

Telford & Wrekin Local Plan: Examination in Public

Initial Statement by Council - Matter 3: Development Strategy

1. The Local Plan is underpinned by a commitment to deliver on all three dimensions of the Government's definition of sustainable development. We have an ambitious plan to promote employment land and complete the vision of the New Town's founding fathers. We are providing the housing we need both for now and for the future; and the Plan protects the best bits of our natural and built environment. Our IDP demonstrates that we can deliver the infrastructure we need. There are no infrastructure showstoppers.
2. The Council's development strategy rightly focuses on delivering new homes and jobs overwhelmingly within the existing Telford and Newport urban areas consistent with government policy that requires us to move to a low carbon economy. We reject the "doughnut town" or "free for all" housing sprawl-focused strategies promoted by speculators with land at the fringes of Telford and Newport.
3. The need for affordable housing is an important policy consideration in the plan making process and it could influence overall housing targets, particularly in view of the affordability issues identified in the two iterations of our SHMA. However, the need for affordable housing in the borough is distinct from the overall objective assessment of housing need, since the methodology and numbers are not compatible.
4. The promoters of these "doughnut town" and "free for all" alternative strategies imply that the borough can only deliver all the affordable housing we need through the provision of large amounts of additional market housing over and above our already ambitious housing requirement. We say that these approaches would not only result in an unrealistic and undeliverable rate of housing delivery but would also have other harmful consequences such that they would not represent sustainable development. These harmful consequences include: the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land; sterilisation of minerals supply; visual impact on valued landscapes such as the Weald Moors and Lilleshall; and steering development away from urban sites that have better links to services, a point that is especially pertinent to vulnerable families who need affordable housing.
5. We have conducted adequate sustainability appraisal (SA). There are no recorded objections to our methodology. Rather, we find that many objectors appear confused on the strategic fit and the SA Objectives. SA should be seen as a tool which informs plan making. It is not the be all and end all of the plan. We will justify our development strategy here today and our allocations at Matter 8 next week.
6. Our monitoring programme is comprehensive but we value the inspector's advice on ways it could be improved.

Vincent Maher MRTPI