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Date: 28th April 2025

Dear Ian,

Shropshire Local Plan – Update on Examination and Duty to Cooperate Position

The purpose of this correspondence is to provide you with an update on the examination of the draft Shropshire Local Plan and to outline the consequences of this for the Duty to Cooperate process between our two authorities.

As you will be aware, the draft Shropshire Local Plan has been at independent examination since September 2021. As part of the Duty to Cooperate process undertaken to inform this, our authorities agreed that of the forecast unmet need arising in the four Black Country authority areas over the plan period, 1,500 dwellings and 30ha of employment land would be accommodated within Shropshire. This position was reflected within the agreed Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) in August 2021, and within the draft Shropshire Local Plan itself. Subsequently, this position has been reaffirmed at various points, most recently as part of the SoCG in November 2024 which has informed the recent submission version of the Wolverhampton Local Plan.

Whilst the examining Inspectors into the draft Shropshire Local Plan agreed in February 2023 that the legal Duty to Cooperate had been met, issues regarding the scale and delivery of these contributions have nevertheless continued to persist throughout our examination. Following the resumption of the examination process in 2024, it was hoped the Local Plan could proceed to adoption in a timely manner. Unfortunately, following Stage 2 hearing sessions in October 2024 and subsequent correspondence from the examining Inspectors in January and February 2025, it is now considered there is little choice but to seek to withdraw the draft Shropshire Local Plan from examination. If we were not to do this, the examining Inspectors have indicated their intention to prepare their final report concluding the draft Shropshire Local Plan unsound.

It is therefore our intention to formalise the withdrawal of the Local Plan from examination through a decision of Council in July 2025. If approved, statutory and interested parties will be formally notified in line with the requirements of Section 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

In advance of the decision of Council in July, I wanted to write to you to set out Shropshire Council officer thoughts on the status of our agreement regarding the principle of accommodating contributions to your forecast unmet need. In doing so, the important caveat included within the latest SoCG (November 2024) is recognised. This states...



“Subject to its ongoing Examination, should Shropshire’s Local Plan not proceed to adoption, the agreed position will need to be reviewed. Any consideration of further contributions from Shropshire as part of future Local Plan Reviews will need to reflect updates to Shropshire’s own housing need and its ability to accommodate these needs within its administrative boundary.” (SoCG, Nov 2024, para 4.18).

As a result of the withdrawal of the Local Plan, there will no longer be a mechanism to achieve the principle of delivering the unmet need in Shropshire. Therefore, it is with regret that we can see no way by which Shropshire can currently accommodate any contributions to unmet needs forecast to arise in the Black Country as envisaged as part of this plan making process.

It is clearly very frustrating the draft Shropshire Local Plan has not been able to proceed to adoption, and we equally recognise that this will be disappointing news for you as well. Unfortunately, this is an inevitable consequence of the soundness concerns raised by our examining Inspectors.

Shropshire Council fully recognises that the Duty to Cooperate process between our authorities will continue. As you may be aware, it is the intention for the Council to commence work on the next Local Plan for Shropshire under the new plan making system later in 2025. As part of this process, we would like to proactively engage with your authority as part of early and ongoing cross-boundary discussions.

Crucially, this engagement must be responsive to the significant recent changes that have arisen which have implications for plan making. Of particular note:

- The very significant uplift to Local Housing Need in Shropshire (from 1,070 dwellings per annum to 2,005 dwellings per annum – with the potential for further increases over the period of plan making) as a result of the revised national standard methodology.
- Updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including changes to the approach to Green Belt in circumstances where unmet need for homes, commercial or other development exists.

Regard will also need to be had to the comments of the Shropshire examining Inspectors, including their conclusions on the appropriate geography in Shropshire within which any contributions to the Black Country can sustainably be accommodated.

It is therefore clear that the context behind future Duty to Cooperate conversations has changed significantly since 2021. Nevertheless, we continue to fully recognise the importance of considering relevant strategic cross boundary issues through this process and to seek agreement wherever possible.

In the meantime, I would like to thank you for your support and contributions to the plan making process in Shropshire, and I look forward to continuing to engage with you on an ongoing and constructive basis in the future.

Kind regards

Eddie West
Planning Policy and Strategy Manager
Shropshire Council

