



Standing Conference

3 February 2009 at 7pm

Council Chamber, Shirehall, Shrewsbury

'Shropshire Makes Choices' - Event Summary and Feedback

The main theme of the Joint Standing Conference was the preparation of Shropshire's Local Development Framework (LDF), and in particular the emerging Core Strategy. The event was an opportunity for Shropshire Partnership members to discuss a range of strategic planning issues facing Shropshire, and specifically the key choices which must be made on the spread and type of development within the county. Views and feedback expressed at the conference will now be used by Shropshire Council in developing a preferred approach to these planning issues.

Agenda

Nick Taylor (Assistant Director, Strategy and Development for Shropshire Council) gave a presentation on the Shropshire Local Development Framework, specifically on the current consultation on the Core Strategy 'Issues and Options' document. The presentation highlighted that the Core Strategy will need to identify the overall distribution of growth around Shropshire. Amongst a number of possible alternative options, the Core Strategy could concentrate development in and around Shrewsbury, or opt for a more dispersed approach which would provide higher levels of growth to rural areas.

Celia Bahrami (Director of the Shropshire Partnership) then provided an update on progress towards the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The role of the LDF in implementing the emerging priorities of the SCS was highlighted.

Delegates were then split into small Active Groups to discuss the Core Strategy 'Issues and Options' document. Delegates were asked to identify which strategic option would most suit Shropshire. Each group was facilitated by a member of the Shropshire Planning Policy Team.

Summary of Feedback from Active Groups

There was a spread of opinion about the strategic distribution of new development. On the one hand a move towards a more dispersed distribution to development, including more building in rural areas, proved popular amongst many groups. However, others felt that rural areas could not feasibly take an increase of development because of insufficient infrastructure in many areas. Enhancing transport links was seen as important to promoting a healthy economy, whilst Shropshire's range of market towns were seen as crucial in emphasising the character of Shropshire's communities. There was some concern that concentrating development in Shrewsbury would disadvantage wider areas of Shropshire.

The following key points were made:

- Shrewsbury will be key to the overall strategy, but support also needs to be given to wider transport links and market towns;
- Developing high quality jobs and economic development should be a high priority;
- Market towns are vital to the character of Shropshire and a focal point for rural areas and many employment opportunities;
- Concern that Shropshire is a low wage economy. Expanding future employment opportunities is therefore important. This could include the food, green, manufacturing and tourism industries;
- Concern about the aging population and declining available work force in the county. There was strong support for the need for a higher education facility, possibly linked to the research and development sector;
- The economy of Shropshire needs to be marketed appropriately. The distinctive roles of market towns especially should be explored and unique selling points promoted;
- Support is needed for Home-working opportunities, especially in rural areas;
- Housing opportunities are needed across the county, and should be balanced with employment opportunities;
- Careful analysis needs to be given to housing need in relation to the overall distribution of growth;
- The type of housing is as important as quantity. There needs to be a range of size and tenures;
- Need to have greater flexibility in encouraging industry into the area, such as the broader use of existing business parks;
- Need to balance the needs of developers with council aspirations and requirements;
- Concern that broader rural distribution is not feasible due to a lack of necessary infrastructure and general negative attitudes to development amongst many rural areas;
- Brownfield development should be promoted whichever option is chosen;

- Small local business should be supported and promoted;
- Whilst there was some concern about the growth of some rural settlements, the need to develop sustainable rural communities is vital;
- There is a need to develop infrastructure to support development, including highways development, transport links, water supply, and sewerage;

Comments on specific growth options

- There was concern that Option A (Growth Point Plus) does not fully recognise the broader needs of Shropshire, despite general recognition that Shrewsbury does have a crucial part to play in the overall strategy;
- Option B (Transport Corridors) was seen as potentially positive in supporting infrastructure improvements, supporting investment, and the need to develop better links between towns. However, there was concern about the potential for ribbon development, and for some rural settlements outside the main road and rail network to stagnate;
- A strategic approach including development in both market towns (Option C, Market Towns) and wider rural areas (Option E, Rural Rebalance) was generally supported. Delegates commented that this combination would allow the rural economy to grow and sustain rural services.