

Development Policy 1: Future Expansion of Bishop's Castle

Introduction

Development Policy 1 provides an analysis of the factors affecting the suitability of the land beyond the development boundary for future development for housing purposes. It takes as a starting point the fact that the community is not averse to growth of the town. Indeed, since the 1970's there has been a steady increase in population, overwhelmingly as a result of movement in from other parts of the country. The local community has welcomed this and responses to the Bishop's Castle Community Led Plan (CLP) survey undertaken in 2014¹ highlighted community spirit and vibrancy as two of the most valued things.

Future population increase is currently targeted within the Shropshire Local Plan at 150 houses by 2026. This includes over a five year period (2016 – 2021), 40 houses on the SAMDev site on School Lane and 25 houses delivered through 'windfall' sites i.e. as individual or small developments in appropriate locations. Apart from exception sites, this five year target was proposed within the existing development boundary.

The Local Plan growth targets are required to be regularly reviewed against a continuous and ongoing five year supply target and its time frame continuously extended. A current review by Shropshire Council is looking at: land requirements beyond 2021 to fulfil the remaining, ongoing 5 year supply of 150 dwellings by 2026; and an extended target of additional growth to 2036. Whilst this will not necessarily lead to a significant, additional requirement for housing beyond 150 new dwellings in Bishop's Castle since 2016, it is unlikely that either the existing target of 150 or any additional increase will be able to be accommodated within the existing development boundary.

This is one reason why it is essential to establish a policy regarding development beyond the existing boundary. In addition, there may in future, be further pressure for development beyond the development boundary should Shropshire Council be unable to continuously provide a county wide, five year supply of deliverable housing land². The aim of the policy is to reflect the evidenced concerns and aspirations of the community and to recognise both the significance and the limitations of the historic infrastructure on which this town has been built.

¹ See Appendix "What we Value" and "The Most Frequently Quoted Issues", taken from the 2014 CLP Community Survey

² Ref two housing applications (APP/L3245/W/14/3001829 and APP/L3245/W/143001799) granted on appeal in 2015. Both sites were outside the development boundary but the Appeals were considered prior to obtaining Planning Inspectorate approval to the 5 year supply of housing land.

The Policy

The Bishop's Castle CLP survey highlighted the communities concern regarding the need to:

- provide more affordable housing to retain our young people;
- conserve the ancient infrastructure, streetscape and architecture of this historic town; and
- recognise the importance of the immediate landscape not only for residents but to ensure the vibrancy of the vital tourism economy.

To this end, the policy distinguishes between those areas adjacent to the Development Boundary where development would have a serious negative effect and therefore should be avoided and the areas where there would be no or minimal negative impact. It takes no account of whether the land would ever be made available.

There are two elements to the policy:

1. an assessment of the capacity of the town's historic infrastructure to accommodate access to/from further development (see item 2i of the Infrastructure Action Plan)
2. an assessment of the impact of development on the surrounding landscape (see item 2ii of the Development Action Plan)

At the present time, the remainder of this Policy will be devoted to item 1 above as the proposed landscape assessment has yet to be undertaken. On completion of the landscape assessment, the policy will be updated to include it. As however, the validity of the infrastructure assessment is not dependent on the landscape survey this does not in any way dilute the relevance of the interim Policy.

The second most quoted need in the CLP survey was for affordable housing to enable our young people to remain in Bishop's Castle. Without it we will continue to experience an increasingly aging population and an inability to sustain the facilities that ensure the long term vitality of the town. The combined effect of changes in national legislation regarding housing provision; changes to the rules governing social housing providers; and the fact that Bishop's Castle lies in a deeply rural area with limited access to jobs and services has resulted in it being increasingly more difficult to realise any new provision of affordable housing, certainly within the development boundary.

For this reason alone it is recognised that, whilst this policy is opposed to the allocation of housing in the areas defined as unsuitable for development, it will need to be weighed on a case by case basis, against the county policy relating to the development of exception sites for affordable housing for local inhabitants should these be proposed in future in areas defined here as unsuitable for development.

The policy identifies 3 different zones: an area unsuitable for development; an area unsuitable for development unless significant modifications were made to the existing

highway infrastructure to facilitate acceptable access; and an area that may be suitable providing restrictions are placed on vehicular access. There are no immediate concerns as regards all other zones adjacent to the development boundary.

1. An area unsuitable for development

The land bordering the development boundary on the western side of the town between Welsh Street to the north and Woodbatch Lane to the south (see the Policy Map)³ has been the subject of lengthy and continuous consultation with the community between 2011 and 2015 when Shropshire Council undertook the process for selection of an appropriate site to include in the SAMdev Plan. Two separate sites were considered in this location and both were rejected, primarily on the grounds of access to and from both the town centre and the hinterland of the town and the effect this would have on the sensitive infrastructure of the settlement.

The only vehicular access to all sites in this locality is via Kerry Lane, an ancient drovers' road from the Kerry ridgeway which is referred to in the Bishop's Castle Conservation Area Statement⁴. Even within the development boundary, this road has in places, limited sight lines and a width of only 4 metres (cf. Local Authority Highways standards for new residential developments which have historically been considerably greater). Along its route there are problematic junction alignments with poor sightlines resulting in vehicular/pedestrian conflict; 5 of its junctions are within a 440 metre stretch; and 58% of its length is without pavements. Once a narrow country lane with fields either side, it is now heavily built up on both sides of the carriageway, along its full length, right out to the development boundary. Yet it still carries large and cumbersome agricultural vehicles as well as the urban traffic.

Within a relatively short distance from its junction with the main street, Kerry Lane already provides the sole vehicular access for the following:

- **residential properties:** 312 houses; 10 independent sheltered accommodation flats; 18 sheltered accommodation bungalows together with their community centre.
- **Commercial premises:** a nursing home, a pub, a cafe and a brewery
- **Service sector premises:** a Primary School; a Sure Start children's facility; a Church Hall (which is hired out for public events); a Bowls Club; a Fire Station; and a children's playground and playing fields (which is also hired out for public events)
- **3 as yet undeveloped sites** with outstanding planning permission for housing totalling an additional 25 properties that, according to accepted highway authority's

³ The hatched area only indicates land immediately bordering the development boundary. Any land beyond this area which would also require access to the A488 via the town centre/Conservation Area would also be unsuitable for development.

⁴ Bishop's Castle Conservation Area Statement – designated in August 1972, reviewed and amended in 1990 and then updated in 2012.

calculations of daily traffic generation per dwelling, would generate a further 150 vehicle movements per day.

In addition, there are: a further 30 properties on Corporation St. which have an option of alternative access to the hinterland through the town centre, but which also use Kerry Lane as a regular means of access; and various scattered dwellings on the hillside to the west of the town which use Kerry Lane to access both the town centre and the hinterland to the east.

On 11 July 2014 between 8.45 and 9.00am, a 15 minute survey was taken at two junctions on Kerry Lane. At the junction with Lavender Bank 81 cars and 22 pedestrians were counted. At Corporation Street, there were 129 cars and 76 pedestrians. Whilst this period is one of the busiest in the day, coinciding with the 'school run' and therefore could be charged with being exceptional, there are different but equally problematic conditions at other times of the day. No lorries or agricultural vehicles were recorded by the survey but the development of internet shopping is resulting in an ever-increasing presence of delivery vehicles, large and small, throughout the day, on the towns roads. They are commonly seen in this location together with agricultural vehicles including multi decked sheep transporters and combine harvesters.

Virtually all traffic travelling between the above premises and the hinterland or town centre must travel along this urban stretch of Kerry Lane. The town centre lies to the east, as do virtually all required hinterland destinations. The road in the westerly direction leads only to the more deeply rural areas of the Welsh hills. Any further development along the south westerly border of the town would exacerbate the already hazardous conditions along the urban section of Kerry Lane.

A further factor of relevance is the potential impact of further development in this locality, not only on the leisure activities of the inhabitants but also on the tourism economy of the town. Both the Conservation Area and the much-used regional footpath the 'Shropshire Way' are significant to this part of town. The Conservation Area Statement recognises as a negative factor "the movement of traffic along the main streets" and the conflict between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The eastern section of Kerry Lane lies within the Conservation Area and the Shropshire Way must be accessed via this section of Kerry Lane and its hazardous junction with both Church Lane/Grange Court and the adjacent Church Street/Brampton Road.

For all the above reasons, the development boundary bordering the hatched area on the Policy Map should remain as shown and no further development should occur beyond it to exacerbate the existing, well documented problems.

2. An area unsuitable for development unless access via the town centre is prevented

Vehicular access to the town centre and the desired destinations of the hinterland from the stippled zone on the Policy Map⁵ is via Welsh Street. The northern section of the town centre is a focal point of the Conservation Area with its listed buildings and ancient, narrow roads. Traffic in this area is singled out in the Conservation Area Statement as particularly problematic and traffic issues were voiced as a major concern in public surveys and consultations and are the subject of investigation to try and find a resolution to the problems (see items 2i - vii of the Town Centre Action Plan).

Further development to the west of the town (see the stippled area on the Policy map) would only exacerbate an already dire situation and therefore should not occur either until a resolution is found to the existing town centre traffic situation and/or access to Welsh Street beyond the junction with the Wintles ring road is prevented.

3. An area that may be suitable for development if vehicular access via Church Lane is prevented

The western boundary of this locality is Church Lane and the six properties situated along its carriageway. Church Lane is itself a narrow, winding lane, mostly single track, which leads to 2, adjacent, triple road junctions - the Kerry Lane/Grange Court housing development (8 properties)/Church Lane junction and the adjoining junction of Kerry Lane/ Church St/Brampton Rd. This hazardous traffic conflux is referred to above (page 4 - 'Areas Unsuitable for Development').

At the Church Lane/Grange Court/Kerry Lane junction there is a Signboard with Map directing walkers along Church Lane and the Shropshire Way to the Clun Hills and AONB beyond. This is a well used route by both visiting walkers and local people and is an important contributor to the town's tourism economy. Additional traffic on this single track lane would exacerbate existing difficulties. Any future development in the locality cross hatched on the Policy Map⁶ should not be allowed to take vehicular access onto Church Lane.

30 August 2018

⁵ The stippled area only indicates land immediately bordering the development boundary. Any land beyond this area which would require access to the A488 via the town centre/Conservation Area would also be unsuitable for development.

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The most frequently quoted requirements in the responses to the survey undertaken in 2014 for the Bishop's Castle Town Plan update are as follows:

MOST FREQUENTLY QUOTED REQUIREMENTS	No. of Responses	% of all Responses
The need for/lack of job opportunities other than low wage and the difficulties in attracting businesses/employers to the town.	45	41%
The need for/lack of an affordable, low cost housing stock to ensure the retention of local, young adults and families.	44	40%
The need for improvement to buildings, infrastructure and/or the streetscape and the opportunities for regeneration, including in the town centre and its immediate surroundings and also the impact of this on the economy and vitality of the town.	37	33.6%
Historic changes in the retail provision and consumer behaviour and the need to address the impact this has had and potential threats to the viability of the town centre.	33	30%
To address the threats to the continuing provision of statutory services and/or vital support facilities in order to sustain the rural economy and our quality of life.	32	29.1%
To address the importance of the landscape both within the town and its environs and as the basis for the tourism economy.	32	29.1%
To address the parking problems, including in the town centre.	30	27.3%
To address the difficulties of access to the hinterland for work, leisure and services and the inadequacy of public or other voluntary transport schemes for those without a car.	27	24.6%
To address town traffic and highways related problems, including in the town centre.	25	22.7%
The need for new initiatives in response to climate change and technological developments to ensure a sustainable future, including energy efficiency, broadband facilities and food production.	22	20%
To address an increasing demographic imbalance, resulting from the young leaving due to lack of suitable jobs and housing and an increasingly older, retired population that will make increasing demands on services that are currently being cut and lost.	20	18.2%
To address the challenge of accommodating necessary changes and improvements without compromising the charm and vitality that is Bishop's Castle.	16	14.6%
The provision of facilities to meet the needs of young people.	14	12.7%
To address issues that recognise the importance of tourism to the economy of the town.	11	10.0%
Recognition of the vital place of volunteers in the fabric of the town and its activities.	10	9.1%

WHAT WE VALUE IN BISHOP'S CASTLE



“A special place”.....”one of the great secrets of this country”

This feeling was amplified by the following groups of comments:

The Community Spirit (referred to 38 times)

The most frequently stated qualities were: friendly (19); caring (10); Others included: welcoming; tolerant; courteous and trusting

A great range of facilities for a town this size (referred to 28 times)

The most frequently referenced facilities were: SpArC (19); pubs (15); shops and services (14); library (11); hospital (10); other medical services (9); ESWS (8); and good schools (7)

A special town (referred to 27 times)

The most frequently referenced reasons were: architecture (10); size (7); pace and quality of life (7); Others were quirkiness; a working town; and vibrant

The beauty of the surrounding countryside (referred to 23 times)

A vibrant culture (referred to 20 times)

The most frequent comments were: festivals and events (15); Others included: sports and arts opportunities, provided by SpArC and local groups; live music sessions; a range of activities for all ages; and the diversity and colour of available culture.

A dynamic population (referred to 9 times)

The most frequently stated qualities were: diverse age range; pragmatism; positivity; imaginative and creative; and happy people.