

Telford & Wrekin Local Plan

Examination in Public

K1 - Opening Statement on behalf of the Council

1. Sir, the Council is grateful to you for allowing us the opportunity to make a short opening statement to introduce the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan at this critical stage in its progress towards adoption.
2. I will start by telling you why Telford & Wrekin is such a great place to live and work in. I will then take you through some of the main themes likely to run through this examination and which will inform the Council's answers to the matters, issues and questions which you have raised.

Telford & Wrekin

3. Situated in the east of Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin is a unitary authority which achieved borough status in 2002 with a recorded population of just over 167,000 in the 2011 Census.
4. This is a very varied place.
5. We are a mix of urban and rural. While most of the population live in either Telford or Newport, we have over 60 rural settlements, many of which pre date the Domesday Book. We are blessed with high quality agricultural land, some breath taking landscapes and substantial mineral resources.
6. The Wrekin – at 407m above sea level at its summit – may not be the highest peak in the Shropshire Hills AONB but it is one of the most distinctive because of its varied geology and the surrounding flat landscape.
7. We have the historic market town of Newport which still keeps the original street pattern dating from Norman times.
8. The borough is the birth place of the industrial revolution too. In 1709, Abraham Darby successfully smelted iron using coking coal instead of charcoal. The Iron Bridge was built in Coalbrookdale in 1779. The area has had a long history of mining and iron and steel production since then.
9. Thomas Telford became the first surveyor for Shropshire in 1787 and the borough acknowledges his legacy today.
10. In 1963, the Dawley Development Corporation (DDC) was set up to acquire land for new housing to coincide with changing local economic circumstances.
11. In December 1968, ministerial approval was given to promote a visionary new town covering nearly 8,000 hectares and the DDC was renamed the Telford Development Corporation. The branding of the new town as Telford conjures up innovation and engineering, two facets of our historic legacy.

12. Telford has expanded substantially since then and has incorporated a number of older settlements including Wellington, Oakengates, Ketley, Donnington, Hadley, Madeley and Horsehay. It now has a population of over 145,000 people. Its growth was underpinned by some noble ideals, including the creation of a “forest town”; an established interconnected Green Network; an ambitious programme of land acquisition; a strict segregation of land uses; and roundabouts!
13. It is a popular place to live in and recent housing completion figures support this. Originally an overspill town from the West Midlands conurbation, the town and the borough is now self-reliant - just as other Post War new towns across England are – with stronger commuting and migration links with neighbouring Shropshire and Stafford. However, we still look to collaborate with the West Midlands conurbation further away and have non-constituent membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority.
14. The economic base of the borough has changed over the years. Coal mining has ceased and at first the Telford Development Corporation, then the Wrekin District Council and now the Telford & Wrekin Council has aggressively gone out to bring new inward investment to help diversify the borough’s economy. In this respect, we believe we have punched above our weight and, over the years, Telford has become home to nationally and internationally recognised companies such as Cap Gemini, Ricoh and BAE Systems. More recently the MoD has resolved to set its logistics hub here. Canadian automotive parts manufacturer Magna has agreed to invest £100m in the town.
15. The borough also benefits from the presence of two universities. The University of Wolverhampton is investing in its engineering and manufacturing faculty. An expansion of Harper Adams University will bring many jobs to Newport in the fields of robotics, sensors, augmented reality systems, environmental technology and ICT.
16. The New Town will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2018 and it is important that those of us with the privilege of planning for this town and the whole of the borough address new challenges we will face. These include: completing the original vision for the New Town and helping deliver employment land; planning for an older population as the town matures; reducing our reliance on the car; improving recycling rates; protecting those aspects of the New Town and Newport that make these areas so popular for our residents; making best use of the substantial amount of brownfield land which was a legacy of the industrial era in Telford; and safeguarding our

heritage and our rural and minerals assets for future generations. We believe the plan strikes the right balance.

Planning for growth

17. The Telford & Wrekin Local Plan will replace the Wrekin Local Plan, the Core Strategy, the Central Telford Area Action Plan and the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Joint Structure and Joint Minerals Local Plans. The Local Plan addresses the previous absence of a Waste Local Plan.
18. It is a plan that is unashamedly pro-growth and pro-investment consistent with a “business winning, business supporting” Council. At the same time, it seeks to preserve the borough’s heritage and protect our green spaces. We believe there is significant support for this balanced vision. The inspector will have recorded many comments from consultees approving the plan. There are, by other unitary authority standards, very low levels of duly made objections.
19. I would like now to touch on some of the main themes of the plan.

Housing

20. We have deliberately gone for a housing requirement (15,555 homes) greater than our OAN. This is linked to a bold but realistic plan to release employment land and to retain more of the skilled workers who commute into the borough daily but spend their disposable income in Shropshire and Stafford at the weekend.
21. As far as possible, we have sought to keep urban growth within the existing urban boundaries of Telford and Newport and on brownfield land but the plan promotes two sustainable urban extensions at Priorslee and at the edge of Donnington and Muxton in the north east of Telford. Both extensions are proposed to serve and be close to the substantial amount of employment land nearby that benefits from consent under the New Towns Act. One of them at Priorslee already has planning permission.
22. We accept Newport should grow southwards building on the construction of the A518, the establishment of new retail facilities and this part of the town’s proximity to the popular Burton Borough, Adams Grammar School and Newport Girls’ High Schools as well as a proposed new agritech centre just outside the town.
23. Our rural areas remain popular and it is important to allow them to grow so that we can attract more young people to them. Given the dominance of the New Town, many of our villages have few services. It is therefore important that growth in the rural area be planned carefully especially for an ageing population. Two large areas of previously developed land at Allscott and Crudgington will deliver two thirds of our

rural housing supply. The balance will come from a raft of planning permissions and we propose that five settlements with the best infrastructure take some infill housing. These are: High Ercall, Waters Upton, Tibberton, Edgmond and Lilleshall.

24. New communities must have community and social infrastructure too and our plan makes provision for this.
25. We are in a fortunate position of being able to demonstrate that we are substantially underway to deliver this ambitious housing requirement and we have factored in a rate of non- implementation of planning permissions in this housing requirement too.

Employment

26. Our housing target goes hand in hand with a plan to deliver employment land. The Council has a land deal with the Homes and Community Agency (the HCA), the successor of the Telford Development Corporation, to market and deliver this land for future growth.
27. Most of the employment growth will take place in Telford but it is also important to plan for the needs of the Newport economy too, building on its links with Harper Adams University and local firms in the agricultural sector.

Environmental matters

28. Our plan contains policies to protect our ecology, our trees, Telford's Green Network, Newport's green spaces and three strategic landscapes.
29. We have a vision for our World Heritage Site at Ironbridge, our seven conservation areas, our 29 scheduled ancient monuments, our three listed parks and our 800 listed buildings. We also want to protect "locally listed" buildings, features that make the borough distinctive. These range from historic rural Duke of Sutherland estate cottages as well as the best bits of the visionary New Town and our industrial heritage.
30. Our plan is underpinned by a sustainability appraisal. We can show how we have assessed it for its sustainability at each stage as it has emerged.

Viability and delivery

31. You have asked at a number of points whether plan policies are viable. We will demonstrate that they are.
32. We have submitted a viability appraisal which shows that there are no unreasonable burdens on the development industry. We have a costed infrastructure delivery plan which does not identify any showstoppers. We do not see the plan adversely

affecting our ability to set a Community Infrastructure Levy in future should we decide to adopt one.

Modifications

33. We have sought to engage with as many stakeholders as possible from the initial Issues and Options stage consultation through to the Regulation 19 Publication version of the plan which ended in March 2016. Our outreach considerably exceeds our legal obligations and the requirements of our Statement of Community Involvement.
34. It is appropriate that we take account of the advice of experts and local people who know their neighbourhoods best. We have received a number of suggestions at the Regulation 19 Publication stage that by and large improve the plan. We have incorporated them into Submission Version of the plan and have a separate live modifications table that we will update as the examination proceeds. We will continue to listen during the examination in public and will adopt helpful suggestions that will make the plan more readable and clearer in its intent.
35. However, we believe the plan is sound and does not need any further modification. We hope to persuade you and others too of this.

Conclusion

36. I promised to keep this opening statement short. I won't "go round the Wrekin" as we say here. I started on a personal note letting you know why I think Telford & Wrekin is a great place. I'll end on one now. I have arrived late in the day but I know that many officers and elected members have worked tirelessly over the years to get this plan to the place where it is now. Some have returned today from jobs in new organisations or come out of retirement to watch the debate. I am grateful for their efforts.
37. There is a team of staff here to answer your questions and "observers" who will take away any further suggestions that you and others propose during the hearing sessions for further modifications that would improve the plan and overcome any barrier to its adoption.

Vincent Maher MRTPI