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Our future*

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# **Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Development Plan Review 2017**

## **Housing Report**

**March 2017**

# Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan Review 2017 - Housing Report

This Review paper has been prepared by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group set up by Much Wenlock Town Council, comprising members of the community, Town and Shropshire Councillors and advised by Shropshire Council officers. It is set out in 7 sections;

1. Introduction
2. Executive Summary
3. Current and Future Housing Needs
4. Overview of the supply of Affordable Housing
5. Housing supply – development trends 2013-2017
6. Scale and type of future housing developments
7. Conclusions

## 1. Introduction

This paper sets out the background to the Housing chapter of the Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan (MWNP) Review 2017. It provides the background evidence and information which have informed the housing policies and proposals of the original Plan. The policies were aimed at helping meet the local housing needs of the community and were drafted to also accord with the Shropshire Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

It draws on a range of evidence primarily;

- Planning Policy & Strategy Manager of Shropshire Council who has provided the Panel with regular development completion updates.
- the Shropshire Housing Group Community Led Partnership in tandem with the Much Wenlock Town Council ,
- the Shropshire Council housing allocation scheme, Homepoint.
- Neighbourhood Plan Residents Survey, published July 2012, which is the most recent housing survey for Much Wenlock.
- Local landowners

The Housing policies of the Neighbourhood Plan were framed in the context of the NPPF's ambition to achieve sustainable development (paragraphs 9, 10 and 14), to widen the choice of high quality homes to meet objectively assessed needs and to take account of the local circumstances of Much Wenlock. As such the Neighbourhood Plan continues to actively aim at implementing paragraph 50 of the NPPF in determining the 'size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand' and to monitor and review the policies for meeting the identified need for affordable housing.

The Plan successfully passed the basic conditions required by legislation and this review seeks to monitor continuing alignment with the aims of the NPPF and Core Strategy which seeks to secure a housing supply which meets local needs and ensure that sufficient land comes forward to meet those needs over the Plan period. Core Strategy policies have been set within the context of a series of overarching objectives and Objective 5 is relevant here. This states that the Core Strategy will,

*“Provide for a mix of good quality, sustainable housing development of the right size, type, tenure and affordability to meet the housing needs and aspirations of all sections of the community, including provision for specialist needs and the elderly.”*

More specifically, in relation to Much Wenlock the Core Strategy states that, *“the town is subject to inward development pressures and to avoid becoming a commuting settlement, the priority is for local employment opportunities balanced with housing and infrastructure to meet local needs.”* The MWNP Review 2017 seeks to monitor the progress of the Core Strategy in this respect.

The MWNP and its policies were subject to assessment by an independent examiner, Andrew Ashcroft, BA (Hons) MA, DMS, MRTPI, the then Assistant Director – Economic, Environment & Cultural Services, Herefordshire Council, in 2013 and 2014. He made certain recommendations which are pertinent this Review and these are noted below;

*5.2 In particular the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates that plans should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made, and that plans should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraphs 17 and 154 of the NPPF).*

*5.22 A realistic target would however be necessary in order to allow effective monitoring to take place.*

*5.24 The proposed targets largely reflected differing opinions on the urban capacity of the Much Wenlock town area and the likelihood of affordable housing coming forward on exception sites in the Plan period. Having considered all the information, I recommend a housing target of 130 dwellings for the Much Wenlock town area in the Plan period. I have come to this conclusion on the basis of the identified housing needs in the plan area and the evolving relationship between the Town Council and the Shropshire Housing Group.*

*5.25 The development of new housing in the Plan area in forthcoming years will be influenced by a combination of factors including the take-up of the various extant planning permissions, the deliverability of affordable housing units (especially through the Town Council/Shropshire Housing Group model) and the availability of as yet unspecified windfall sites. Given this range of factors I also recommend a modification that the Plan is reviewed after a three year rather than a five year period. That review should focus on housing delivery and will be able to assess progress on the granting of planning permissions and/or the delivery of housing in the Plan area. If necessary the review of the Plan will be the trigger either for the modification of some of its policies and/ or the allocation of a suitable urban extension site that itself meets the basic conditions.*

It is these comments which underpin the Housing Report Review document. Background documentation used in compiling this report is available from the Town Clerk’s office.

<mailto:townclerk@muchwenlock-tc.gov.uk>.

### **Affordable Housing – a definition**

The term ‘affordable housing’ is used in broad terms in this document and refers to dwellings within the area of Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan and includes social rented and shared equity homes from Housing Associations or social rented homes from the local authority (Shropshire

Council). It also includes four almshouses which are in the control of a trust. It can also include self-build homes in some circumstances. For a full definition of 'affordable homes' see Shropshire Council's Supplementary Planning Document, 2012.

## 2. Executive Summary

The Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' in July 2014 having been assessed independently and successfully passed a referendum of the community. The assessor recommended that the Town Council, with Shropshire Council, should, after 3 years, review the delivery of housing in the context of a target of some 130 dwellings by 2026. The Town Council established a working group to monitor the progress of the Plan and this report sets out the findings as they relate to the town of Much Wenlock. The overall picture is that some **73** dwellings have been built or have been given permission to build since April 2013 up until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. This exceeds more than half the target suggested by the assessor. The Plan's policies are aimed at meeting the local housing requirements of the community for both market dwellings and affordable housing. To date working with the Shropshire Housing Group an exception site has been brought forward which will deliver 12 dwellings. There remains an ongoing need for affordable houses to meet local requirements. Given the healthy if not high levels of housing development, the successful developing relationship with local social housing providers and our knowledge of the potential for windfall and exceptions sites we can conclude that at this stage there is no need to change or modify the Housing policies and approach set out in the Neighbourhood Plan. We note that Shropshire Council is undertaking a partial review of the Core Strategy toward a new Local Plan for Shropshire. The Neighbourhood Plan will need to inform this review and consider any appropriate changes of context for managing development beyond 2026 to 2036.

## 3. Current and Future Housing Requirements.

The Much Wenlock Neighbourhood Plan (MWNP) Residents Survey undertaken in October 2012 revealed that **34** (10.7%) respondents to the MWNP Residents Survey who completed the Housing Needs section said they are in need of housing now. Of those which filled in the relevant questions the type of home occupation they are seeking was broken down as follows:

- 6 Owner occupied
- 0 Private rented
- 22 Rented through Homepoint
- 4 Shared equity with a housing provider

The Shropshire Homepoint is the facility by which local people register their housing needs in the County. It is used by Shropshire Council to help assess local needs and match supply. The Homepoint figures for Much Wenlock as of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 suggest that there are **38** households on the housing register with current Parish addresses and of these **25** households have expressed a first preference to remain living in the Parish. These 25 households (according to *Shropshire Council Homepoint*) require the following number of bedrooms:-

14 x 1 bed  
10 x 2 bed

1 x 4 bed

There remains an expectation that in Much Wenlock that there would be an element of need which have not yet been registered with Homepoint

#### **Future Housing requirements over the next 5 years**

**63** (21.2%) respondents to the MWNP Residents Survey who completed the Housing Needs section said they would be looking for property both affordable housing and market housing over the next 5 years. Those which filled in the relevant questions were hoping to meet their needs through the following:

- 25 owner occupier
- 10 Privately rented
- 22 Rented through Homepoint
- 4 Shared equity with a housing provider

Consultations associated with the Shropshire Housing Group Community Led project at the beginning of 2017 revealed 7 expressions of interest for shared equity homes; we do not yet know how this relates to the survey answers in 2012, whether they are new or perhaps form part of the 25 wanting to become owner occupiers.

*Source: Much Wenlock Residents Survey raw data responses, 20/06/2012 Page 11, F3/F4  
Shropshire Housing Group Jan 2017*

In summary therefore, these figures suggest that the need for affordable housing in the parish remains similar to that identified in 2012 and is in the order of **52** over the next 5 years; this figure does not take into account the turnover [of approximately one in seven] of existing affordable housing stock which becomes available annually through natural changes in circumstances. Neither does it take into account that by far the majority of the **192** social rented homes in Much Wenlock are not covered by a local letting policy, being available through Shropshire Council Homepoint on a 'those in most housing need' basis

Additionally **31** respondents to the resident's survey will be looking to buy market housing over the next 5 years; some or all of these potential buyers will take advantage of the turnover of annual market house sales or the expansion of the shared equity supply or the delivery of dwellings through windfall sites in the town and parish.

#### **4. Overview of the supply of Affordable Housing to meet local needs**

This section gives an overview of affordable housing in the parish and places this in the context of previous studies and the attitude of the community to providing for these local needs.

Affordable Housing is available in the town and parish or has come forward through the following;

##### **Shared equity**

- 13 shared equity homes have become available at Sytche Lane
- 3 shared equity homes have been taken up on the Farley Rd
- 2 further shared equity homes are planned at Callaughton Lane (these will be covered by a local lettings policy)

We note that some of these may be sold on to buyers with no 'local connection'.

### **Social Rented**

There is a reasonable stock of social affordable housing in the parish. The housing stock of social rented properties up to 2012 in Much Wenlock is **192** out of total of around thirteen hundred or so homes. A further **10** social rented homes are due to be available by the end of 2017 in Callaughton Lane; these will be covered by a 'local connection' policy.

This is slightly lower than the average for Shropshire but in line with the national average.

The social housing is made up of a mix of types, owned by a number of different Housing Association owners, with the majority belonging to Shropshire Council.

When they become vacant they are all let through Homepoint, the Shropshire Council Housing service which allocates social rented properties in the town. Only a very small number require a 'local connection', the majority of properties are let to those 'most in housing need' taken from a wider area than the Much Wenlock parish.

Sources: *Shropshire Council Homepoint data Feb 2012-Jan 2017*  
*Shropshire Council Supplementary Planning Document, Type and Affordability of Housing, 2011*  
*Definition of 'local connection', Shropshire Council Core Strategy, Build your own affordable home*  
*Information Pack, Sept 2012,*  
*Shropshire Council Much Wenlock Rented Properties, 10/02/2012*

## **5. Housing Supply – completions and development trends 2013 - 2017**

Shropshire Council's monitoring figures (*Shropshire Council, Much Wenlock completions 1 April 2013 to end of Feb 2017*) for completed developments in Much Wenlock since the start of the Plan period, April 2013, show that there have been **29** completed dwellings in the town including **13** affordable housing units. These figures include one large site (Sytche Lane shared equity dwellings) the remainder are from windfall sites.

The figures for permissions and current applications in the town and the parish are as follows:

### **Outstanding residential permissions granted in Much Wenlock**

- 4 dwellings the Lindens Station Rd
- 17 Lady Forester Nursing Home (sheltered dwellings)
- 2 flats at 64a High Street
- 2 dwellings at Gasworks corner
- 12 affordable dwellings Callaughton Lane
- 1 affordable dwelling Bourton Rd
- 1 Mardol House King St
- 1 dwelling at former sorting office
- 1 Birchfield House
- 2 Fox Studio
- 1 Barn Conversion St Mary's lane

- 1 Land adjacent to 6 Bridge Rd

Residential permissions in the rural parish have not been included as they do not form part of the target figure of **130** set by the assessor. How housing completions are counted may be a matter for any future changes to the Plan, there may be an opportunity to include the settlement at Homer as part of the town completions. The total for permitted and built dwellings since April 2013 is some **73** dwellings or more than half the target for the whole plan period to 2016.

### **Expressions of interest during the plan period**

In addition to these 73 dwellings, we have identified a number of other potential development and windfall sites through 'calls for land' on various occasions. The number of expressions of interest strongly suggests this will help to ensure a steady supply of land for housing allocation. These are:

- 4 dwellings in Sytche Lane, (expression of interest)
- Pinefields (empty dwelling with land)
- Lady Forester Nursing Home (further development expression of interest within the Plan period)
- Land behind Havelock Crescent

In conclusion, the historic development trend in Much Wenlock and the surrounding parish since 2013 is that **73** units have been built or have permission granted, of which **42** have been on large sites, **13** of which are on an exception site and **18** on windfall sites.

Based on the anticipated completion figures of **69** dwellings since April 2013 up to Jan 2017 for Much Wenlock town, it is reasonable to state that the Plan is well ahead in delivering the Assessor's target set out in the Plan. We can also anticipate with some confidence that there will be a steady and adequate supply of housing provision, which has averaged at **17** dwellings per year, to come forward within the timescale of the Plan.

Since the start of the Shropshire Council Local Plan period in 2006, Shropshire Council figures show that dwellings completed or on stream for completion are providing a substantial contribution to local housing supply. The figures taken together indicate that the town and parish is and has already substantially met the expectations of the target of 130 dwellings required by the independent assessor during the period of the MWNP.

The delivery of sufficient or additional numbers of dwellings is, of course, not the whole ambition for the Plan. As noted above, this must also be of the right type to meet local needs. We remain concerned about the number single level developments which are suited to the elderly or disabled and the Homepoint data suggests continuing needs for affordable houses to meet local needs.

*MWNP Monitoring Panel assessments*

*Shropshire Council Completions figures*

*MWTC PEC minutes since April 2013*

*Applicable national and local policy guidance*

*PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development*

*PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*

*Much Wenlock Design Statement*

*Much Wenlock Town Council Minutes, 7 Feb 2013, item 18*

## 6. Scale and type of future housing developments

This section reviews the findings of the 2012 Residents Survey and considers the approach the Plan takes towards land supply and availability. In order to inform the policies in the Plan, the survey of 2012 asked people for their views on the scale of development that they thought would be appropriate for Much Wenlock. The key findings were that:

- **548** respondents expressed the view that developments should be less than **25** dwellings
- **61** people wanted developments of over **50** dwellings

*The majority of respondents think that the size of developments should be limited to less than 25 dwellings.*

- **526** respondents expressed the view that no more than **100** houses should be built up to 2026
- **175** people said that up to **500** houses should be built up to 2026

As noted above, in 2013 the independent assessor set a development target figure of **130** dwellings in the town of Much Wenlock over the Plan period of April 2013 to 2026

Through the Residents Survey in 2012, the community was asked whether the Plan should allocate land for affordable housing. A clear majority of respondents to the Residents Survey said that the Neighbourhood Plan should allocate land for affordable housing to meet local needs. **587 (84%)** said 'Yes' to the allocation of land, whilst **109 (16%)** said 'No' to allocating land. There is no suggestion at present that this response has broadly speaking changed.

Respondents who were looking for homes, both affordable and market, or will be looking for them over the next five years were also asked what type of housing they would require.

### **In 2012**

- 21.9% required one bedroom
- 53.1% required two bedrooms
- 18.8% required three bedrooms
- 6.3% required four bedrooms

### **Over the next five years:**

- 33.3% required one bedroom
- 47.6% required two bedrooms
- 19.0% required three bedrooms
- There was no requirement stated for four or five bedroom homes.

There was also a strong response from older residents who attended the community consultation events during 2012 that sheltered or housing suitable for older residents was a high priority. The 2011 Census shows that the median age of the local population is 51 compared with 39 nationally. 27% of residents are aged 65 and over compared with 22% in England and 28% in Shropshire. The single largest cohort accounting for a fifth of the local population is in the 49-59 age bracket.



The conclusions were that the MWNP Housing Policies must ensure that developments will include a range of house types; including a mix of two and three bedroom homes with a high percentage of single storey homes on level sites suited to older residents, and to ensure that sheltered housing is included as part of the future development in the town. This will serve to meet both the needs of our ageing population and young people looking to live in Much Wenlock. The policies must also ensure that new housing development is of a scale and location which meets the aspiration for smaller scale development in keeping with the nature of the town and parish.

Sources: *Much Wenlock Residents Survey raw data responses, 20/06/2012, Page 1 A1-A5 Retired Population estimates (Laing & Buisson, Care of elderly people: UK market survey, 2006) Age Concern England, Age Agenda 2008).*

National Statistics website: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

In the context of this clearly assessed need, the Plan proposes a combination of delivery approaches which include developing collaborative partnerships between the Much Wenlock Town Council, Shropshire Council and one or more Housing Associations to bring forward affordable housing on exception and other sites. The Plan permits growth on a scale acceptable to the community; permitting small scale infill and windfall sites within the parish and some land allocation. It also makes sure that developments include a suitable mix of housing suited to local needs, including dwellings suited to older residents. The Plan will do this by:

- Allocation of land
- Policies to manage and allow the development of appropriate windfall sites
- Working with Shropshire Council and social housing providers to bring forward exceptions sites

### **Allocation of land**

The Draft Plan as submitted for assessment did include a 1 ha allocation for market housing at Bridgnorth Road but the landowner/developer withdraw the site as being unviable in the context of their commercial arrangements. The assessor consequently deleted the proposal from the Plan that went to the referendum. This was based on a degree of confidence that there would be a continuing supply of houses through windfalls and exceptions site policies under H1.

### **Windfalls**

We have noted above that there has been a steady development of small windfall sites and Further windfall sites coming forward could easily generate 60 or more houses in the remaining 9 years of the Plan period. This shows Much Wenlock will deliver a significant level of housing development and we are aware that some residents may argue that this is an increase which is too large for the scale of the town and the environment of the parish. In drafting the Neighbourhood Plan, we were advised that windfall sites could not be refused provided they met the design and other policies of the Plan. As the Plan notes, the assessor's target sets out a benchmark for the scale of development in Much Wenlock and the Town Council will continue to monitor the situation in discussion with Shropshire Council.

## **Delivering an Affordable Housing Supply - Exceptions Sites**

However, the Town Council also wishes to ensure that there is a supply of affordable housing for local people. The Community Led Project Group formed in 2013 has engaged with The Shropshire Housing Group and investigated possible sites and funding sources. This process has led to the successful purchase and permission for development of 12 homes at Callaughton Lane

The 'call for land' identified a number of potential sites which may be suitable as exception sites. By working with social housing providers the Town Council can identify further small scale sites in the parish.

*The Much Wenlock Town Council resolved 'to enter into a dialogue with housing providers that had expressed an interest to provide affordable homes to meet the needs of the community'*

*Much Wenlock Town Council Minutes, 31 Jan 2013, item 5*

*The Much Wenlock Town Council resolved to meet with Shropshire Housing Group.*

*Much Wenlock Town Council Minutes, 7 March 2013, item 16*

*The Much Wenlock Town Council resolved to an annual monitoring of the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan and to carry out a three year review of the policies.*

*Much Wenlock Town Council Minutes, 7 March 2013, item 17a and 17b*

## **7. Conclusions**

The Housing Policies within the Neighbourhood Plan, adopted by the Much Wenlock Town Council and the Shropshire Council, as a package, aim to deliver a supply of housing through limited development to meet local needs and also establish a long term working arrangement whereby these needs are understood and delivery mechanisms can evolve to meet Much Wenlock's unique circumstances.

The monitoring procedure provides compelling evidence of housing development occurring on track and perhaps ahead of anticipated target levels. Complemented by our knowledge of local sites, in the Plan period we can anticipate a regular contribution of windfall sites [NPPF para 48] and through active engagement with Housing Associations and Shropshire Council, there is real scope for an approach which will bring forward further exceptions sites. As such we can conclude that there is no compelling evidence to suggest that the housing policies or proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan need to be modified or altered at this stage.

We are aware that Shropshire Council is now undertaking a partial review of the Core Strategy and Local Plan for Shropshire to manage development to 2036 - <http://new.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/local-plan-partial-review-issues-and-strategic-options-consultation/>. The Neighbourhood Plan continues to be relevant as the review is undertaken the Core Strategy and Local Plan for Shropshire to manage development to 2036. Its value lies in that it seeks to reflect the unique character and circumstances as well as the aspirations of the community of Much Wenlock. Its importance in the process of review will be in ensuring that the ambitions of the community are appropriately reflected in decision making on planning applications. The Neighbourhood Plan will inform this review to ensure that the ambitions of the community are not overridden by strategic policies which do not understand the unique character and circumstances of Much Wenlock. The Town Council through its Neighbourhood Plan Working Group will be engaging with Shropshire Council on their review.

## **Issues for the Future**

Monitoring the Neighbourhood Plan continues to be key to its relevance to the community especially analysis of the effects of the future changes of government policy, it is recognised that there may be some unpredictability attached to the exercise but there is a need to recognise that there may be changes.

The key question is what will happen when Shropshire Council roll forward their Local Plan to 2036 under the White Paper changes and how Much Wenlock will fit into the future needs of Shropshire as a whole. The Government may require a new methodology for numerical assessment of market needs which will be based on the census, though this is still undefined. The current target of 130 new dwellings for Much Wenlock by 2026 may not continue to stand. It is not know yet whether the new figures derived will be or mandatory or advisory. There may be a separate methodology for Neighbourhood Plan areas but the picture at the time of writing is still unclear.