

Update on the Bridgnorth Plan

Clive Dyson - Chairman, Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group

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The Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group was established in June 2019, with the support of local parish councils and other local bodies. We aimed to identify key issues facing the town, consult on people's views, and develop recommendations for the future of the town. We recognised the need to carry out our work with an eye to the ongoing review of Shropshire Council's Local Plan.

Bridgnorth Plan – 1st Edition

After a lot of effort put in by working group and a number of consultation exercises, the first edition of the Bridgnorth Plan was issued on 24th November 2020: see www.bridgnorthtownplan.weebly.com. Bridgnorth Town Council has provisionally approved the first edition of the Plan.

The Plan is not just a 'Town planning' document. It covers work on business growth and employment, housing demand and provision, environmental sustainability, the infrastructure required to promote growth, retail hospitality and tourism, mobility and transport, crime and safety, social sustainability and sports and leisure. Work is continuing on some of these areas and there are others that the town may wish to address in future, including medical services, and education and training.

The draft Local Plan

The Steering Group has submitted responses to the Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 consultations on the Local Plan, which are available at <https://bridgnorthtownplan.weebly.com/local-plan-review.html>. In our response to the Regulation 18 consultation, we raised a number of issues, including:

- The scale of development proposed for Bridgnorth is too large. We recommended a limit of 800 to 1000 new dwellings over the period from 2019 to 2036.
- The scale of development proposed for Shropshire is excessive, in part due to a questionable commitment to meet a projected shortfall in housing for the Black Country conurbation.
- New housing around Bridgnorth should not be located on a single large development.
- Any growth in employment and housing should only proceed once commitment and funding for the necessary improvements to the local infrastructure and services have been confirmed.

The latest (Regulation 19) draft of the Local Plan makes few changes for the Bridgnorth area, apparently taking no account of submissions made by local bodies. Local parish councils and the Steering Group have all responded, questioning the legal compliance and soundness of the draft. The submissions are generally consistent. Tasley and Worfield parish councils refer to the Bridgnorth Plan in their submissions.

Next steps

The first edition of the Bridgnorth Plan achieves the first goal of the Steering Group, having consulted on a set of issues facing the town and summarised potential approaches to these.

I anticipate that the next edition of the Bridgnorth Plan may be produced after the Local Plan has been approved, sometime in 2022. In the meantime, the Steering Group needs to:

- Pursue, with the Town Council, the creation of a coordination group (with the working title "Future Bridgnorth") involving Shropshire Council, local Parish Councils, the Marches LEP and other local groups, as recommended in the Local Economic Growth Strategy, Bridgnorth Town Council's response to it, and the first edition of the Bridgnorth Plan.
- Continue ongoing work, including a number of mobility and transport projects, the coordination of sports in the town, led by Sporting Bridgnorth (sportingbridgnorth.co.uk), and discussions on supporting the young, old and vulnerable.
- Review the terms of reference of the Bridgnorth Plan Steering Group with parish councils and other bodies, probably after the local elections are held in May. I intend to step down as Chairman of the Steering Group at that time, so a new Chairman will have to be elected.

In the meantime, I would like to thank the individuals, councils, other bodies and members of the Steering Group who have supported and contributed to our work. We have achieved a lot in about 18 months.