

Telford & Wrekin Local Plan

Examination in Public

Closing Statement on behalf of the Council

1. Sir, I would like to thank you for the way you have conducted the hearing sessions and the guidance you have given the Council and all other interested parties.
2. I would also like to thank the Programme Officer, Tina Kelly, for the way in which she has co-ordinated the hearings and ensured their smooth running.
3. Thanks also to Gaye Keeys for keeping all the Council's planners, team leaders, Assistant Directors, observers, witnesses and supporters of the plan on our toes and for organising the logistics for getting documents circulated within and outside the Council and between two different offices.
4. Finally, to all those who have participated in the hearing sessions. We do have disagreement on some issues but I hope that we have had a constructive dialogue. We have offered modifications where it was both reasonable and sensible to do so. We have kept a running schedule which we will update and publish shortly
5. The Local Plan will replace a suite of DPDs that date from 2000. They have all time expired. The need to review our planning policies also comes in the context of a much changed planning system following the abandonment of regional planning and the introduction of the NPPF. The Government's commitment to a plan-led system is reinforced by the White Paper *Fixing our broken housing market* which was released on Tuesday. The Government is directing all councils to boost significantly the supply of housing. This Council responds wholeheartedly to these new national priorities and to local challenges too. We are an ambitious borough with a track record of delivery. The recently issued "Centre for Cities" report supports our track record, and rates us number 2 nationally for housing growth for the second year running.
6. It is worth reminding all participants of the key elements of the Local Plan.
 - It seeks to make Telford & Wrekin healthier, wealthier and better connected.
 - It seeks to focus growth primarily on Telford and Newport and support our rural communities too.
 - At the same time, it seeks to protect and enhance our green spaces and those aspects of life which make the borough such a great place to live, work and visit.

7. The Council has put forward its Plan on the basis that it considers it to be sound. The evidence base supports this and the discussions have examined the Plan and its evidence base in detail. To conclude:

- The overall spatial strategy is sound and one that seeks to deliver the maximum amount of new development to the two most sustainable locations within the borough with a minimum of encroachment onto the open countryside. We reject the alternative Wappenshall “satellite settlement” strategy (as did the inspectors into the Core Strategy in 2007) as well as the “doughnut town” and “free for all” strategies offered by others. Our development strategy is informed by a robust sustainability appraisal.
- At the same time, we have set an ambitious housing requirement and we have allowed a substantial contingency (refer Table 10). This will allow us to boost supply should local circumstances change significantly.
- The Council can show substantial progress in delivering our ambitious plans for new employment and housing land release too. With particular regard to our two sustainable urban extensions, one (Site H2) has planning permission and Miller Homes have submitted a programme to deliver the site. Planning applications have been submitted on the second one (Site H1). The Council has worked closely with the developers for each site allocation and statutory bodies to demonstrate the others are deliverable.
- We have demonstrated in response to your query about affordable housing (Docs K13 and K13a to K13d) that we have planned for our needs with the minimum encroachment into the open countryside and without imposing on ourselves an unrealistic and undeliverable housing requirement.
- You heard evidence from the Black Country, South Staffordshire and Birmingham that we have complied with our duty to cooperate and you will have heard them acknowledge that Telford & Wrekin is a separate housing market area from the Greater Birmingham housing market area. We have received a proposal that we take some of the Greater Birmingham’s unmet housing need. We are carefully considering this proposed modification and we will respond to this. However, we maintain that it could only be reasonable to accept this after our West Midland neighbours have completed their exercise to meet the need within their area and then justified any approach to us on an evidential basis.

- We recognise that 76ha (net) is an ambitious target for employment land development and we have submitted evidence (Doc K14) that at least 43ha (net) will be delivered over the next few years. As we have illustrated on a site by site basis our unique Land Deal supported by £44.5m of government reinvestment of land receipts into infrastructure is driving delivery on public land including in recent months landing the largest foreign direct investment into the UK in recent years. We believe Policy EC1 could be improved by clarifying the mix of uses that will be encouraged. For example, at Sessions 4 and 7, we have confirmed that waste management sites should be directed to our Strategic Employment Areas.
- There can be no question that Telford Town Centre should be the principal location for main town centre uses. We accept that modifications to Policies EC3 and EC8 would improve the plan. We recognise that some flexibility should be applied to the Central Telford Strategic Employment Areas where those parts correspond with the Telford Town Centre. At the same time, our position remains clear that it is good planning policy to direct retail development to the primary shopping area of the town centre.
- We also have flexible and business friendly strategies in place to promote the right mix of uses in the market towns of Newport and Wellington and our other centres.
- We acknowledge the passion of the promoters of the restoration of the Shrewsbury to Newport Canal but have offered extensive evidence of why this is not justified or effective or likely to be delivered. We will submit the Historic Environmental Record and an answer on your question on non-designated heritage assets to you.
- We remain committed to broadening housing mix and types to tackle but will review a number of development management policies following our discussion in Matter 5.
- We have demonstrated the merit of identifying three strategic landscapes which represent the best in the borough. We hope that you will see this too from your site visits and you will appreciate that Ironbridge does not need such a designation. Likewise, we trust we have convinced you that the principle of Green Network should apply across the borough just as other local authorities have applied the visionary concepts of their New Towns to the rest of their municipalities (refer Doc B6d). The Green Network identified covers more than areas of public open space.

- We have taken soundings on our minerals policies, recognise how they could be tightened to accord with the published evidence base and believe that such tightening could be covered by modifications to the text of the Local Plan. However, we have shown in our statement of case (Doc J8/TWC) that the minerals resource in Telford has been largely exhausted or has been sterilised, regardless of any economic worth, because of the extent of s7(1) consents.
 - Our sites allocation methodology is robust. Our planning judgment on the final schedule of sites is sound.
8. The Local Plan's success will depend on effective implementation of its policies. Our IDP (Doc E3) shows there are no showstoppers. We have a good track record of working with a range of delivery providers including the LEP, Highways England and the HCA.
 9. The Council would like to progress the Local Plan to adoption as promptly as possible and eagerly awaits your final report. The finding of a sound plan will help the Council progress the SPDs that will help inform how parts of the plan will be delivered covering Ironbridge, residential alterations and urban design.
 10. With that in mind, the Council would like to consult on the modifications it has offered thus far and any proposed main modifications that arise from your report should you find the plan sound. The Council would wish to do this as early as possible. Taking this into consideration, the Council propose a further consultation period following your report. The Council will then proceed to prepare a final published Local Plan for adoption.

Vincent Maher MRTPI