth in Bridgnorth proposed in the Local Plan Review appears to be based on a somewhat arbitrary allocation of a proportion of the total number of dwellings required for Shropshire. There has been no separate housing need's analysis for Bridgnorth. The allocation is higher than that envisaged by Bridgnorth District Council, before the move to a unitary authority. It also appears that the Local Plan Review proposal for Bridgnorth is high because the target for the whole of Shropshire includes a 'failure to deliver' safety margin and a full affordability uplift has been applied, as discussed above.

Factors that should influence any decision on how much housing to build include:

- Provision of funding to provide the necessary infrastructure. The infrastructure required is discussed below. This is a critical issue that was raised in many of the responses submitted to phase 3 of the Local Plan Review.
- The Local Plan Review does not allow for the potential construction of about 2,750 additional dwellings on three 'strategic sites' in the county. Shropshire Council has recently consulted on these sites [5]. If these developments proceed, we consider that the dwellings should contribute to the number required in Shropshire. This would reduce the requirement in all Principal Towns, but especially in Bridgnorth as many of the dwellings will be located relatively nearby. Just 650 of these dwellings would meet the difference between the high- and low-growth options presented above.
- Are there exceptional circumstances to justify development on the Green Belt?
- Does local need justify development on other greenfield sites around Bridgnorth?

6.2 Employment land[3]

As already noted, a number of industrial areas in Bridgnorth have been developed for housing over the last fifty years. The Local Plan Review suggests that there is currently an "imbalance between housing and employment" in Bridgnorth. A reasonable aspiration would be for enough new employment to be generated around the town for it to continue to thrive and for it not to become more of a commuter town, whilst not having an undue impact on the local countryside. We will consult on this.

This section considers issues affecting the demand for and provision of additional employment land around Bridgnorth.

6.2.1 Evidence of demand for employment land

It is difficult to determine the demand for business space around Bridgnorth and we will be seeking more evidence during the consultation phase. For now, we note that:

- Our business contacts have all indicated a preference to locate in towns close to the major transport network, where development sites (often brownfield sites) are available.
- None of the existing larger employers is willing to state publicly that they are looking to expand in Bridgnorth.
- A number of companies have recently announced redundancies within the settlement.
- There appears to be a significant quantity (3,500 sq. m. or more) of business space currently available to let.
- There has been no progress in developing the area allocated to employment land around Tasley in the current Local Plan, which would tend to indicate a lack of demand.

[3] 'Employment land' is land used for business and industrial development.

Given clear evidence of demand we would expect to support the development of a justified amount of employment land on appropriate sites. Indeed, if an existing employer were to seek to expand, we would recommend that they be supported. Of course, any expansion onto Green Belt land would need to meet the requirement for exceptional circumstances to be demonstrated.

6.2.2 Matching the provision of employment land to population growth

In the absence of a clear demand for additional employment land, we have estimated how many jobs, and hence how much employment land, would be required to enable balanced growth to occur in the Bridgnorth settlement.

- That 62% of Bridgnorth residents who are in work commute to work elsewhere and 38% are employed within the settlement, as at the 2011 census
- That 58% of people working in Bridgnorth commute to work from elsewhere and 42% live within the settlement, as at the 2011 census.
- That 47% of the population are economically active, as at the 2011 census.
- That, as assumed by Shropshire Council, each hectare of employment land supports about 95 'average' jobs, or about 250 'office' jobs.

Box 1: Assumptions made to estimate the amount of employment land needed

Making the assumptions listed in Box 1, the amount of additional employment land required to support jobs that would need to be created after 2019 would be as shown in Table 4.

		2019	2036		
			Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Jobs in Bridgnorth		5,562	6,315	6,491	6,932
Additional jobs in Bridgnorth			752	928	1,370
Additional employment land (average)	ha		7.9	9.8	14.5
Additional employment land (office)	ha		3.0	3.7	5.5

Table 4: Additional jobs and employment land required

We have provided estimates for the area required if 'average' jobs are provided (including warehousing and manufacturing, for example) and if only 'office' jobs are provided. Note that a smaller area would be required if more office-based jobs were provided.

We tentatively conclude that an additional area of employment land of between 3 ha and 15 ha would suffice to meet demand in the Bridgnorth settlement through to 2036, depending on the level of population growth and type of employment.

6.2.3 Currently available and approved employment land

Table 5 lists the employment land that we understand is currently available around the Bridgnorth settlement, including new sites that were allocated in the current Local Plan.

Additional land at Tasley, south of the A458	6.7 ha
Land at Old Worcester Road, for recycling and environmental firms	1.5 ha
Stanmore Industrial Estate	2.8 ha
Bridgnorth Aluminium	0.3 ha
Faraday Drive	0.3 ha
Chartwell Business Park	4.6 ha
TOTAL	**16.2 ha**

Table 5: Additional employment land already allocated[4]

In addition, we estimate that 3,500 sq. m. or more of business space is currently available to let on local business parks. More may be available, given recent redundancies that have been announced.

We also note that there are also a number of existing sites and buildings in the town centre, and elsewhere, that could also be adapted to provide commercial, retail or residential facilities. Some of these would be subject to planning permission for change of use.

6.2.4 Meeting the demand for employment land

The already approved employment land, taken together with the space available to rent, would appear to meet our estimate of the potential requirement for employment land.

The Local Plan Review states that at least 16 ha (that is, an additional 4 ha over the Local Plan) is required, which is consistent with our upper estimate. However, the Local Plan Review goes on to propose that a further 16 ha should be provided. We will seek to understand the reasons for this proposed additional allocation.

7 Location of future development

In general, residents of each area around the Bridgnorth settlement where development might be located (such as Tasley, Oldbury, Astley Abbots and around Stanmore) are against any development in their area. There are valid advantages and disadvantages in each location.

For the present, we note that:

- Development around Tasley, Oldbury or in Astley Abbots requires building on greenfield sites and any development in these areas would be visible from afar.
- Development around Stanmore requires release of Green Belt land. However, it may be possible to keep the development screened.
- Development in any of these locations on any scale would also require some significant road improvements – see section 8.1.

We propose that the best approach is to first agree how much growth is, in some sense, optimal for the town, as discussed above. Once this is agreed it will be far easier, even if controversial, to consult on where it should be located.

[4] This does not include 6.6b ha of land at Tasley, south of the A458, which has been allocated to allow for relocation of the Livestock Market and which is therefore not available as additional employment land.

8 Mobility and Transport

Good communications are vital for any community to prosper. They support the ability of businesses to operate and allow people to travel to work, education and other services. They bring visitors and tourists to the area. But they also cause pollution, and congestion can deter visitors and lead to inefficiencies.

The road, cycling and pedestrian networks around Bridgnorth have not been improved significantly for more than 20 years and public transport is in decline. Many public services, including further education, have been moved to adjacent towns, 10 to 30 miles away, requiring people to travel to access them.

For the future, Shropshire Council's Economic Growth Strategy [2] and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Transport Strategy [3] envisage enhancing the transport corridors in the area as shown in Figure 1.

Note the total absence of any strategic plan to improve the road network in the vicinity of Bridgnorth. It is the only market town in Shropshire for which strategic road improvements are not planned. Without such a commitment is it difficult to see how significant development, of housing or industry, can be envisaged around Bridgnorth.

Supporting even the growth included in the current Local Plan will require significant expenditure to address the current problems facing the town: in particular the pollution and congestions within the town and on some main roads around the town.

8.1 Traffic movements

Table 6 shows the Annual Average Daily Flows (AADF) for key roads around the Bridgnorth settlement in 2018 [6].

	Pinch point	All vehicles AADF			Max vehicles per hour	AADF/8		
		2018	2036 Opt 1	2036 Opt 3		2018	2036 Opt 1	2036 Opt 3
Hospital Street A442		16,345	18,555	23,124	2,600	2,043	2,319	2,891
Hollybush Road B4373		10,995	12,482	15,555	2,280	1,374	1,560	1,944
Telford A442	Norton	10,426	11,836	14,750	2,600	1,303	1,479	1,844
Kidderminster A442	Quatford	9,785	11,108	13,844	2,600	1,223	1,389	1,730
Wolverhampton A454	Hilton	9,156	10,394	12,954	2,940	1,145	1,299	1,619
Stanmore A454		3,822	4,339	5,407	2,940	478	542	676
Hermitage B4363[5]		*5,334*	*6,055*	*7,546*		*667*	*757*	*943*
Stourbridge A458	Enville	5,207	5,911	7,367	2,600	651	739	921
Bypass A458		9,489	10,772	13,425	3,180	1,186	1,347	1,678

Table 6:2018 and estimated 2036 traffic flows, and nominal maximum flows

The roads to neighbouring towns all have pinch points that limit the maximum traffic flow. The design capacity (maximum vehicles per hour) is listed for each road or pinch point, according to the "Design Manual for Roads and Bridges" [7], based on a 7.3m wide single carriageway road in an area with a speed limit. Note that Transport for London state that "There are numerous limitations on road capacity which make it highly unusual for roads to attain their stated design capacities."

[5] The figures for the Hermitage have calculated from the Wolverhampton and Stanmore figures. Its capacity will be far lower that for an equivalent level road.

The AADF for 2036, for options 1 and 3 considered above, have been estimated under the same assumptions used in Box 1 and that traffic flows scale with the number of commuters. These assumptions will not be accurate, but are considered to be a reasonable proxy. Significant increases in traffic flows are forecast, especially for Option 3 (high growth).

To obtain a feel for how close these roads are to capacity, we have assumed that the peak hourly flows are 1/8 of the AADF, based on some observation of flows in Bridgnorth. The results for 2018 match with observations, in that the roads closest to capacity are Hospital Street in Low Town (which is a pinch point carrying both A442 and A454 traffic) and Hollybush Road (which carries all traffic that cannot use the bypass, across the old bridge and from the Highley and Chelmarsh roads). The Telford, Kidderminster and Wolverhampton Roads are also well-used. There is still capacity on the bypass.

We consider that action is required to address these bottlenecks, even if the town only grows to the level forecast for Option 1. If it grows to the level forecast for Option 3, then it is clear that these roads will all become overloaded, or reach their limits. Based on this analysis, it would appear that funding would have to be committed to major road network improvements if growth to the level forecast in the Local Plan Review is to be contemplated.

If development is located around Stanmore, as proposed, then the localised effect on traffic movements would need to be evaluated. We might anticipate several thousand additional traffic movements per day on adjacent roads.

8.2 The trunk road network

North-South, long-distance traffic uses the A442, which passes through Low Town and is already at or close to capacity, as discussed above. To address this, we recommend that the following be considered, which, taken together, would provide an alternative route for north-south traffic, avoiding Low Town.

1. A link road between the A454 Green Lane and the A442 close to the bridge over the River Worfe. Plans for this link have been prepared in the past.
2. A link road between the A442 and the A458, to the south of Bridgnorth. One alternative would be to widen the minor road from outside Dudmaston Hall to the A548.

The former is also required to reduce the amount of traffic forced to use the Hermitage.

In addition, the main roads to Telford, Wolverhampton, Stourbridge and Kidderminster would all need improvements to address pinch points, accident blackspots and the impact of increased traffic on the residents of the villages on them.

8.3 Roads in Bridgnorth town

Traffic along Bridge Street, Underhill Street, Hollybush Road and Pound Street is already at or close to capacity, as discussed. Pollution levels on them are close to or exceed statutory limits and Shropshire Council is required to take action to reduce them. Delays often cause backups onto the A442 and, at peak times, up Wolverhampton Road and along Telford Road (Mill Street).

In addition, many drivers take the route from Northgate, along the High Street and down New Road to avoid congestion, especially at peak times. significantly degrading the experience of people in and increasing pollution levels in the High Street.

To address this, we suggest the following options are evaluated and the most cost effective implemented:

1. Provision of access to the A458 bypass from the B4363 or B4555. This may have to be limited access, possibly towards the river. It would relieve pressure on the old bridge and allow traffic to and from the Highley and Chelmarsh roads direct access to the bypass.

2. Construction of a new, single carriageway link road from the A442 to the B4374 Broseley Road, somewhere to the north of the town. This would require a new bridge across the Severn.
3. Congestion is often caused by delivery vehicles blocking the road, especially along Bridge Street. Would it be cost-effective to contribute to the cost of businesses, such as pubs, relocating their delivery arrangements to the rear of their properties, where feasible?
4. Putting traffic lights at the road junctions at the entrances to St. John's Street and the Cartway. The location of pedestrian crossings and bus stops should also be reviewed.
5. Giving, in the short term, higher priority to traffic travelling up Hollybush Road and Pound Street, so that vehicles are not left queuing uphill with their engines running. The roundabouts at the junctions with Salop Street and Listley Street should be reviewed.

8.4 Parking

There is inadequate parking in the centre of Bridgnorth on Saturdays, when many shops do most of their trade. Parking is currently just about adequate for the rest of the week although many employees park in residential areas and locations such as the old Westgate council offices and walk in. The situation will get worse if and when new retail premises are built on the Smithfield car park.

The provision of adequate parking is therefore a priority for the town, bringing tourists and shoppers to the town. Possible options include:

- Retaining the car parking adjacent to Sainsburys. One option may be for parking to be built under or over any new development so that the available parking is not reduced.
- Implementing new parking areas. One possibility would be a multi-story car park on Inage Lane. A second option would be to purchase and convert to parking some or all of the land adjacent to the Severn Valley Railway. An electric bus service could be provided to High Town, or even a second link, of some form, to Castle Walk.
- Reducing the demand for parking spaces by local residents, by supporting new technologies and car sharing, as outlined below.
- Introducing a park and ride scheme, as discussed earlier, although this is generally considered to be a back-up option.

8.5 Public Transport, pedestrians, cyclists and e-bikes

The current bus service is not adequate to allow people without their own cars to work in or make use of services in Shrewsbury, Telford and Wolverhampton, that have often been relocated from Bridgnorth. Nor does it allow residents of neighbouring villages to travel readily to and from Bridgnorth. This is a county-wide issue and needs to be addressed. However, it is possible that autonomous vehicle technology may help to address this in the next 10 years.

To reduce pollution and congestion, the advantages and disadvantages of providing stands for multiple buses in the Smithfield area in High Town and the Severn Street car park in Low Town should be evaluated. Some bus stops might then be removed or relocated.

Most households in the parish are within walking or cycling distance of High Town or Low Town. There is fairly good provision for pedestrians, including the paths through many areas and the many steps, although most need improved surfacing and are becoming overgrown. There is little provision for cyclists, partly due to the hilly terrain. However, we envisage increased use of e-bikes and propose that cycle routes are implemented to support this, including: a route from Friars Street to Love Lane, via Ropeway Park (which would also carry

National Cycle Route 45 from Riverside to Stanley Lane); and a route from Lodge Lane to the top of the Hermitage, to provide a safe cycle route out of town to the East.

Support for public transport, cycling and walking is stressed as a priority in Shropshire Council's Core Strategy [8]. Strategy Policy 8 states that *"Support the improvement of Shropshire's transport system in a sustainable and integrated way and locate development to improve accessibility by quality public transport, cycling and walking, help reduce car dependency and the impact of traffic on local communities and the environment."* We would therefore expect funding to be available.

8.6 Electric and autonomous vehicles

Westminster, Shropshire Council and Bridgnorth Town Council have all passed motions recognising that there is a 'Climate Emergency'. The next 20 years will see the widespread introduction of electric vehicles (EVs), autonomous vehicles and solutions to facilitate car sharing. Bridgnorth should plan for and take action to support these as they could all reduce congestion, pollution and parking problems. Emissions limits are likely to be applied to all town centres.

Adequate public EV charging facilities must be provided and all new housing and commercial premises should have charging facilities. However, the electricity distribution network in the area is probably not adequate to meet requirements and will need to be upgraded.

National funding is available in these areas and could support, for example, public charging points and EV car sharing, with dedicated, parking spaces being allocated to car sharing groups, preferably with an EV charging post at each.

We may wish to promote Bridgnorth as a Zero Emissions town and could seek to reserve a space for Shropshire's first Hydrogen refuelling station.

9 Other issues to be addressed

This consultation document covered a range of issues that need to be considered at an early stage of the development of the Bridgnorth Plan, as they address key aspects of the future development of the town.

Other, equally important but less urgent, issues are being addressed and will be consulted on during 2020. They include:

- Education and skills.
- Meeting housing needs.
- Support for young and old people.
- Demographics and the impacts of a changing age profile.
- Town appearance and facilities.
- Health and medical facilities.
- Sports and leisure.
- Crime and safety.
- Sustainability and the environment.

10 A tentative vision for the Bridgnorth settlement

The following statement is a suggestion for your consideration. What would you like to see? Let us have your comments during the consultation phase.

Bridgnorth aims to be a great place to live and work, as well as a destination for visitors seeking an 'experience'. It will play to its strengths.

The town centre will be enhanced, aiming to improve the ambiance for residents and visitors and further enhance its attractiveness to tourists. All the central area will, by 2030, be a clean and pollution free, zero emission area. Its shop frontages will be improved and the High Street will have been made more pedestrian friendly, whilst still allowing traffic access. Sufficient parking will be available in and close to the central area. Pedestrian and bike (including e-bike) routes will have been improved.

Whilst not on major transport corridors and with main roads at or close to capacity, Bridgnorth will offer additional business opportunities for local people, with a focus on modern office space, with good communications, for skills-based businesses. It will provide a location in which skilled employees are keen to live and work. Provision will be made to allow people to work some of the time in Bridgnorth, rather than having to commute to more expensive offices in other town and city centres.

Transport to neighbouring towns and villages will have been enhanced by appropriate road improvements, public transport improvements and possibly, over time, through the use of autonomous vehicles.

Additional housing and employment land will be developed sustainably, as justified, provided that the necessary infrastructure is funded in advance. All development will be implemented to be carbon neutral, or capable of being so by 2030 at the latest.

References

[1] "Local Plan Partial Review," Shropshire Council, 2018.

[2] "Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire 2017-2021," Shropshire Council, 2017.

[3] "Investing in Strategic Transport Corridors in the Marches," Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, 2016.

[4] "Business Register and Employment Survey," Office of National Statistics, 2017.

[5] "Shropshire Local Plan Review: Consultation on Strategic Sites," Shropshire Council, 2019.

[6] "DoT Road Traffic Statistics web site," https://roadtraffic.dft.gov.uk/, 2019.

[7] "Design Manual for Roads and Bridges," http://www.standardsforhighways.co.uk/ha/standards/dmrb/vol5/section1.htm, 1997.

[8] "Shropshire Local Development Framework: Adopted Core Strategy," Shropshire Council, 2011.

Versions

1.0 Initial release: 30th October 2019

1.1 Minor corrections or wording and typographical mistakes: 30th November 2019. Section 6.2.4 reworded for clarity.