

## **Proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework**

As you will no doubt be aware there has been an announcement from the Government that they have commenced a consultation on major changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

I believe these reforms will result in developers being allowed to override the concept of Plan-Led development thereby eroding the views of communities when considering planning decisions.

Many town and parish councils in Shropshire have already agreed Neighbourhood or Parish Plans or are committed to producing one. These changes will risk superseding such plans, brushing aside the hard work, expertise and expense that has already been invested. Neighbourhood and Parish Plans are produced for local people by local people. The Government is suggesting that the agreement on housing numbers and land allocations should be made by a "regional body". This raises the suspicion that it is another back door attempt to force Shropshire into a Combined Authority arrangement. If these suggestions are approved, local people will have absolutely no say in what is built or in which locations.

Whilst I am not usually political in my role as your divisional councillor, I feel I must point out that the Labour manifesto talked of a commitment to build 300,000 houses a year, some 70,000 less than now being suggested although this does mimic the levels of building which was proposed in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, but the numbers allocated to Shropshire are ridiculous.

The Government's proposed allocation system will see huge numbers of houses built on green fields and, in some cases, green-belt sites in our county and other areas of rural England whilst the major cities will be allowed to under-achieve their fair share of housing despite having the greatest demand for housing and more suitable infrastructure.

By returning to the discredited 5-Year Land Supply model, developers will be put even more firmly in the driving seat of deciding what is built where, resulting in more toy town building without the necessary supporting infrastructure. We are also extremely disappointed that the hard-won requirement to make new developments 'beautiful' (albeit rather vague) and avoid yet more identikit soulless modern estates is being dropped and the density figures are also being increased.

The housing numbers allocated to Shropshire is particularly disappointing as Shropshire has consistently achieved the housing targets laid down by previous governments. To put the increase in numbers into perspective our annual "current need" is 1,070 homes, our "proposed need" included in the draft Local Plan is 1,450 but the government is now setting the requirement at 2,059 per annum. In short, they are almost doubling our current housing target. In my view this is unreasonable, unacceptable and unachievable.

Why should rural England be expected to supply thousands of houses that the major cities cannot organise themselves to build? Why should our local communities lose their voice in the planning process through a proposed new edict that would allow the vast majority of applications without any democratic involvement. Furthermore, there is a strong implication that major infrastructure applications, roads, wind farms, solar, pylons etc will be determined without consultation with local communities.

The changes to the NPPF will make demonstrating sufficient housing supply by local authorities almost impossible (no matter what is actually delivered), thus opening up even more green belt to development, regardless of local views. The suggestion that the affordable housing target should be 50% is very dubious when planning authorities struggle to get 10% affordable homes threshold built now due to viability rules.

To be clear, if we, as the local planning authority, do not comply with these proposed changes and we fail to allocate housing, we will have our planning function taken over by Whitehall.

Furthermore, recognition of the value of our most productive farmland is set to be deleted from planning law. In a world where climate change makes our food supply from abroad increasingly precarious, and home-grown food more important (as the war in Ukraine demonstrates), the Government is looking to build on the very land we need most. With an increasing population, we must not just maintain but increase our ability to grow our own food, or we run a real risk of facing food shortages and sky-high prices in the future.

The Government is also suggesting that the current rules around nutrient levels are scrapped. Whilst these levels have created issues with determining applications especially in the south of the county, there must be a more intelligent solution than merely scrapping the levels?

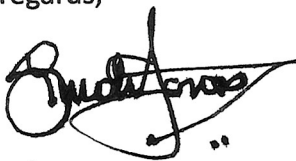
As councillors at County, Town or Parish level and as individuals and residents of Shropshire we must together make our voices heard, by responding to this consultation.

Shropshire is such a beautiful and unique place, and our environment is one of our greatest assets. While we accept the need for a level of new homes, these proposals would put developers in charge and could see the face of Shropshire irrevocably changed without any input from those communities affected.

I would urge anyone who doesn't want to see an intensification of development on the fields around their town or village to respond robustly. It is critical that we make our voices heard by government. You can respond to the consultation, which closes on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, below.

[Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Jones', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

**Simon Jones**

Divisional Councillor for the Shawbury Division, Shropshire Council