



ALBRIGHTON VILLAGE ACTION GROUP
March 2025 Parish Magazine Article
The Fight Continues to Save Our Green Belt



In the last issue we reported that the Government Planning Inspectorate's recent letter to Shropshire Council judged that the draft Local Plan for Shropshire was 'unsound'. This was a shock and a matter of concern to our councillors, AVAG and local residents generally. The heart of the issue was that they said the proposed number of buildings and sites would not be sufficient to meet Government targets. They also said that in order to fulfill the 'unmet need' of the Black Country, sites around Shifnal and Albrighton would be most appropriate. They also mentioned that in the past the Local Plan proposed Green Belt sites being 'safeguarded' for future development - such as the Taylor Wimpey site on Cross Road.

So what happens now for Shropshire Council's Local Plan?

The Inspectors' letter asked for a response within a month and a detailed proposal as to how the plan would be fixed, within six months, by finding an additional site(s) to build more housing in the east of the county. The Inspectors are working within the context of the Government's highly ambitious housing targets, and the new guidelines in the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in December 2024. Despite Government declarations that sites considered 'Brownfield', or 'Grey Belt' would be the first to be developed, and that the preservation of high-quality Green Belt and agricultural land was still a Government priority, AVAG is concerned that the challenge to meet large housing targets could have the effect of vastly increasing building in rural areas. This would give developers the opportunity to offer up speculative proposals on very profitable Green Belt land that have been deemed as not suitable nor sustainable and just not right for local communities in the long term.

In response, on 4th February 2025, Shropshire Council produced a remedial proposal which was voted on by Shropshire Council's Cabinet on 12th February and issued to the Inspectors, who are expected by the beginning of March to announce whether they have accepted it. The Council's response challenged some of the demands of the Inspectors in detail while accepting others. For example, they have said that they cannot review the Sustainability and Green Belt Assessments of any new sites in the time demanded, or extend the Local Plan period by 3 years. They have also remarked on contradictory responses from the Inspectors in the past, which have created difficulties. However, the Council have agreed to find sites for an additional 1500 houses in the east of the County, potentially in the Green Belt.

If the revised Local Plan proposal is rejected by the Inspectors the County would need to start a new Local Plan from scratch. **IF** it is accepted, the Council will need to undertake a rapid piece of work this Spring to identify new sites in the east of Shropshire for the additional 1,500 houses. After putting the plan out for consultation, it would then be resubmitted to the Inspectors by the summer of 2025.

Get Ready for a new 'Call for Sites'

AVAG think it is possible that Shropshire Council may look at finding the extra sites by looking at those that are 'safeguarded' for the future, which in Albrighton includes the Taylor Wimpey site on Cross Road (160 houses) and the site between Kingwood Rd and High House Lane (150 houses), and there are a number of others across the county. Since Shropshire Council will be using their existing assessments of sites, we hope that it will only propose locations which have already been judged to be sustainable and suitable for housing, unlike the inappropriate Boningale Homes plan which for example would bring nearly a thousand more cars.

Albrighton has seen huge development in the past few years, and this continues with hundreds of new houses built in the village this past year, and 771 new houses are already earmarked in the Shropshire Local Plan for our village. All of this was approved democratically by residents and/or their representatives.

AVAG is encouraged by Shropshire Council's response to the Planning Inspectorate offering a pragmatic and realistic solution to their challenges. AVAG would promote a new 'Call for Sites' quickly in order to allow ample time to identify good alternative locations. We believe that this is the most appropriate way to ensure

that the most suitable sites for development are progressed. And avoid speculative proposals from profit-driven developers who show no regard for the long-term impact on local communities.

Under the new NPPF the County will also need to start the NEXT Local Plan in October 2025!

What's the latest on Boningale Homes' Albrighton South Planning Application?

In short not a lot! Boningale Homes and Shropshire Council's Planning Dept have both been waiting for the Local Plan situation to become clearer, but we are hopeful that the case against this overdevelopment planning application is so strong that Shropshire Council's Planning Officer Lynn Parker will still refuse the application, as she said that she was 'minded' to do before Christmas. The planning application decision may happen in March, April or even later.

Shropshire Council are mindful of both the changes to the NPPF with its increased housing targets, as well as the fact that their Local Plan has been challenged by the Planning Inspectorate. The increase means the Council is falling a little short of the required 5 year housing supply projections. If, as we hope, the Boningale Homes' application is refused, then they will may decide to pursue an expensive legal Appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. The refusal of three of their other planning applications in South Staffordshire last year demonstrated that Boningale Homes' strategy of offering many speculative and opportunistic applications in highly profitable villages with Green Belt is not yielding the results they had hoped for. That's good news for our massively supported campaign.

As Sharon Barker, AVAG Committee member commented: "We understand the need for housing, but the Boningale Homes development is completely inappropriate. It would change our village forever, overwhelm our roads, and destroy productive farmland. It is in the wrong place, far from the village centre and the railway station, making it car-dependent and unsustainable. We have seen hundreds of new houses built in Albrighton in recent years with 771 included in the Local Plan. It is clear that we are not NIMBY's but we do want sustainable and well planned development of the Village to retain its character for future generations.

"There are far more suitable locations within the county and in the Black Country, including brownfield sites and areas closer to existing infrastructure. We must voice our concerns to ensure that the Government truly follows its 'brownfield first' policy and the NPPF upholds its commitment to protecting the Green Belt, or we risk losing our countryside forever."

Look out for our new roadside banners: '**The Fight Continues to Save Our Green Belt**'. We are working on new fundraising events which will be announced on our Facebook Group 'Albrighton Village Action Group', and our website 'albrightongreenbelt.co.uk', and email.