

Response to Public Consultation 12 January 2013

First, I would like to thank all those involved with compiling the Neighbourhood Plan thus far for their dedication and diligence and months of hard work.

Town Referendum

I strongly agree with most of the proposals set out in the consultation document (copy enclosed), but I still think the Plan does not go far enough to expose the problems of flooding, drainage and traffic congestion as they exist **now**; this so their proper acknowledgment might better inform the way ahead in relation to any future development. For the past several decades the town has been in a state of what might be described as infra-structure deficit. And the real challenge is how the town might solve this to create a sustainable and safe environment for all the residents who live here now. In recognition of this position, in December 2007, at the Town Referendum, 461 voted against further development in the town until flooding, drainage and traffic issues were resolved. Only 13 people voted for continued development.

Flooding and pollution

Since 2007 we have seen the completion of Falcon's Court and the building of Forester Gardens. The latter was strongly opposed by residents and the Town and Bridgnorth District Councils on grounds flood risk and drainage issues. During the 1990s Bridgnorth District Council had in fact imposed a moratorium on development in the town because the sewerage system was so poor. Refusal of an application on these grounds at the Lady Forester Hospital around 1997 is evidence of this. It was not clear even to former Bridgnorth District Council's senior Planning Officer, Mike Clough how this moratorium was dispensed with, but from around 2000 onwards we have seen considerable development, and absolutely no improvement of the sewerage system that currently allows the sewage works to dump excess flow, including untreated effluent, into Farley Brook.

It is interesting to consider that in the 21st century, our ancient medieval town is still upholding medieval habits by depositing its bodily waste into a water course that runs past other people's properties and, during the last flood of 2007, **through** other people's properties. It is also interesting to consider that the water course that all of us help to pollute then flows into River Severn and thence passes through a World Heritage Site.

Surely, then, a major objective for the Neighbourhood Plan, is for the town to stop polluting the environment during times of heavy rainfall. This is a matter for **current** residents. It relates to the properties that are here already. It is especially pertinent in times of climate change. It will of course be expensive to rectify. But if we do nothing about it, are we simply going to accept the situation? And if we do accept it, then how can we talk of sustainability? Passing the problem downstream and wilfully adding to it with more development, does not seem to be responsible or sustainable behaviour.

In the recent past, local Shropshire Council politicians have argued that the only way to fund the upgrading of deficient infra-structure is to develop, but since the authorities concerned are unlikely to upgrade roads and drainage **in advance** of development, the effect of further large-scale development could be, in the interim, catastrophic for householders downstream of it. All drainage in Much Wenlock's very steep catchment must, in the end, go through Farley.

While the building/ reinstating of attenuation ponds around the town's catchment is welcomed, it should be made clear as part of the plan that these ponds may indeed **alleviate** flooding conditions, but they do not stop it altogether. The ponds must be managed and kept empty. In other words, the creation of such ponds should not be taken to mean that the flooding problem has been solved, and that further large-scale development can then proceed.

Affordable housing

What is the definition of 'affordable'? And how does this fit in a locality where house values are among the highest in the county?

According to the housing survey people in the town have requested more affordable housing, but levels of affordability in the town are to a great extent influenced by residents themselves. Are property owners prepared to sell their homes for less and implode the high market values that typify Much Wenlock's property market? This seems unlikely unless national market values force them to do so. But the more residents set high value on their own property, then the harder it becomes to build something affordable for young people starting out, or the elderly who wish scale down. Perhaps residents should be encouraged to convert larger houses to include affordable units for younger or older family members. We have also recently seen commercial developers doing constructive conversions on the High Street, upgrading shops and also making studio apartments from larger premises above them. This is to be applauded on many fronts. It maintains the historic environment and the town's essential character while providing useful retail/business and more living spaces in the heart of the town. Hopefully these new homes will be for rent since local demand for reasonably priced rental properties seems not be met.

Exception sites

The use of exception sites to meet the need of affordable housing should be regarded with great caution. CPRE has shown that an exception site can be used to set precedent for another 'exception' site once the development boundary is breached. Adaptive re-use of existing buildings and infill should be the first options. **And what has happened to Shropshire Council's initiative to encourage landowners to provide small parcels of land for affordable self-build homes?** Surely this would be an appropriate strategy for many parts of the parish, and more in keeping with the natural flow of small-scale growth in most small communities? It is also one that is subject to a real and demonstrable demand. Someone needs a home in a given locality and the land owner and the authorities facilitate provision that allows them to build it (subject to affordable build conditions). It demonstrates a true community commitment to affordability in perpetuity.

Many thanks for the chance to express these views, [REDACTED], resident.