

Appendix 13: Policy Guidance Documents

National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into force on 27th March 2012 and has replaced the majority of Planning Policy Statements and Guidance. The overall aims of the framework are:

- To promote economic growth and jobs;
- The presumption is in favour of sustainable development, except where this would compromise key sustainable development principles set out in the rest of the Plan. However, the NPPF emphasises that the development plan remains the starting point for decision making;
- Sustainable development, which includes economic, social and environmental gains, should be jointly sought simultaneously.
- In relation to rural facilities the NPPF emphasises the importance of growth and the economy in rural areas; “Support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas” (para 28).

Living Working Countryside - The Taylor Report (July 2008)

This report made recommendations on rural housing and planning where the overriding objective of the report was to help ensure the planning system brings a positive, lasting legacy to places in which people actually want to live. The report highlighted several problems in connection with the availability and cost of housing in rural areas, arguing that “affordable homes [in rural areas] are few and far between and business growth is too often restricted”. It made a number of specific recommendations, including “encouraging rural communities to develop small groups of affordable housing for local people to rent or buy where they meet criteria of local support” and “encouragement for new development on brownfield (previously developed) land to protect the countryside.” The report also highlights the particular problems in relation to facilities and services in small rural settlements.

From the perspective of rural facilities, a key point to note is that the Taylor report makes explicit the link between the availability of affordable housing in rural communities, and the sustainability of the businesses and facilities in those communities; “lack of affordable housing and local well-paid employment means many local people and those working in the community will be priced out, and the viability of local shops and services are thereby at risk...locally made decisions in these communities relating to just a few affordable homes can be crucial to the sustainability of the community, its shop, pub, school and local businesses.”

The Commission for Rural Communities - State of the Countryside Report (2010)

This is an annual report that has been produced since 1999. The Commission for Rural Communities is a statutory body funded by government which provides advice and guidance to decision makers with regard to the circumstances of rural communities. The State of the Countryside 2010 provides a comprehensive description of social, economic and environmental conditions and changes across rural England, highlighting the main challenges and future trends for government and other organisations. This report identifies some general national trends which can be usefully compared to the data derived from the Rural Facilities Survey. Specifically in relation to rural services, between 2000 and 2010, the number of GP surgeries and cash machines has increased, whilst Post Offices, banks and building societies, Primary/First/Middle schools and petrol stations have seen a decline. This is evident within Malvern Hills and Wychavon District, which has seen a number of rural post office and shops close in the last five years. With respect to broadband access 70% of households in urban and less sparse areas are connected to the internet, compared to between 40% and 50% of households in rural settlements. Approximately 5% of rural households were still using dial-up services in 2009. The results from VFRTS review undertaken in 2011 (results shown in **Appendix 14**); showed that out of the villages that have responded with regard to internet access (96 villages); only 2 villages did not have broadband access. This indicated a low proportion of rural settlements (2 %) accessing the internet via dial-up services, which is below the access of dial up indicated in nationally. The national report suggests that with regard to access to public transport “96% of households in urban areas have an hourly or better bus service within 13 minutes walk compared with 50% in villages and hamlets.” In comparison, of the 185 villages surveyed in the VFRTS, 31 % of villages have either limited or no access to public transport, which is better than the national average.

Changes to the Planning System

The Localism Act

The Localism Bill obtained Royal Assent on 15th November 2011 and is now an Act in Parliament. The main aim of the Act is to provide more power to communities, professionals and councils. In terms of the planning system, the act envisages a bottom up planning approach, rather than top down planning.

The Localism Bill includes five key measures that underpin the Government's approach to decentralisation. These are:

- Community rights
- Neighbourhood planning
- Housing
- General power of competence
- Empowering cities and other local areas.

The following measures included in the Localism Bill, in particular, may have positive implications on the level of services and facilities within South Worcestershire's rural areas:

Community Rights

Many villages and towns across South Worcestershire have increasingly seen local services threatened with closure, sale or change of use. In some rural areas, the local community has taken services over. In Bishampton, for example, the local community were fortunate to retain their shop due to the Parish Council stepping in and running the service. However, not all communities may be fortunate enough to raise enough capital in time to bid for the local service they want to retain.

To assist the local area, 'community rights' allow the local community, voluntary groups and parish councils to identify and bid for land or buildings which are important to them and want to retain for future generations. This could include a village shop, local pub or an area of open space.

The Localism Act requires local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value which have been nominated by the local community. When listed assets come up for sale or change ownership, the Act then gives community groups additional time over private schemes bidding against them to develop a bid and raise the money to buy the asset when it comes on the open market.

Neighbourhood Planning

New rights in the Localism Bill allows local communities to help shape their area by allowing residents to have more say on where new homes and businesses should go and what they will look like. Parish and Town Councils, with the help of the local community and local authority, can prepare Neighbourhood Plans to help influence where they live. Once written, the plan will need to be supported by the Local Authority, independently examined and go to a local referendum where local people will vote on whether they approve of the plan.

Strategic Policy

Regional Spatial Strategy

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) (January 2008) provides a broad development strategy for the West Midlands, providing policies to guide planning decisions. Phase One of the document was completed and provides a long term strategy for the Black Country. Phase Two of the document was proposed to focus on housing development, employment land,

urban capacity, transport, waste and overarching policies relating to climate change, water policies and sustainable development. Phase three proposed policies relating to rural services, gypsies, travellers and travelling show-people, culture, sport and tourism, environment and minerals. Despite work on Phases Two and Three being undertaken, revisions were never finalised.

The Localism Bill proposes the revocation of the RSS for the West Midlands in order to give authorities at a local level more freedom in their decisions, both through development plans and decisions on planning applications. However, at the time of writing, the RSS remains part of the development plan for South Worcestershire and the following policies support the VFRTS evidence base at a regional level. This will remain the case until the revocation process is formally completed through the Localism Bill.

West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy - Preferred Option Stage

Promotion of rural regeneration is one of its key objectives. It aims to maintain viable and sustainable rural communities where the employment, housing, cultural and service needs of communities are met.

Policy RR1: Rural Renaissance aims to improve accessibility and other community facilities such as health within rural areas. There is also the need to have regard to inter-relationships between the urban and rural areas. Development in those settlements close to Major Urban Areas (MUAs), with good level of services, will need to be closely managed to meet local need. Those remote areas will need to ensure that economic diversity, affordable housing and access to public transport is the priority.

Policy RR2: Rural Regeneration Zones supports economic, social regeneration and improved accessibility.

Policy RR3: Market Towns states that such towns and some larger villages should play a key role in providing improved local services and act as a focus for development to meet local regeneration needs. It makes it clear that development plans should identify which settlements should be selected for this role based upon local assessment and a consideration of the inter-relationship with other settlements in their areas. In terms of villages specifically, paragraph 5.17 states that:

“Villages perform an essential role in maintaining and enhancing the rural way of life by providing homes, jobs, services and other facilities for local people. Consideration should be given to the extent to which sustainable development, which is appropriate in scale and nature, would enable villages to remain viable.”

Policy RR4: Rural Services recognises that the quality and level of services and public transport in a rural area, is the key to rural renaissance and that development plans should take into account the extent of services and facilities in a particular location to ensure a sustainable form of development.

Worcestershire County Structure Plan (1996 - 2011)

In September 2007 the Secretary of State directed that only certain Worcestershire County Structure Plan policies be saved. The 'Saved' Structure Plan Policies will remain a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and preparation of planning documents until the Development Plan is adopted. Policy SD8 'Development in Sustainable Rural Settlements' allows for development to meet local housing/employment/other needs in order to support local services and to help achieve an improved balance of facilities.

South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) Issues and Options Paper (November 2007).

This document sets the scene and background for the Joint Core Strategy. The paper illustrates the main planning issues facing the area and provides a number of possible solutions to help resolve these issues.

SWJCS Preferred Options Paper (September 2008).

The Preferred Options Paper was published in light of responses received at the Issues and Options stage. The Paper sets out the preferred locations for development alongside the emerging planning framework for the long term future of South Worcestershire.

Linkage to Spatial Objectives. The Preferred Spatial Strategy supports or delivers the following Spatial Objectives derived from the Sustainable Community Strategies:

- Stronger Communities objectives 1, 2 and 3;
- Meeting the Needs of All Generations objectives 4, 5 and 6;
- Economic Success that is Shared By All objectives 8 and 11;
- A Better Environment for Today and Tomorrow objective 16;
- Improving Health and Well-being objective 18; and Communities that are Safe and Feel Safe objective 21.

South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) - Preferred Options Paper (September 2011).

The election of the coalition government and consequent shift in the planning system to a more 'bottom up planning approach' resulted in the re-branding of the Joint Core Strategy, to the SWDP. The revised SWDP preferred option strategy for South Worcestershire incorporated the Core Strategy and Site Allocations into one single document. The SWDP differs from the SWJCS in that the plan reflects the local economic and housing aspirations of South Worcestershire, as opposed to those of the Region.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (September 2011).

The appraisal noted that the development strategy and settlement hierarchy (SWDP 1) approach is in accordance with the Sustainability Appraisal and supports and enhances community identity. The SA also stated that the strategy also enables integration of new communities identified for the rural areas where services and facilities can accommodate them. The SA stated that while the effects on travel and transport are uncertain in the short term, directing development to areas with existing infrastructure and requiring sustainable transport options to be integral to new development were supported (SWDP3).

The Preferred Policy for the villages effectively progresses SA objectives, particularly for housing and communities and builds on sustainable development principles. Evidence indicates that maintaining the viability of rural communities is key to raising standards of living for the wider community of the South Worcestershire area.