

Developing the Shifnal Neighbourhood Plan

A PROGRESS REPORT

There is a lot of work going on behind the scenes at the moment. The Steering Group set up by the Town Council is currently writing the draft Neighbourhood Plan with the help of a consultant and also with contributions from The Shifnal Forward Action Groups. The Plan will include policies on

- Transport and movement
- Economy
- Health ,Education and Leisure
- Environment
- Housing
- Green Belt
- Character and Conservation

A date for your diaries. On Friday 12th June between 3pm and 8pm at Trinity Methodist Church Hall the Steering Group will be holding a drop in event and exhibition to explain the draft policies that are proposed to be included in the Shifnal Neighbourhood Plan. Members of the Steering Group will be there to explain what is happening in terms of the progress of the Plan. You will be able to comment on the draft policies both at this event and by email or letter directly to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Keep looking at the website www.shifnalplan.co.uk which contains lots of useful information which is updated on a regular basis.

Comments and ideas are always welcome at any time and we can be contacted via the website or by email shifnalplan@hotmail.com or write to us via Shifnal Town Council at 43 Broadway, Shifnal,TF11 8BB.

Chris Raine (Chair) and Tim Day (member) of the Shifnal Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

The Future of Shifnal's Green Belt

There is much debate in Shifnal about the future of the town. This article tries to explain where we are in relation to the green belt.

A common misunderstanding is the difference between the terms Greenfield and Green Belt.

Greenfield is any site that has not been previously developed i.e. not Brownfield.

Green Belt is a special planning designation that significantly restricts development within that area. There are 14 Green Belts in the UK. They were first introduced in 1947 with the aim of keeping areas permanently open and free from 'inappropriate' development. The aim was to prevent urban sprawl. They have evolved over the years and are currently enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework which sets out the rules for planning in England.

The Shifnal area outside the town is within the West Midlands Green Belt which means that the town itself is completely surrounded by green belt. Shifnal along with Albrighton and Alveley are the only major settlements in Shropshire to be located wholly "as an island" within the green belt. Shifnal lies at the North West corner of the West Midlands Green Belt. The West Midlands Green Belt in our area ends to the west of Shifnal at the Telford boundary and at the A5 to the north. Contrary to popular misconception most of Shropshire other than our area down to Bridgnorth and land to the east of the River Severn south of Bridgnorth is not green belt – there is no green belt around Shrewsbury, Oswestry and the other market towns nor is the rural west of the county green belt.

National Policy is that once established Green Belt boundaries should be long term and only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation and review of the local plan.

To allow for the long term future development of Shifnal and also to enable choice in which land would in future be allocated, the former Bridgnorth Local Plan set back the Green Belt boundary from the then built up area of the town.

The land between the built up area and Green Belt boundary was “safeguarded land” where normal Green Belt policies would apply until such time as the land was allocated for development. This land was principally to the north of the town up to the M54 and to the south behind Silvermere Park and the Uplands.

The result of all the recent permitted housing schemes is that most of this safeguarded land which would have been sufficient for the future development of Shifnal for 20-30 years, has now been allocated for development within a couple of years. All that is left is a small area between Admirals Farm and M54, and the fields adjacent to the Thomas Beddoes development.

The Shropshire Core Strategy 2010 – 2020 which superseded the Bridgnorth Plan, decided to maintain the current Green Belt boundary.

The detailed plan that delivers the Core Strategy aims for towns such as Shifnal is the SAMDev Plan (Site Allocations and Management of Development). This covers the period up to 2026. It, however, includes the statement that “a detailed review of the Green Belt will be undertaken during the next plan period” and Shropshire Council have indicated that the Core Strategy review will commence soon after the SAMDev approval has been received. This means that this process is likely to start within the next year and this will eventually involve a review of the green belt boundaries of Shifnal, Albrighton and east of Bridgnorth – the only part of Shropshire affected.

There will be extensive consultation by Shropshire Council and at the same time significant pressure from developers. The new larger Shifnal community will need to decide whether it wants to tell Shropshire Council that the town’s settlement boundary should remain broadly where it is now or whether there should be further developments on the land that is currently green belt. This would inevitably change the rural setting that contributes to the character of the town.

The views expressed in this article are personal to the author – Tim Day.