The Bridgnorth Plan

Phase 1 Report[1]: Economy, Growth and Transport

1 Introduction

An independent Steering Group, formed with the support of local organisations and parish councils, was asked in June 2019 to consider issues facing the town and to develop a plan for the settlement. The Bridgnorth Plan will build on the previous Bridgnorth Town Plan, published in 2012. A first draft will be completed during 2020 and will cover the settlement consisting of Bridgnorth and adjacent parishes.

The first phase of work was carried out in 2019, with working groups on the following topics:

- **Growth and Demographics**: Understanding potential changes in population and business in the area and the potential demand for housing and business premises.
- **Economy and Business**: Considering how to best support the economy in Bridgnorth. This working group also set up a **Retail, Hospitality and Tourism** sub-group.
- **Mobility and Transport**: Assessing people's need to travel and demand for the transport of goods. Carrying out a traffic analysis and considering potential improvements.

Their work was summarised in a **Consultation Document** [1], which was completed in November 2019 and is available on the Bridgnorth Plan website (https://bridgnorthtownplan.weebly.com).

Three public meetings to consider its recommendations were held in early 2020 and a survey was carried out. 155 people responded to the survey, over 50 of whom offered to contribute to the Bridgnorth Plan.

This report builds on the Consultation Document and the results of the survey. It constitutes a tentative draft of the relevant sections of the final Bridgnorth Plan, although these will be revised as necessary in the light of further work and discussions.

Work on other important issues facing the town, leading to the completion of the draft of the Bridgnorth Plan, will continue during 2020. This work is important, but not urgent, and will be delayed, if necessary, to allow for action on and the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.

2 Bridgnorth

Bridgnorth is a prosperous, historic market town to the west of the Midlands conurbation. It has 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.

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

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 permission has been given 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 steadily become disused, with companies in the electronics and carpet manufacturing industries closing many years ago. The sites have all been 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 new development is 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.

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 were about 13,000 people living in the settlement in 2019 [1].

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 Shropshire as a whole. It contributes a lot to the economy of Bridgnorth, but is not the only sector that requires support and that 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 serve this sector.

3 Sustainability and the environment

The UK Government, Shropshire Council and Bridgnorth Town Council have all recognised that a Climate Emergency exists. 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "Reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and other pollution is important and should be prioritised". Action must be taken to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. 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. An Environmental Sustainability working group has being established, in collaboration with Sustainable Bridgnorth, to address this topic further.

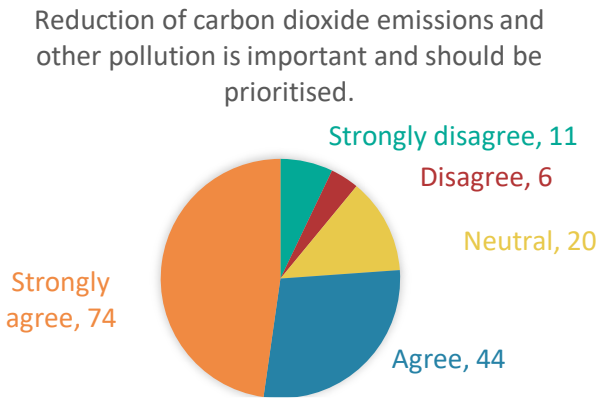

Figure 1: Emissions and pollution

4 Economy, Business and Employment

Bridgnorth has a few large employers, many 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.

4.1.1 Provision of Employment Land

Table 2 lists the employment land that we understand is currently approved for development around the Bridgnorth settlement, including sites that were allocated in the current Local Plan.

Additional land at Tasley, south of the A458[2]	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 2: Additional employment land already allocated

We estimate that 3,500 sq. m. or more of business space is currently available to let on local business parks. 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.

[2] This does not include 6.6 ha of land that has been allocated to allow for relocation of the Livestock Market and which is therefore not available as additional employment land.

We strongly recommend that this available land, which is already approved, is developed to provide local jobs, over the period covered by Shropshire Council's ongoing Local Plan Review. Our aspiration is for this to generate sufficient new employment for the town to continue to thrive and for it not to become even more of a commuter town. This will necessarily result in development on some greenfield sites, which have already been allocated. At the same time, we recommend that brownfield land in neighbouring towns should be developed, in preference to even more greenfield sites being allocated.

Shropshire Council assumes that each hectare of employment land can support about 95 'average' jobs or about 250 'office' jobs. On this basis, 14.5 ha of additional employment land would be required to provide for the 1,370 additional jobs envisaged in the Local Plan Review if they were 'average jobs'. If they were all 'office jobs', then only 5.5 ha would be required. We therefore consider that the employment land already allocated under SAMDev is sufficient to meet the objective for employment envisaged in the Local Plan Review.

In the survey, we asked how many additional jobs are needed in Bridgnorth. More than half of respondents considered that 800 to 1000 new jobs will be required by 2036 – see Figure 2.

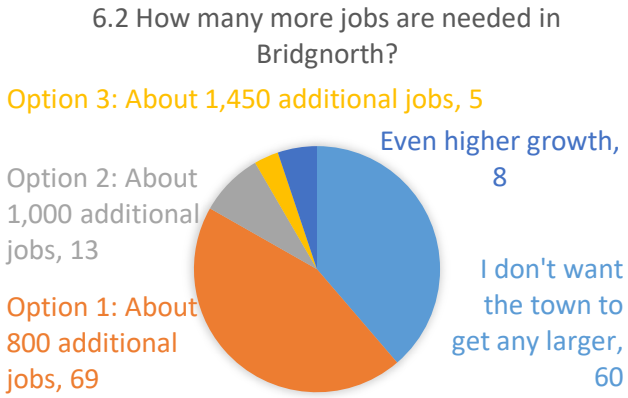

Figure 2: Employment

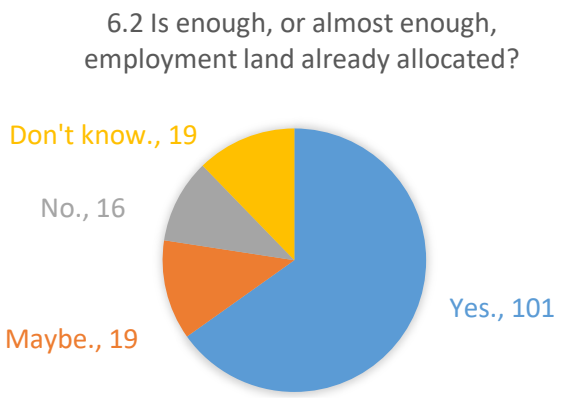

Figure 3: Employment land

A significant minority (about 40%) of respondents considered that no more jobs are wanted. However, we do not support this view as being realistic. Bridgnorth requires more jobs if it is to retain some of its young people and provide employment.

At the other extreme, we have estimated that Shropshire Council's 'Balance Growth' policy, to create one job for each new dwelling, would require about 1,370 new jobs to be created to support the housing growth proposed in the Local Plan Review [5]. This level of employment growth, or more, was only supported by about 10% of respondents.

Our estimates indicate that even this level of job creation could be achieved on the currently allocated employment land if a reasonable proportion of office-based jobs are included. With fewer office-based jobs an additional 4 ha may, possibly, be required. This agrees with the Local Plan Review, which states that 16 ha (that is, an additional 4 ha over the current Local Plan) is required.

However, the Local Plan Review goes on to propose, without providing any justification, that a further 16 ha should be allocated for the period to 2036. We are strongly against this proposal, although we recognise that more employment land may need to be set aside for the longer term.

About 2/3 of respondents to the survey agreed that 'enough, or almost enough, employment land is already allocated' – see Figure 3.

Overall, we recommend that the employment land already allocated in the current Local Plan be developed fairly quickly, but with due care, with the ultimate objective, which may

be hard to achieve, of providing up to 1,500 new jobs, but with the immediate target of achieving 800 to 1,000 new jobs. We recommend that no further employment land be allocated in the LPR, beyond that already allocated under SAMDev. We recognise that locations for additional employment land for use after 2038 may need to be identified, possibly around Stanmore Business Park or to augment the employment land currently allocated at Tasley.

4.1.2 Provision of necessary business infrastructure

Clearly, the provision of the highest-speed broadband, an adequate electricity distribution network and other utilities (including sewers, recycling and waste disposal) are all required to support business growth in the area. We need to provide continuously faster broadband within the town if we are to achieve the economic growth envisaged in the LPR.

4.1.3 Can the targeted growth in employment be achieved?

Setting objectives for employment growth in the above fashion is a reasonable starting point. However, there must be a plan for how this growth in employment might be achieved.

We have concerns that the levels of employment growth being considered may be difficult to achieve, for the following reasons:

- Bridgnorth is not located close to, and has poor connections to, the motorway network. As already discussed, there are no plans for a major investment in the road network to and from Bridgnorth. This is particularly significant for logistics firms and those handling and processing physical goods.
- The electricity distribution network to industrial sites is already at its limits, although plans are in place to address this for individual existing companies.
- The highest internet bandwidths, in total and for individual connections, are not available.
- Bridgnorth has no mainline railway station and has a poor public transport service.

These, and other, issues need to be addressed if the envisaged level of employment growth is to be achieved.

We recommend that the following actions are taken:

1. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis is carried out on competitiveness of Bridgnorth as a location for firms operating in a range of sectors. This should also be carried out for other market towns in Shropshire (and possibly in nearby counties). The comparative results should give an indication of where new development should be allocated.
2. An analysis and costing of the necessary road improvement needed to ensure that a sufficient range of firms can operate from Bridgnorth is carried out and funding to implement it is committed.
3. A review of potential office-based industries (operating in, for example, design, IT, professional services and finance) be carried out, including defining ways in which Bridgnorth can be made attractive to them. For example, what would be needed to establish a design and technology hub or to attract financial sector operations?
4. Consideration be given to relocating some government administration to Bridgnorth, in recognition of the relative lack of such activity in the town.
5. Provision should be made for starter units for local people who wish to go into business. We should continue to support small, entrepreneurial light-industrial units.

With regard to office-based businesses, we consider that they are most likely to locate and thrive in Bridgnorth, as they are least reliant on good transport links. 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 of 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 note that the density of jobs (per hectare) is higher for office-based jobs than for other types of employment. 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.

4.1.4 Retail, hospitality and tourism

As noted above, 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 have been raised during our consultation to date and many of them were noted in the previous Town Plan:

- How can the town adopt a "unified marketing strategy"? This could build on the previous success in the Great British High Street competition.
- 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 section 4.1.5.
- 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 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.

We recommend that the Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group, Bridgnorth Chamber of Commerce, local retailer groups, the Marches LEP, Town and Shropshire Councillors and Shropshire Council officers form an action group to consider the above and whether to propose a BID. It will first have to consider what is required in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1.5 The town centre

Bridgnorth High Street and surrounding streets are due for a major refurbishment to ensure the town centre remains attractive to residents and visitors, and to cope with increasing local population. Further work on this is required, but initial findings and suggestions are that consideration be given to:

- A programme of works, including addressing the width and standard of pavements, paving under the Town Hall, adding a lift to the Town Hall and refurbishing the New Market Hall, possibly adding a 'colonnade'.
- Most respondents to the survey considered that the High Street should not be fully pedestrianised, although almost half thought that it should be pedestrianised on Saturdays and market days – see Figure 4. About 1/3 thought that the current approach, with full access for vehicles, works. About 20% supported moving to shared use, retaining access for vehicles but 'sharing' the space and giving priority to pedestrians.
- Over half of respondents thought that there is insufficient parking in Bridgnorth on Saturdays and a further 20% that there is insufficient on weekdays. The situation will get worse if parking around Old Smithfield is lost to retail development and when Westgate is developed for housing. Possible ways of providing additional parking space are presented in section 8.4.

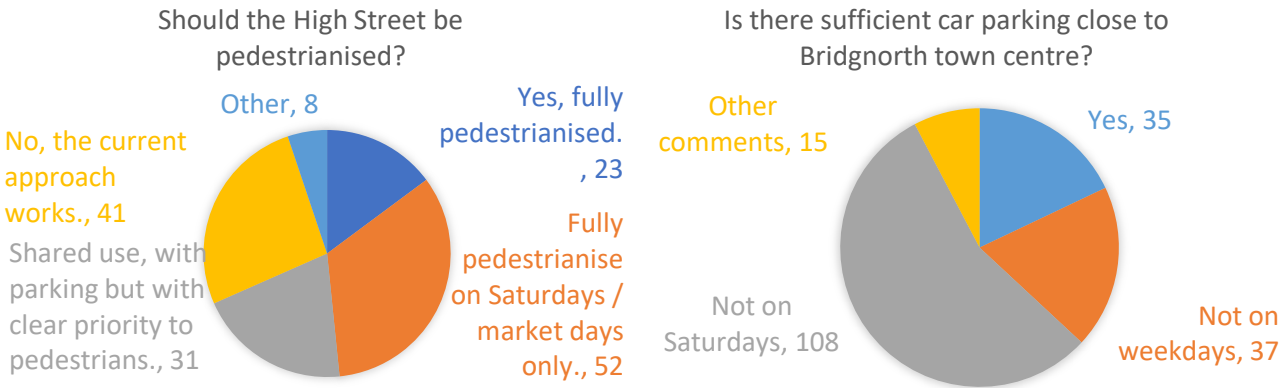

Figure 4: Pedestrianisation and car parking

- About half of respondents said that they would use a park and ride scheme if it operated during the week – see Figure 5. Most respondents were local residents and more work is required to get inputs from visitors and to consider this alongside an improved local bus service. For now, we do not consider that a park and ride scheme is a good way to provide additional parking for Bridgnorth, although it may serve as a back-up option for the busiest periods and possibly to provide parking for people employed in the centre.
- 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. Half of respondents said they were not put off visiting by this and half said they were, mostly at peak times – see Figure 5. In the long term, this might be addressed by providing new routes for through traffic (see section 8.2). The High Street would remain open to traffic, allowing people to park briefly to shop and giving residents access. 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[3].

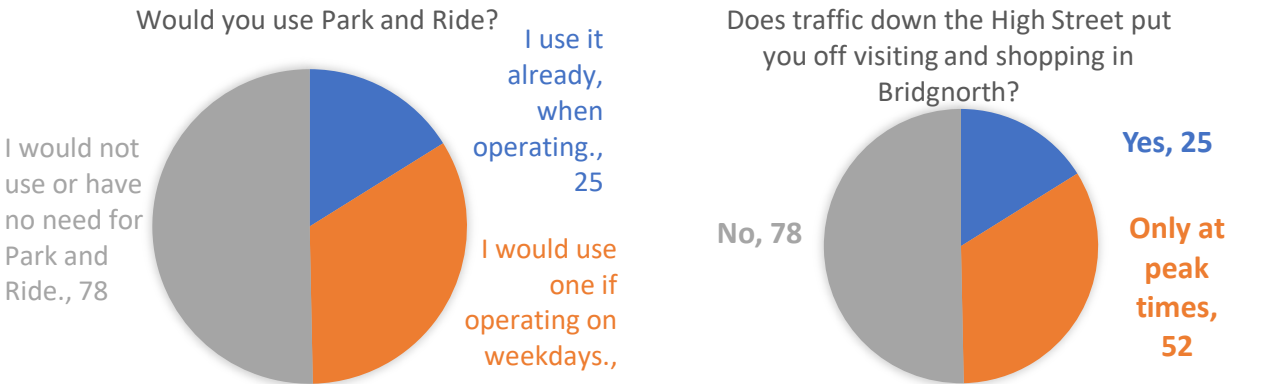

Figure 5: Park and ride and traffic in the High Street

- 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.

[3] The areas to the north and south of the Town Hall could be configured as short-stay car parking.

5 Housing development in the Bridgnorth settlement

Three options for housing growth were presented in the Consultation Document:

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.

Table 3 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 3: Population of and number of dwellings in Bridgnorth

Between 2006 and 2019, 745 new dwellings were completed, at a rate of 57 per year – see Table 4, which gives a breakdown of the number of dwellings to be built for each option over time. 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.

The Local Plan Review proposes (Option 3) an additional 656 dwellings and 1,443 people by 2036, compared to the extrapolation of the current Local Plan (Option 1).

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 4: Forecast for the number of additional dwellings around Bridgnorth

Given the above information, the survey asked how much more housing is needed in Bridgnorth – see Figure 4. More than half of respondents indicated that that no more housing is required, which seems rather idealistic. Most of the rest were in favour of an additional 800 to 1000 houses, over those already built up to 2019. About 5% indicated that the number of houses proposed in the Local Plan Review, or more, were needed.

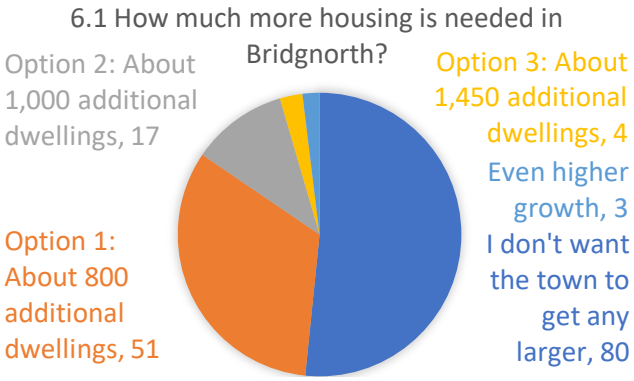

Figure 6: Housing Growth

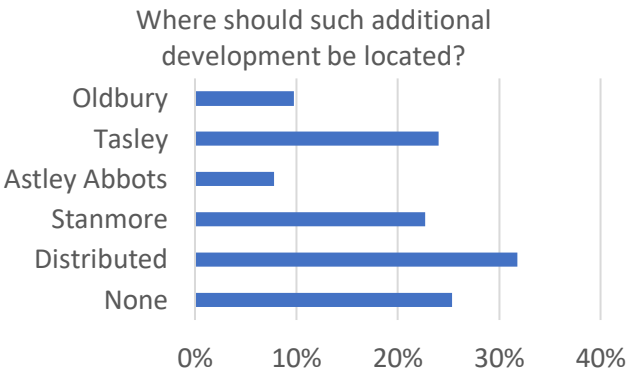

Figure 7: Location of development

The infrastructure around Bridgnorth (see sections 7 and 8) is barely adequate to support the current size of the town and would need to be improved to support any of the levels of growth discussed. We also note the views of respondents to the survey.

In addition, and as noted earlier, Shropshire Council have a policy of balanced growth, aiming for one new job to be created for each new dwelling built. Given our concerns about the difficulties in creating new jobs around Bridgnorth (see section 4.1.2) we recommend that additional housing development is linked, in some way, to the provision of new jobs. Housing should not progress too far ahead of available jobs.

We therefore recommend that 800 to 1,000 new dwellings (that is up to about 330 more than approved in the current Local Plan) are included in the revised Local Plan. A statement should be included that the number dwellings will be reviewed every 5 years and may be increased, if the rate of creation of new jobs justifies it.

We consider that there are good reasons why the growth in housing around Bridgnorth should be limited in this way. There are obvious locations better suited to growth (for example, with good existing road connections) and some of the housing development could be catered for on the Special Sites [6].

6 Location of future development

Given the information in the Consultation Document, we asked where additional development should be located – see Figure 7. More than one area around the settlement could be selected. Over 30% of respondents favoured development on sites distributed around the town. Of the other options, just over 20% of respondents were in favour of additional development either around Tasley or around Stanmore.

For now, we would comment that:

- Development around Stanmore would require the release of Green Belt land. Shropshire Council have not yet provided a statement of Exceptional Circumstances to justify this.
- Development around Tasley would require building on a greenfield site which is visible from afar.
- Development in either of these locations on any scale would require some significant road improvements – see section 8.1.

7 Infrastructure and future development

Existing local infrastructure, transport links, public facilities and services are not capable of supporting much growth in population and business activity without significant investment. We agree with the submissions made by other bodies and individuals, including Bridgnorth Town Council, that such investment should be identified, and ideally committed to, before further development occurs around the town.

In particular, some major road improvements are required and improvements to high speed broadband will be required within the settlement, as noted earlier. As a minimum, potential funding sources must be identified and verified to be applicable. Ideally, the necessary funding should be set aside.

Previous consultation has indicated that residents main concern about future development is that the necessary infrastructure to support it will never be provided. With good planning, it should be provided in advance. The replies to the survey, shown in Figure 8, confirm continuing concern that the necessary infrastructure must be provided to support any future development.

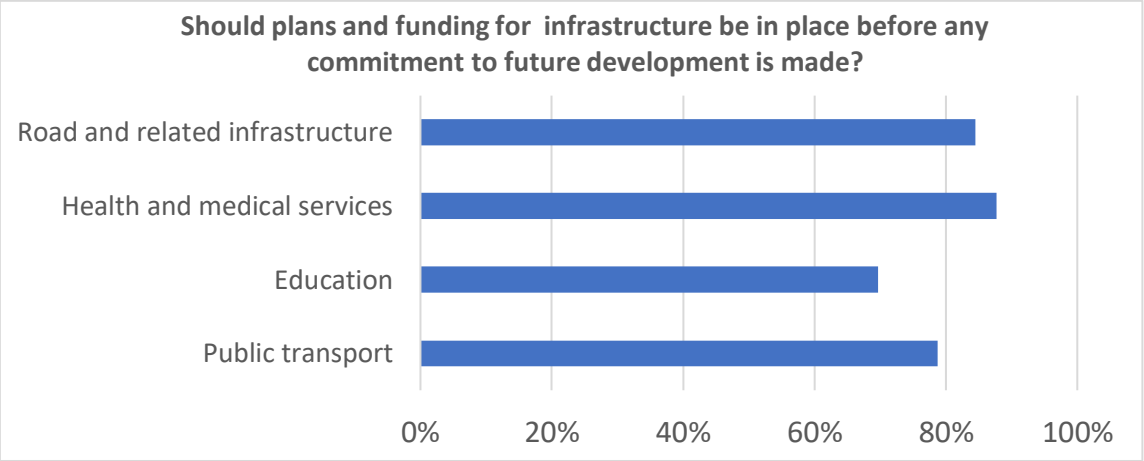

Figure 8: Commitment to funding infrastructure

In addition, the electricity distribution network needs extending to ensure that it can handle additional growth and housing, and that future demands, such as EV charging, can be met.

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 also bring visitors and tourists to the area. 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.

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 corridor along the M54/A5 and the route along the A49 from Shrewsbury to Hereford. There appear to be no plans to make any strategic investments in the road network around Bridgnorth. It is the only market town in Shropshire for which strategic road improvements are not planned.

Huge changes will occur in transport over the next 2-3 decades, including the likely elimination of fossil fuel powered vehicles by the end of that period. This will help address issues, such as pollution, which may best be addressed by bringing forward the introduction of zero emission vehicles.

8.1 Traffic movements

Table 5 shows the Annual Average Daily Flows (AADF) for key roads around the Bridgnorth settlement in 2018 [7].

	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
Bypass A458		9,489	10,772	13,425	3,180	1,186	1,347	1,678

Table 5:2018 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”. There are numerous limitations on road capacity which make it highly unusual for roads to attain their stated design capacity.

The AADF for 2036, for options 1 and 3 considered above, have been estimated under the assumption that commuting patterns do not change significantly and that traffic flows scale with the number of commuters [1]. 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 at or close to capacity are Hospital Street in Low Town (which carries both A442 and A454 traffic) and Hollybush Road (which carries all traffic that cannot use 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, most of the roads listed above will be overloaded. Based on this analysis, 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.

The effect on traffic movements of any proposed development must be evaluated and funding obtained for required road improvements.

8.2 The road network

Figure 9 shows that respondents to the survey consider that most roads to neighbouring towns need improvement, with the A442 to Telford giving most concern.

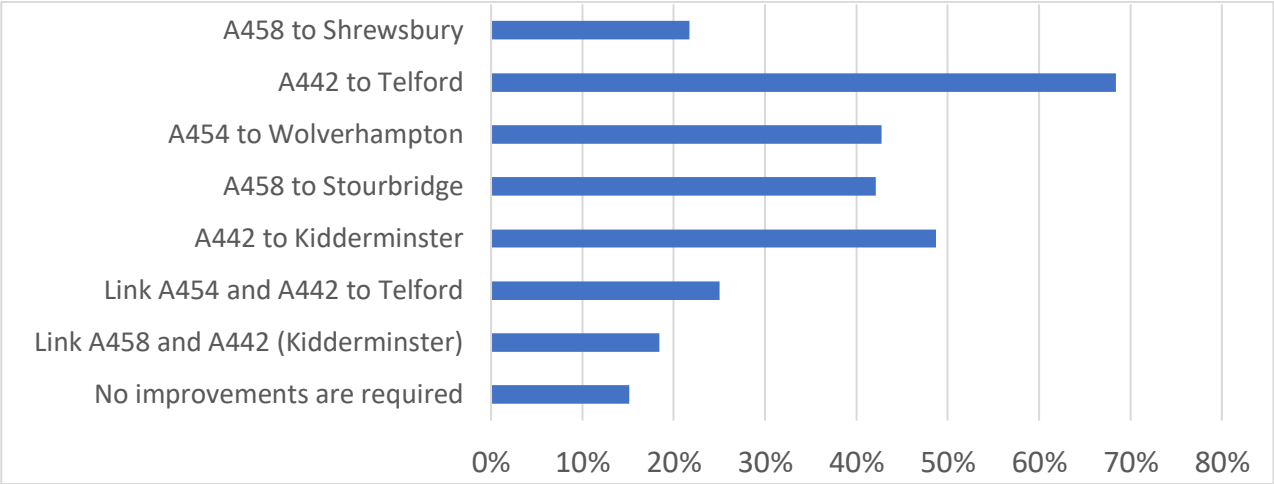

Figure 9: Which trunk roads need to be improved or added?

Figure 10 shows which alternatives people supported to reduce congestion and pollution within the town.

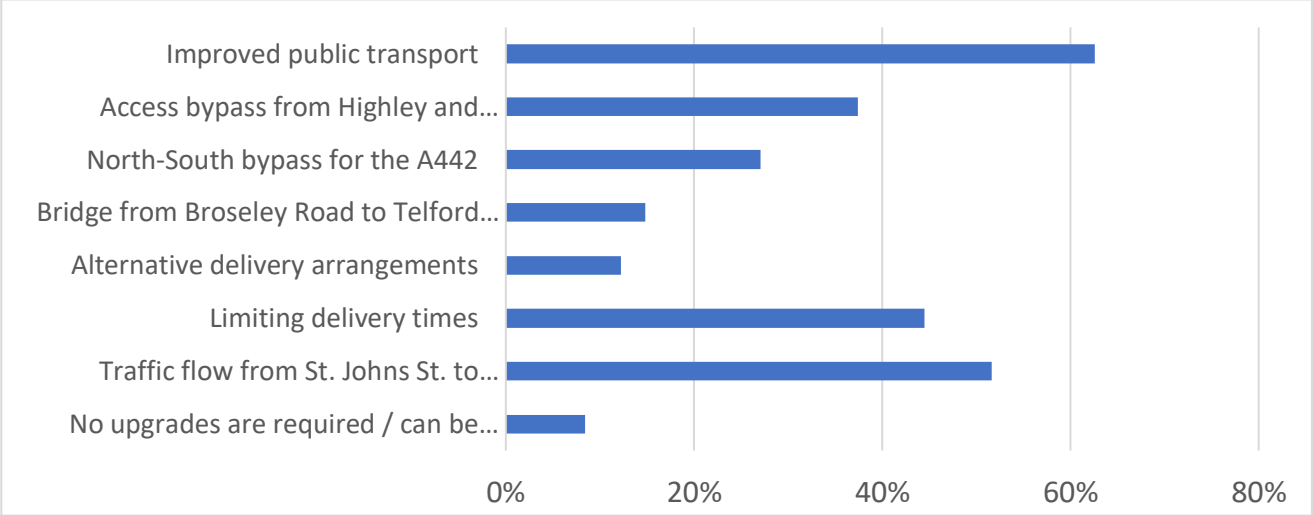

Figure 10: Which alternatives would you support to reduce congestion and pollution?

There was significant support for constructing a junction from the existing E-W bypass to the B4555 / B4363. We believe that this junction was considered when the bypass was constructed. It would reduce traffic over the old bridge and remove commercial vehicle traffic for Highley which currently has to pass through the town.

There was also support for providing a North-South bypass for the A442, reducing the load on the A442 through Hospital Street, which is close to capacity. We consider this would be best achieved by building:

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. This link would also bypass the section of the A442 that floods, becoming impassable.
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 A458.

This would effectively create a North South bypass for Bridgnorth, including the section of the A454 that runs past the entrance to Stanmore and joins the A458 Stourbridge Road.

Simple changes to improve traffic flow along St. John's Street, Bridge Street, Underhill Street, Hollybush Road and Pound Street were also supported. This road is already at or close to capacity, as discussed, and pollution levels exceed statutory limits at busy periods.

These infrastructure projects are linked, as at peak times congestion over the old bridge backs up onto the A442. A detailed traffic study needs to be made to quantify the benefits to the town.

Congestion is often caused by delivery vehicles blocking the road, especially along Bridge Street and the High Street. It might 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. We also recommended that the feasibility of establishing a pick-up and drop off service for businesses in the town is considered.

8.3 Public Transport, pedestrians, cyclists and e-bikes

Improving public transport was the most-supported option for reducing congestion and pollution in the town (see Figure 10).

About 40% of respondents to the survey, who expressed a view on public transport, considered it adequate for accessing employment or services in Shrewsbury, Telford or Wolverhampton. It was considered inconvenient or unusable for other towns and local villages.

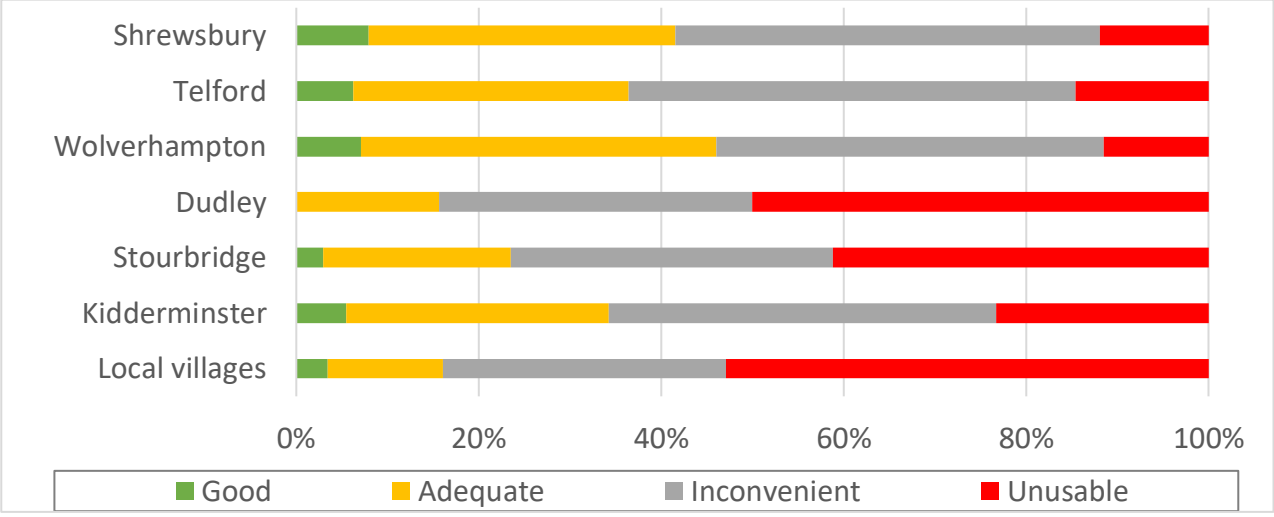

Figure 11: How usable is public transport to access employment and services?

To reduce pollution and congestion, the advantages and disadvantages of providing bus stands in the Smithfield area in High Town and Severn Street car park in Low Town should be evaluated. The idling of buses (and other vehicles) in the High Street, Old Smithfield and Mill Street should be banned.

Support for public transport, cycling and walking is stressed as a priority in Shropshire Council's Core Strategy [8]. We would therefore expect funding to be available. Most households in the parish are within walking or cycling distance of High Town or Low Town. A detailed study of the pedestrian and cycle routes in Bridgnorth needs to be made, leading to a plan to improve provision for pedestrians, cyclists and users for mobility scooters. We envisage increased use of e-bikes and mobility scooters and propose that routes are implemented to support them, including a route from Friars Street to Love Lane, (which would also carry National Cycle Route 45 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.

8.4 Parking

As discussed above, there is inadequate parking in the centre of Bridgnorth on Saturdays. Parking is currently just about adequate for the rest of the week although many employees park outside the town centre and walk in. The situation will get worse if new retail premises are built on the Smithfield car park and as population growth takes place. Possible options for increased parking 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.
- Purchasing some or all of the land adjacent to the Severn Valley Railway and converting it to a mix of public space and parking. Access to this would be improved by the proposed junction onto the bypass, from the B4555 / B4363, as discussed above. An electric bus service could be provided to High Town, or a second link, such as a cable car or funicular, to Castle Walk.
- A multi-story car park on Innage Lane, although access would have to be via Victoria Road or the town centre.

8.5 Electric and autonomous vehicles

Shropshire Council and Bridgnorth Town Council have passed motions recognising that there is a 'Climate Emergency'. The next 20 years will see the widespread introduction of electric vehicles (EVs). Bridgnorth should plan for and take action to support these as they will reduce congestion, pollution and parking problems. We may wish to promote Bridgnorth as a Zero Emissions town.

We recommend that initial focus is given to supporting residents with off-street parking to install chargers for EVs. We should experiment with a few destination chargers in car parks and with on street parking bays reserved for residents participating in EV sharing schemes. All new housing and commercial premises should have charging facilities.

9 A tentative vision for the Bridgnorth settlement

The following draft statement has been updated from that in the Consultation Document, following the consultation:

> *Bridgnorth aims to be a great place to live and work, as well as a destination for visitors seeking an 'experience'.*
>
> *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 pollution free, zero emission zone. 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. Road improvements will be made to reduce pollution and limit congestion within the town. Pedestrian, mobility scooter, bike and e-bike routes will be improved.*
>
> *Transport to neighbouring towns and villages will be enhanced by appropriate road improvements, public transport improvements and possibly, over time, through the use of autonomous vehicles.*
>
> *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. Provision will be made to allow people to work from Bridgnorth, rather than having to commute every day to more expensive offices in other town and city centres.*

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.

10 Next steps

This document has covered a range of issues that needed to be considered at an early stage of the development of the Bridgnorth Plan. Other equally important, but less urgent, issues are being addressed and will be consulted on during 2020. They include:

- Further work on the economy, including retail, hospitality and tourism and the possibility of a Business Improvement District.
- Support for young and old people (Social Sustainability).
- Education and skills.
- Health and medical facilities.
- Sustainability and the environment – a joint working group with Sustainable Bridgnorth.
- Meeting housing needs.
- Demographics and the impacts of a changing age profile.
- Town appearance and facilities.
- Sports and leisure, which is being addressed by Sporting Bridgnorth.
- Crime and safety.

11 Summary and conclusions

Our main recommendations are that:

- We support Shropshire Council's policy of balanced growth, with at least one local job being created for each new dwelling built.
- Bridgnorth does not lie on a transport corridor and, under current strategic plans, will not have the connectivity to support the growth in housing envisaged in the Local Plan Review. We recommend that housing growth around Bridgnorth is limited to 1,000 new dwellings by 2036, including those approved under SAMDev. There is significant support for this level of housing growth, although there is also opposition to any growth at all. We recommend that this limit should only be reviewed (at a subsequent review of the Local Plan) if the local employment growth target is achieved.
- Any growth in employment and housing should only proceed once commitment to and funding for the necessary improvements to the local infrastructure, road network, transport links, public facilities and services has been confirmed.
- We support the aim in the Local Plan Review proposals to grow employment around the town, although we have some concerns that the provision of additional commercial and industrial sites will not automatically attract new business to Bridgnorth. A pro-active approach and funding will be required to achieve the objective.
- We do not find there is any need for much, if any, additional employment land to be allocated at present. The employment land already allocated under SAMDev should be sufficient to meet the above objective through to 2036. Locations for future employment land, probably around Stanmore and Tasley, will need to be provisionally identified for use if needed.
- 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.

- 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**.
- Restoring some government services to Bridgnorth would be most helpful. We have not yet addressed Education and Training, but it is evident that the lack of Further Education and adult education in the town is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- An approach to coordination support for Bridgnorth and attracting funding and regional and government support must be found.
- COVID-19 will have implications for the future of the town which need to be considered in the short term and may impact on some of the work in this report.

References

[1] "Consultation Document," Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group, 2019.

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

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

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

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

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

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Versions

2.0 First version for public release, June 2020.
2.1 Minor corrections and clarifications.
2.2 Minor corrections and clarifications.
2.3 Acknowledgements added.
2.4 Date added to footer and further acknowledgments.