

**Site Allocations and Management of Development
(SAMDev) Development Plan Document**

Shropshire's Localism Approach to Plan Making

July 2014

(EV80)

Shropshire's Localism Approach to Plan Making

Overview

1. It is perhaps easy to forget when looking at their recent track record that Shropshire Council was only formed in 2009. Since then the Council has secured a Sound Core Strategy, been the first nationally to implement a CIL charging schedule, have an adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan whilst our innovative Place Plans have been shortlisted for a national planning prize.
2. Evidence and justification for a localised flexible approach towards rural settlements was well presented in the Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing, "Living Working Countryside" and the Government's response to it in successive documents beginning with Open Source Planning (see Appendix A) and further developed in the NPPF. Shropshire's approach seeks to balance top down strategic leadership and planning in the adopted Core Strategy with bottom up community led planning delivered by our Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) document, aided by our approach to community led planning through an adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan in Much Wenlock (<http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/>), Parish Plan reviews and a unique less formal approach to neighbourhood plans under the heading 'community led plans' (<http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/community-led-planning-advice/>).

Introduction

3. Community lies at the heart of planning in Shropshire. Planning plays an important role in shaping the places where people live and work. As Local Planning Authority, Shropshire Council has overall responsibility for Strategic Planning throughout Shropshire but it is committed to continuous working with communities to help them to draw up plans for their own particular localities, their town, parish or neighbourhood. Shropshire Council has already produced a sound Core Strategy establishing the framework for a localism approach and has submitted SAMDev for examination which sets out site allocations and development management policies to deliver the Core Strategy's aims and objectives. This overall development framework will in future be known as Shropshire's Local Plan.
4. Uniquely, Shropshire Council has produced a planning policy framework which recognises the intrinsic community value of existing town and parish plans and through the web-based Shropshire Place Plans seeks to help those communities deliver on their aspirations and desired actions. 18 Place Plans cover the whole of Shropshire and incorporate the key priorities of their constituent communities as set out in each community's own action plan. In future it is envisaged that the 18 Place Plans will reflect both Local Plan policies and those expressed in new community-led plans.
5. The Shropshire Local Plan provides a real and ongoing role for town and parish plans as they stand today (without any legislative changes) as we have linked them to future development needs, community spending priorities and infrastructure delivery. The Local Plan already effectively takes "ownership" of these community plans and the Place Plans provide a framework for their delivery.
6. Through Shropshire's localised approach communities can have their say by:
 - 1) Contributing directly to Shropshire's Local Plan via the SAMDev process;

- 2) Creating or reviewing a town or parish plan which influences the Local Plan by triggering policies, for instance allowing additional development to take place ('opting in'); and
 - 3) Discussing with their local Councillors the annual local spending priorities in their area arising from the new development that they have agreed to.
7. This flexible approach is made possible in Shropshire through both the Local Plan approach and the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy on 1st January 2012 to allow developer funding to be recouped from local development and channelled into those local communities providing for development to meet their identified needs.
8. The aim of localised planning is to increase local governance and to create a better incentive for positive community planning. The proposed governance arrangements being put in place to cover the CIL annual priorities and spending dialogue is also appropriate for the Government's New Homes Bonus initiative which provides a monetary reward to Shropshire Council on behalf of communities when development has been completed.
9. The localised approach has at its heart community led planning which is about local communities being able to have a real involvement in the way their town/village/neighbourhood is developed. It is a structured process, involving local community groups, activists and volunteers in creating a vision for the community and an action plan to achieve it. The process involves using a mix of evidence collection, different types of consultation and debate at the very local community level. The whole community has the opportunity to participate and the resulting vision should focus on the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the community, its sustainability as a place, and all those who live and work there. It involves the local planning authority drawing on the strengths of people and communities to help them to realise their potential to become more resilient and adaptive to change, this involves taking individual and collective responsibility for the future of Shropshire's communities which includes delivering our priorities: enterprise and growth, with strong market towns and rebalanced rural areas; healthy safe and confident people and communities; and, responding to climate change and enhancing our natural and built assets. (See also Appendix B: Positive Planning with Rural Communities – Shropshire's Emerging Approach to Localism; Rob Hindle/Rural Innovation September 2010).

Localism and Planning Policy

10. Shropshire's approach has been driven by close adherence to the spirit and word of the governments localism agenda beginning with Open Source Planning then through the Localism Act, the NPPF and the Growth and Infrastructure Act, and has been seen by all as a welcome break from the old style Local Plans, an opportunity to express a truly local and distinctive approach, with a significant tilt to the new localised planning agenda which this authority has fully embraced. Thus our approach, initially through the Core Strategy and clarified in SAMDev, focuses relentlessly on the critical issues that relate to the way the area is intended to develop long term and provides a strategic response to the critical issues that have been identified, yet with sufficient inherent flexibility not to be blown off course by external events.
11. Shropshire's strategic approach is in many respects strikingly simple, focussed growth within, Shrewsbury as the County Town and Growth Point, concentrated yet balanced growth within 17 market towns and key centres and rural rebalance by helping rural

settlements to become increasingly self reliant, sustainable, places. It is about working with and sustaining communities of place and recognising that this is a dynamic and not a fixed equation and flexibility of policy and implementation will be required over time to make this happen, in many cases, to change the status quo. This approach clearly stems from Mathew Taylor's findings as they chimed so strongly with the rural character and the uncertain state of rural communities and settlements in Shropshire. This necessitated rethinking the "traditional" view of sustainable development to one which is more informed by the economic and social well being of a place, the glue that holds communities together.

12. Defining 'sustainability' is fraught with the danger of the 'sustainability trap'. This is the situation where settlements that do not meet the sustainability criteria are not allowed development, thus consigning them to stagnation and a downward cycle of decline. The use of criteria serves to create an artificial distinction between places that are deemed sustainable and those that are not, whereas in reality this distinction is highly variable and fluid over time.
13. A narrow interpretation of "sustainability" has in the past prevented many settlements from adapting to changing social and economic challenges. Shropshire Council's localism approach champions a broader interpretation of "sustainability", and seeks to deliver *improvements* to sustainability wherever a community wish to achieve this. An integrated approach that includes the Local Plan (adopted Core Strategy and SAMDev) along with other documents such as the CIL Charging Schedule, Implementation Plan and Place Plans, will deliver more sustainable places. The level of developer contributions that are appropriate are contained in documents that are more readily updated than the mainstream Local Plan, to ensure they track the changing viability of development over the lifetime of the plan.
14. The Local Plan in its simplest form seeks to provide a framework for creating sustainable places. In doing so it presents a balance between well informed and consensual top-down strategic planning, and bottom-up community led planned responses delivered flexibly within this framework. It requires a balance between leadership and listening served in equal measure. Thus the Core Strategy through policies CS1 to CS3 sets the contextual approach for Shrewsbury and the Market Towns and Key Centres, the detailed layer has, however, been built from the bottom-up through SAMDev. Policy CS4 of the Core Strategy establishes the approach to Community Hubs and Clusters but it has been SAMDev that has set the detailed approach locally whilst providing flexibility in the future for Parish and other locally generated plans to add layers of detail over time employing our community "opt-in" approach to future sustainable communities identifying themselves for development and investment. The Core Strategy provides the platform, through policies CS8 and CS9 reinforced by SAMDev policies for this approach and the capturing of the community benefits that will help communities to help themselves to be more sustainable places now and in the long term.
15. The Local Plan policies enable the delivery of the overall Policy CS1 housing target for the rural areas, through development in the Community Hubs, Community Cluster settlements and elsewhere. This is a key point in assessing the approach taken to the identification of the Community Hubs and Cluster settlements. The approach has been based on 'localism' principles as set out in the Localism Act and espoused by the NPPF. The Council recognises that this has produced some inconsistencies in the planned scale and distribution of development in the rural areas in comparison to the traditional

settlement hierarchy and approach of reliance on the presence of facilities and services, and relative accessibility, as key measures of sustainability. As set out under Policy CS4, the Council's approach 'rather than abandoning settlements that have lost services as perpetually 'unsustainable', seeks to improve the sustainability of rural settlements and their hinterlands, even those that start from a low base'. Of course, many villages which would have been identified through the traditional approach have come forward (x no. out of y no. main service villages in former Local Plans – compare to EV141) and others may do so during the Plan period, while the positive Core Strategy policies for the countryside and in relation to affordable housing provision mean that appropriate development can take place in settlements which are not currently identified.

16. The basis of the approach was set out in the Core Strategy (Policy CS4) and evolved as the Government strengthened its commitment to localism, tied in with the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy as part of an incentive based approach to encouraging communities to 'opt in' to development – with CIL seen by Government partly as a way to break down the problem of 'NIMBY' resistance to new development. The approach is clearly an experiment and one that needs time to become established and evolve. The Council considered that a locally driven SAMDev Plan was a viable alternative both to a traditional services led Plan and the option of a high level plan supported by Neighbourhood Plans throughout the rural areas. The Council has been confident that, over time, the partnership approach with local communities would work and has achieved a good level of 'opt in' across Shropshire. Recent impacts of the NPPF's presumption in favour of sustainable development in the absence of the Council being able to demonstrate a 5 years' supply of housing land have been a concern, but the adoption of the SAMDev Plan will enable the process to get back on track.
17. Policy CS4 and the approach to the rural areas was subject to sustainability appraisal in the preparation of the Core Strategy and to detailed consideration through the Core Strategy Examination in 2010. The Inspector concluded that 'with the proposed changes, Policy CS4 provides a positive, clearly expressed and sound basis for identifying community hubs and clusters, which is justified, effective and deliverable. It also recognises the particular needs and characteristics of Shropshire's rural settlements, directly reflects the localism agenda, and will help in rebalancing the rural settlements'. The full text of the report in relation to Community Hubs and Clusters paragraphs 37-42 is attached as Appendix C.
18. Shropshire's approach is a successful model of integrating spatial planning with other disciplines, for putting communities in the driving seat, and for relating developer contributions to locally determined infrastructure priorities. It is a matter of design rather than accident that with an innovative Core Strategy in place and as a frontrunner on both the CIL and Neighbourhood Plans, Shropshire has been well placed to respond to the localism agenda. The Place Plan approach has reignited community interest in planning, linking development with infrastructure, generating an ongoing dialogue that is aimed at ensuring that community priorities are identified and facilitates delivered alongside new development.
19. The approach has helped shift the discussion with communities towards the positive benefits that development can bring, away from "Do you want this development?" and towards "How can we work together to improve your neighbourhood?" The Council's approach to localism is that Hubs and Clusters should be determined on a case by case

basis through engagement with the local community, as part of the SAMDev process. A key underlying principle is the 'bottom up' approach, whereby the Council deliberately does not take a directive approach but instead is community-responsive, where there is community support, reflecting local community understanding of what is sustainable in the local context.

Localism in action: Implementation and Delivery

20. The localism approach in Shropshire seeks to ensure that development makes a greater contribution to improving local sustainability than has been the case in the past, through developer contributions to affordable housing and contributions to identified requirements for facilities, services and infrastructure. Each Community Hub and Community Cluster will identify those facilities, services and infrastructure which it believes will improve its sustainability, through its Place Plan.

Place Plans

21. Sustainability in Shropshire is seen as being based on many different factors and it is acknowledged that what is needed to make and maintain a sustainable community in one place may differ in another. The Place Plans are 'live' documents that are informed by each community's own requirements expressed in Parish/ Town Plans, Community Toolkit Events and Neighbourhood Plans, in addition to local evidence on infrastructure requirements from infrastructure and service providers themselves and reviewed (with communities and providers) on an annual cycle. On a place by place basis, the Plans (18 covering the whole of Shropshire) bring together the 'top down' essential infrastructure and investment requirements coupled to growth levels and development identified within the Local Plan, with the 'bottom up' community priorities and aspirations, critical in effectively targeting investment to achieve local community benefit. They accompanied the SAMDev document through its consultation stages from 2011 to 2013. Infrastructure requirements change over time, and therefore care must be exercised in referring to them in a high level document. Place Plans are simultaneously, Shropshire's LDF Implementation Plan, the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and are becoming a key aspect of the corporate approach to locality planning. They will also fulfil part of the Council's annual monitoring role as communities are updated on both policy implementation and project progress. They may not be wholly statutory adopted documents, but are already being viewed as material planning considerations by all parties in the development process.

CIL as part of an integrated package

22. Shropshire's CIL Charging Schedule was approved and adopted in September 2011, and the Council was the first local authorities to bring the Community Infrastructure Levy into effect on 1st January 2012. CIL is however only one of four aspects of developer contributions, the other three being on-site design, affordable housing and site-specific planning obligations. All four aspects need to be considered in the round if development is not to be rendered unviable. Therefore decisions on the use of CIL monies are to be fully integrated with other decisions on site design, affordable housing and on-site planning obligations. The Place Plans facilitate this integrated approach.

Local infrastructure priorities

23. In Shropshire, 90% of CIL monies (including the Neighbourhood fund proportion) will be spent on local infrastructure that has been identified by the local community as their priority. This "meaningful proportion" ensures that there is a very strong link between development and its contribution to the local community's infrastructure needs, as

defined by them. Communities will be asked annually by Members to identify their priorities for receiving community benefits from development, using the freedom that CIL introduces in the use of developer contributions.

Appendix A: The Governments Localism Approach

Date	Document	Quotes
2010	Open Source Planning Conservatives 2010 http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Green%20Papers/planning-green-paper.ashx	<p>The creation of an Open Source planning system means that local people in each neighbourhood – a term we use to include villages, towns, estates, wards or other relevant local areas – will be able to specify what kind of development and use of land they want to see in their area. This will lead to a fundamental and long overdue rebalancing of power, away from the centre and back into the hands of local people. Whole layers of bureaucracy, delay and centralised micro-management will disappear as planning shifts away from being an issue principally for “insiders” to one where communities take the lead in shaping their own surroundings.</p> <p>As with our other policies designed to bring competition to public service provision (for example our plans to empower parents and voluntary groups to provide new schools), Open Source planning will engage local communities and foster a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship.</p>
2010	Open Source Planning Conservatives 2010 http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Green%20Papers/planning-green-paper.ashx	<p>For local housing, local infrastructure and the local environment we will create a new system of collaborative planning by...giving local people the power to engage in genuine local planning through collaborative democracy – designing a local plan from the “bottom up”, starting with the aspirations of neighbourhoods;</p>
2011	Greg Clarke CPRE annual lecture Feb 2011; http://www.gregclark.org/articles~speeches/prolocalism-and-prodevelopment-a-speech-to-the/17	<p>Every single proposal in the Bill has been subject to a rigorous test: will this help us unlock growth? Take the third party right of appeal, for example. This was an idea mooted in policy consultations released before the election by both parties currently in government. But it's paradoxical on one hand to design a system that's about putting choice first - that's about giving local people better opportunities to draw up high-quality plans for their neighbourhoods and local areas - and then, with the other hand, to give greater chances to appeal against decisions made on the basis of those plans. So the third party right of appeal is not part of the Bill.</p>
2011	Greg Clarke CPRE annual lecture	'The first shortcoming in the current system [NOTE this was written in 2011,

	<p>Feb 2011; http://www.gregclark.org/articles~speeches/prolocalism-and-prodevelopment-a-speech-to-the/17</p>	<p>and so he is referring to the old system] is that too often the communities and neighbourhoods that host new development do not feel a direct benefit. They do not share in the proceeds of growth. And when new development has taken place, all too often it has not been matched with investment in infrastructure - in transport, schools, or hospitals...</p> <p>...The second shortcoming we want to address is a lack of meaningful public participation in planning. The evidence of inquiry by design in this country, and other models of getting people involved on the continent, suggest that early involvement in the decision-making process means people are more likely to be supportive of local development. The more people participate, the more likely it is that development is to take place.'</p>
2011	<p>Greg Clarke CPRE annual lecture Feb 2011; http://www.gregclark.org/articles~speeches/prolocalism-and-prodevelopment-a-speech-to-the/17</p>	<p>...we want to create more options for local communities to exercise influence in the planning process. Neighbourhood planning will let people come together at a very local level and decide, together, where the new homes, shops and businesses should go, and what they should look like. The local authority will provide technical support so that the proposals that local people draw up are of decent technical quality.</p>
2011	<p>House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee Sustainable Development in the Localism Bill Third Report of Session 2010–11 <i>Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence</i> <i>Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 16 March 2011</i> http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmenvaud/799/799.pdf</p>	<p>The Localism Bill will devolve powers to councils and neighbourhoods and aims to give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions</p>
2012	<p>Greg Clarke 12 March 2012 Hansard</p>	<p>Greg Clark: As I suggested, the Localism Act 2011 abolishes top-down</p>

	http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120312/debtext/120312-0001.htm	imposition and releases local communities to have their say, and with the new planning framework it will be unambiguously clear that it is local communities that do things their way.
2011	P1 Foreword Localism Act Plain English Guide. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf	The Localism Act requires local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value which have been nominated by the local community. When listed assets come up for sale or change of ownership, the Act then gives community groups the time to develop a bid and raise the money to bid to buy the asset when it comes on the open market. This will help local communities keep much-loved sites in public use and part of local life.
2011	P1 Foreword Localism Act Plain English Guide. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf	The Localism Act...gives local communities the power to decide. The Secretary of State will determine a limit for council tax increases which has to be approved by the House of Commons. If an authority proposes to raise taxes above this limit they will have to hold a referendum to get approval for this from local voters who will be asked to approve or to veto the rise. This means that local authorities will need to convince local voters, rather than central government of the case for excessive rises in council taxes.
2011	P1 Foreword Localism Act Plain English Guide. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf	Instead of local people being told what to do, the Government thinks that local communities should have genuine opportunities to influence the future of the places where they live. The Act introduces a new right for communities to draw up a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood planning will allow communities, both residents, employees and business, to come together through a local parish council or neighbourhood forum and say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go – and what they should look like.
2011	P1 Foreword Localism Act Plain English Guide.	As part of neighbourhood planning, the Act gives groups of local people the power to deliver the development that their local community want. They may wish to build new homes, businesses, shops, playgrounds or meeting halls. A community organisation, formed by members of the

	https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf	local community, will be able to bring forward development proposals which, providing they meet minimum criteria and can demonstrate local support through a referendum, will be able to go ahead without requiring a separate traditional planning application.
2011	P1 Foreword Localism Act Plain English Guide. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf	To further strengthen the role of local communities in planning, the Act introduces a new requirement for developers to consult local communities before submitting planning applications for certain developments. This gives local people a chance to comment when there is still genuine scope to make changes to proposals.
2011	P1 Foreword Localism Act Plain English Guide. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf	New rights and powers for local communities The Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes it easier for local people to take over the amenities they love and keep them part of local life • ensures that local social enterprises, volunteers and community groups with a bright idea for improving local services get a chance to change how things are done • enables local residents to call local

Positive Planning with Rural Communities

Shropshire's Emerging Approach to Localism

**Reviewed by Rob Hindle
September 2010**

Positive Planning with Rural Communities Shropshire's Emerging Approach to Localism

Foreword

The Coalition Government is committed to transferring power from central to local government; to enable people to shape the future of their communities and participate in decisions which affect them.

Minister for Decentralisation and Planning, Greg Clark told the Royal Institute of Town Planning Annual Convention (29th June) that his Localism and Decentralisation Bill would transfer more power from central to local government than anything else on the statute book.

Government's intention is that forward planning will become a much more local function. Planning authorities will be expected to work alongside local communities to determine a shared vision for the future and to enable and shape development to deliver it.

More benefit arising from development is to be retained locally, through local "tariffs" which will generate funds from levies on developers for investment in the "host" community. Communities will be able carry out their own developments, acting through the Community Right to Build.

The Bill will include a requirement that local development plans are generated via "collaborative democracy". This means designing the local plan from the bottom up, starting with the ambitions and aspirations of each community and neighbourhood. It will create an obligation on the planning authority to provide each community with appropriate evidence to enable it to effectively consider its own future. The authority must then help communities to develop their visions and "broker" a rational and coherent plan for the area as a whole.

In this way Government seeks to empower local to come together and define positive change which improves their lives and the lives of their neighbours.

Shropshire Council has anticipated much of this agenda and has embraced it in the iterative development of its new Local Plan. The Council wants communities to decide what their role could be and the sort of development they can, and should host in the future.

The Council published its Final Plan Core Strategy in February; it has been subject to extensive consultation and has subsequently been submitted to the Secretary of State. It will be subject to a Public Hearing to test its soundness in November of 2010.

The Council has also produced a Site Allocations and Management of Development Issues and Options DPD for consultation between April and June this year. This sets out details of potential development sites and explains the approach to development proposed for various types of settlement and areas across the County. The Council has undertaken a “road show” of consultation events to share their thinking and invite communities to respond, share their views, to provide intelligence on the potential development sites which have been identified and perhaps more importantly, to listen to each communities ambitions for its future.

In addition to this formal consultation process the Council has trialled a more detailed engagement process using the Rural Toolkit¹. Its success has encouraged the Council to commit to a collaborative approach to determining the development strategy for each and every community.

This paper sets out the Council’s approach to planning for the rural area and explains their commitment to enabling communities to take a lead in the planning process and so shape their own future.

Rob Hindle
Rural Innovation
September 2010

¹ Full details of this trial can be found in the report from West Midlands Planning Aid, Shropshire Rural Project, September 2010

The Context

1.0 Shropshire’s Local Development Framework seeks to “deliver more sustainable places at all levels and in both urban and rural settings”. It defines a sustainable place as one which has “sufficient social, economic and environmental infrastructure to meet the needs of its current population, but is also resilient and capable of adapting to a range of economic, social and environmental challenges in the future”.

2.0 The Core Strategy identifies that it is especially important to ensure that Shropshire’s market towns and rural settlements become more sustainable places and develop the resilience needed to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. When it was written key identifiable challenges would have been climate change and an uncertain economic outlook. It is now necessary to add “deficit reduction” which brings the risk of reduced levels of public sector investment in infrastructure, capacity and, possibly, services.

3.0 In its opening paragraphs² the Core Strategy acknowledges the importance of localism in the planning process and commits to a process of collaboration with communities in the rural areas.

Spatial Development Strategy

4.0 The Council has taken a very positive approach to planning for Shropshire’s extensive rural area. Its approach is to spread growth across the county. Their objective is to contribute to improved sustainability and to enable the county and all its communities to flourish.

5.0 This means that approximately 75% of new housing is to be delivered outside the main urban centre Shrewsbury, 40% in the market towns and key centres and 35% in the wider - rural rebalance - area. Other development - for economic development, cultural and community uses - will also be needed in these locations if the Strategy’s objectives are to be achieved.

6.0 Market towns and key centres are identified in the Core Strategy together with an indicative level of development

² Paragraph 1.5

(housing and employment land). These include some quite small settlements (in terms of population) - the smallest are Bishops Castle (1800 population), Pontesbury (1500) and Minsterley (1400) - which are included as a joint Key Centre.

7.0 In the Rural Rebalance area development is to be focused on settlements (or small groups of settlements) which will function as Community Hubs or Community Clusters. These “hubs & clusters” will operate as small service centres, meeting the needs of their residents and where-ever possible serving a wider catchment. Outside of these settlements development will be limited to that which enables economic diversification or to meet the needs of local communities for affordable housing.

8.0 It is implicit that Community Hubs & Community Clusters will need to host new development (housing and employment). They are also likely to need investment in facilities and other infrastructure. The Core Strategy seeks to enable (and attract) development which will improve the sustainability of these communities. It takes forward an approach which seeks to trigger investment in “community benefits” (via a local tariff) alongside, and directly linked to, development.

Settlement Hierarchy

9.0 The Core Strategy has a settlement hierarchy which includes Market Towns (Oswestry, Whitchurch, Market Drayton, Ludlow and Bridgnorth) and Key Centres (Ellesmere, Wem, Minsterley / Pontesbury, Craven Arms, Church Stretton, Bishops Castle, Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock, Broseley, Highley & Albrighton).

It states that development in these towns will

“maintain and enhance their roles in providing facilities and services to their rural hinterlands and providing foci for economic development and regeneration. Balanced housing and employment development ... will take place within the towns development boundaries and on sites allocated for development.”

10.0 These towns are to host 40% of new housing (based on figures set out within the former Regional Spatial Strategy, and agreed by Shropshire).

11.0 The remaining rural area is covered by two classifications in the hierarchy; Community Hubs and Community Clusters (CS4) or open countryside (CS5). This is to host 35% of new development.

Community Hubs & Community Clusters

12.0 The policy for hubs & clusters (CS4) states that “in the rural area communities will be made more sustainable by:

- focusing private and public investment ..into Community Hubs and Community Clusters³, and not allowing development outside these settlements unless it meets policy CS5;
- allowing development within the Community Hubs and Community Clusters that helps rebalance rural communities by providing facilities, economic development or housing for local needs, and is of a scale that is appropriate to the settlement;
- ensuring that market housing development makes sufficient contribution to improving local sustainability through a suitable mix of housing that caters for local needs and by delivering community benefits in the form of contributions to affordable housing for local people and contributions to identified requirements for facilities, services and infrastructure. The priorities for community benefit will be identified in partnership with the community.
- Ensuring that all development is of a scale and design that is sympathetic to the character of the settlement and its environs.

Countryside and Green Belt

13.0 Those settlements not classified as Community Hubs and Community Clusters will be subject to policy CS5 Countryside and Green Belt. This states that “new development will be strictly controlled in accordance with national planning policies

³ Groups of settlements that provide the role of a Hub

protecting the countryside and Green Belt from inappropriate development”.

14.0 Subject to further controls re the green belt development proposals on appropriate sites which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character will be permitted where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits, particularly where they relate to:

- Small scale economic development diversifying the rural economy, including farm diversification schemes,
- Dwellings to house agricultural, forestry or other essential countryside workers and other affordable housing or accommodation to meet a local need in accordance with national planning policies and Policies CS11 and CS12

With regard to the above two types of development, applicants will be required to demonstrate the need and benefit for the development proposed. Development will be expected to take place primarily in recognisable named settlements or be linked to other existing development and business activity.

- Other acceptable uses include extension of existing business (unless relocation would be more appropriate); conversion or replacement of buildings for economic development / employment; rural tourism and recreation; community uses and infrastructure; conversion of buildings for employment, affordable housing to meet local need

15.0 Within the Green Belt additional controls will be applied in line with PPG2. Limited local needs affordable housing on exceptions sites will be permitted in the Green Belt, as will limited infilling in any Community Hubs & Clusters.

Allocating Development

16.0 The Rural Rebalance area has a “notional” allocation of 9000 new houses over the plan period (35% of Shropshire’s housing target). Whilst the housing numbers are “notional” since the demise of the Regional Spatial Strategy Shropshire is going to retain them “up to” and “if required”.

17.0 The Council's view is that they are not *required* to deliver this number of new houses, but that it is a figure which represents a sensible target to enable sustainable growth and meet wider corporate and partnership objectives. 9000 new homes is therefore a target for managed delivery in the Rural Rebalance area, and possibly a cap, but will not be binding.

Community Self Determination

18.0 The Core Strategy stops here. It does not go on to address the two extant questions:

- Which settlements or groups of settlements are to be classified as Community Hubs and Community Clusters?
- How will development (particularly the 9000 new houses) be distributed across those settlements?

19.0 The Council recognises that it will need to persuade an inspector that this approach is sound but wants each community (settlement or cluster of settlements) **to make this decision for itself.**

20.0 Initial identification of Hubs and Clusters and site allocations for development will be made following consultation on the Site Allocations and Management of Development document. Initial analysis of responses has already indicated strong results with a good many settlements self identifying as Community Hubs & Community Clusters.

21.0 In the next formal stages of the Local Plan's development these will be placed within this classification in the Settlement Hierarchy. The next stage of the plan making process will provide for further testing and refinement of the response from these communities as well as giving an opportunity for more proposals to come forward from other communities as a result of dialogue with Shropshire Council.

22.0 At the point that The Site Allocations and Management of Development DPD becomes adopted all remaining settlements in the Rural Rebalance area will be covered by policy CS5.

23.0 They need not retain this classification however.

24.0 Communities will be enabled to promote themselves as Community Hubs & Community Clusters and so move up the Settlement Hierarchy. Once a community offers to become and is accepted by Shropshire Council as a Community Hub or Community Cluster, it will become subject to policy CS4 for development management purposes.

25.0 In this way the process of local self determination remains a live process and not one only addressed every ten years or so.

26.0 Communities can “trigger” this change in classification by:

- Carrying out a credible community led planning exercise leading to a conclusion that they would like to be a Community Hub or Community Cluster, and
- Electing to become a Community Hub or Community Cluster via the Parish Council and communicating their wishes to Shropshire Council, and
- Identifying and articulating the type and scale of development (including numbers of houses) they would like to host, and
- Identifying and articulating priorities for community benefits

27.0 Once this process is complete the settlement will be classified as a Community Hub or Community Cluster. The settlements wishes will be included within what Shropshire Council are describing as Place Plans (implementation plan for the LDF), used to set a “target” for windfall development and to describe the community benefits sought locally.

28.0 It is anticipated that the relevant ward member from Shropshire Council would be involved in the local community led planning and decision making process. It is also anticipated that officers from the Planning and Community Regeneration teams would be involved to support the community in this process and to offer advice as to the appropriate scale and type of development as well as the nature of support that the community would need in making it a more sustainable place.

29.0 Shropshire Council intends to offer the Rural Toolkit⁴ as a catalyst and as a framework to initiate and enable this process. It has written to all parish and town councils offering to hold community testing events with them and several are now being lined up for the spring of 2011 (following on from community testing events in the Market Towns and Key Centres this autumn and winter).

30.0 Once the Community Led Plan which proposes additions to the list of Hubs or Clusters within the Settlement Hierarchy is complete, and subject to support from the Planning Portfolio Holder and Cabinet Rural Champion, it will be presented to the Council. The Council will test its “soundness” against the objectives and guiding principles of the Core Strategy in terms of the way in which it was developed and the extent of local support.

31.0 Where the Council is ready to support it, the Plan will be “adopted” as a material planning consideration and included as an amendment / addition to the Local Development Framework via an update to the Local Implementation Plan and Place Plan for that area.

Addressing the Sustainability Trap

32.0 This approach combines the received method of defining a spatial development strategy using a settlement hierarchy with a hefty dose of localism and community empowerment. The position of a settlement on the hierarchy governs planning and development management response.

33.0 Those settlements which are not classified as Market Towns and Key Centres or Community Hubs and Clusters are “residual”. They are subject to “countryside” policies designed to constrain development and protect the natural environment.

34.0 They remain at risk of falling into the “sustainability trap” articulated by Taylor in Living Working Countryside.

⁴ www.ruraltoolkit.org.uk

35.0 The big move forward in Shropshire’s approach is that these communities are no longer forced to accept this position, or to remain in this classification. They can do something about it themselves.

36.0 The decision about which part of the hierarchy to be in, how much and what sort of development to host **lies with the community** and is not linked to any artificial sustainability criteria.

37.0 This approach shares many of the principles of the “Right to Build” but in this way it is included within the local planning system.

38.0 This approach is an important shift of power from the authority to the community. If it can be effectively enabled it should provide a strong catalyst for localism within the County, establishing a collaborative relationship and building trust in the elected members of the new unitary Council.

Embedding Localism

39.0 Localism is not just about planning however. Government’s aspiration is that it extends to every area of the relationship between state and citizen.

40.0 In their recent discussion paper⁵ Nesta argues that local government can “encourage widespread, high quality local responses to big challenges” by embracing localism and enabling a series of local actions to develop solutions to big social challenges - such as climate change, demographic change and service withdrawal. It calls this “mass localism”.

41.0 By embedding localism in their approach to planning Shropshire Council may very well be putting in place the foundations for a much wider shift in their relationship with local communities and in their ability to get things done.

⁵ Mass Localism; Nesta; August 2010

42.0 This is a move which is very much at the heart of the Council's whole Transformation agenda and I await with interest the detail of their blueprint for change as they tackle the localism agenda full on.

43.0 Shropshire's early adoption of the principles of localism in plan making should be applauded. It has taken foresight and leadership to commit to a path which has yet to be enshrined in legislation or precedent.

44.0 I should like to congratulate Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning Councillor Mal Price and Head of Strategy and Policy Jake Berriman on their innovation and ambition and urge that this approach be considered in other rural areas.

Rob Hindle
Rural Innovation
September 2010

Rural Innovation is a specialist rural consultancy dedicated to developing the dynamism and competitiveness of rural Britain. We are passionate rural champions and work with government, business and communities to enable positive and sustainable change.

At Rural Innovation we have a detailed knowledge of the people and places of rural Britain based on over 20 years of experience. We are experts in rural and coastal economies, housing, broadband, farming and land management, the natural environment, renewable energy, planning and community development.

Our mission is to increase opportunities for people of all types to live, work, visit and thrive in Britain's rural areas, both now and in the future.

Rural Innovation is run by Rob Hindle.

Rob is a leading rural expert and policy adviser. He founded Rural Innovation in response to the Foot & Mouth outbreak in 2001 and has subsequently delivered projects for a wide range of public agencies, local and central government.

Rob has a deep interest in sustainable communities and rural economies. He is passionate about the countryside and is a keen advocate of the management of land to deliver public as well as private goods and services.

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Community Hubs and Community Clusters

37. Policy CS1 expects the rural areas to accommodate *around 35%* (9,625 dwellings) of the overall amount of residential development in Shropshire **[PC5]**. This amount of development will be delivered by Policies CS4 & CS5, in the *Community Hubs and Clusters* (around 24-29%), and from affordable housing on exception sites in the countryside (which previously have contributed about 10% of total supply), along with the conversion and re-use of rural buildings. It would also play a major part in the key objective of rebalancing the rural communities. The proposed 35% level is much less than has occurred in Shropshire's villages in the past (42%), and early consultations on the SAMDev [EV141] show that this level of development meets community aspirations, is achievable and deliverable, particularly given the existing level of completions and commitments [FS3.5].

38. However, the suggested addition of "*if required*" to the 35% figure would introduce vagueness about how this figure would be established or delivered, which I cannot endorse. The term "*around 35%, to meet local needs and reflect community aspirations*" would give sufficient flexibility and clear guidance to communities to enable the precise amount and distribution of development within the rural area to be established as part of the SAMDev process **[PC5]**.

39. Policy CS4 establishes a positive framework for rural communities, enabling them to accept development where they consider it would benefit the sustainability of their settlement [FS1.16]. Rather than listing appropriate settlements, the policy outlines what a community hub or cluster is, as a focus for investment, and indicates what development might be acceptable in terms of catering for local needs; this will vary depending on the size and nature of the settlement and its needs. Community Hubs will be single settlements, whilst Community Clusters could be a group of closely related settlements which, together, have a range of facilities serving a local area. They will be identified in the SAMDev, after extensive consultation with communities, and the policy will be delivered through the LDF, other SPDs and the LDFIP. The policy will play an important part in rebalancing rural communities, closely reflects the emerging localism agenda, and is supported by evidence [EV10-11].

40. There is some concern that the policy should identify the specific local centres or include more criteria for their definition. However, the CS is based on a hierarchy which recognises the role and function of settlements, rather than their size, range of services, capacity or set criteria. The key is to engage with the communities and focus on the sustainability of settlements, and provide development which benefits the community and reflects their social and economic function. Policy CS4 will facilitate this community-based "bottom-up" process of "self-determination", enabling a more sustainable pattern of development in rural areas, with viable, realistic community benefits being delivered, in line with the concept of localism. Evidence on the initial consultation stage of the SAMDev [EV141] shows that enough settlements (over 40) will probably come forward to ensure that the overall scale of development envisaged in community hubs and clusters will be delivered. Continued dialogue with communities, landowners and other stakeholders may lead to more nominations as the plan-making process proceeds.

**APPENDIX C: Extract from Inspectors Report into the Shropshire Core Strategy
February 2011 (Stephen J Pratt BA (Hons) MRTPI)**

41. The community hubs and clusters would be unlikely to provide all of the 35% of development envisaged in the rural area outside market towns and other key centres. But with the contribution of "exception" sites, re-use and conversion of rural buildings and other rural developments, along with current commitments, it is likely that this proportion would be achieved [FS3.5]. Debate about which settlements should be identified as community hubs and clusters will be addressed in the SAMDev within the framework set by Policy CS4, providing certainty for both landowners and communities alike. Issues about sites being "*within*", "*in*" or "*at*" settlements are largely academic, given that this matter will be addressed in the SAMDev. The requirement for developers to provide community facilities and benefits is realistic and proportionate, and will depend on viability. A proposed change to the Glossary includes more specific definitions of housing for local needs **[PC18]**. Rural "exception" sites will form an appropriate part of the strategy for the rural area, and the policy will also facilitate special needs housing, including for the elderly.

42. Consequently, with the proposed changes, Policy CS4 provides a positive, clearly expressed and sound basis for identifying community hubs and clusters, which is justified, effective and deliverable. It also recognises the particular needs and characteristics of Shropshire's rural settlements, directly reflects the localism agenda, and will help in rebalancing the rural settlements.