

We are all hoping for a Happy New Year, but for the time being it is still a case of 'watch this space' in the planning world, and the fight against Boningale Homes' overdevelopment proposals.

In our January update we said that we are waiting on four factors which are key to the future of housing in Albrighton:

- 1) **The Government's new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** - this was published on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 with much media attention. More on this below.
- 2) **The Government Inspectors' comments on the Shropshire Local Plan** – These were published on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025 - more on this below.
- 3) **Shropshire Council committee decision** on the Boningale Homes Planning application – no confirmed date yet, but it may be decided at the committee meetings on 25<sup>th</sup> February or 25<sup>th</sup> March or 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025 or even later, depending on the preceding two factors.
- 4) **Albrighton Parish Council to commission work to update our Neighbourhood Plan.** Sadly this is still not progressing. We urge all parishioners to speak to your Albrighton Councillors and remind them how critical it is for villages to have an up to date neighbourhood plan – so that we can defend ourselves from unscrupulous developers like Boningale Homes in the future. Find out how to contact your Parish Councillors here: <https://albrightonparishcouncil.gov.uk/parish-council/councillors>

**The NPPF** was published on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024. This introduces significant reforms to England's planning system, aiming at addressing the housing crisis by setting ambitious building and infrastructure targets, including 1.5 million new homes over five years.

It reintroduces mandatory Local Plans and housing quotas for local councils, (set up but dropped by the last Government), with penalties for non-compliance, and promotes development on brownfield sites, designating certain green belt areas with either poor quality land or existing developments on them as 'Grey Belt', where development is allowed only under strict conditions. We do not believe that the Albrighton South site would be designated as Grey Belt – but areas around RAF Cosford may be.

The new NPPF encourages developers to commit to build-out trajectories (which means declaring when building will start) to prevent land banking. The framework also streamlines planning processes for essential infrastructure projects and increases planning application fees to increase local authority funds.

Importantly, the new NPPF states that Green Belt developments must deliver an amount of affordable housing that is 15 percentage points above the relevant local affordable housing target that would otherwise apply, subject to a cap of 50%. This approach is aimed to balance housing needs with environmental protection, and stipulates that any Green Belt development that is permitted in 'exceptional circumstances' contributes significantly to affordable housing stock. We wonder whether this change will mean that Boningale Homes won't be able to sell their proposed houses for enough money – and therefore make Albrighton South economically unviable. Potentially, this may reduce the attractiveness of Green Belt sites for housing developers.

Further Green Belt guidance is being published by the Government in January 2025, after this goes to press. It will have a key impact on the Boningale Homes Planning Application decision. We'll report on this in next month's magazine and online as soon as it happens.

**The Government Inspectors' comments on the Shropshire Local Plan** were issued on 10<sup>th</sup> December and published on January 13<sup>th</sup>. They have declared that the Local Plan in its current form is 'unsound' due to 'serious shortcomings'. The key point of contention (there are 12 others) is that Shropshire Council has not added extra sites to accommodate the previously agreed addition of 1,500 dwellings and 30 hectares of employment land for the Black Country's 'unmet need'. They say that Shropshire Council has effectively reduced the number of dwellings and amount of employment land proposed for Shropshire in order to accommodate this commitment.

The Inspector's view is that the East of the county is their preferred option (which includes Ironbridge, Shifnal and Albrighton) as it will provide better links to the Black Country. They also point out that changes to the boundaries of the Green Belt due to 'exceptional circumstances' have previously been carried out by the

Council in the Shifnal / Albrighton area, (they do not list where specifically). Concluding their letter the Government Inspectors have asked that the Council provide a detailed Project Plan to address the shortcomings of the Local Plan within a 6 month timeframe. If this proves impossible the likely outcome would be that they would recommend the withdrawal of the Local Plan in its entirety.

The full 12 page letter (ID47) from the Govt Inspectors can be read on Shropshire Council's Planning Portal: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/local-planning/local-plan-review/draft-shropshire-local-plan-2016-2038-examination/examination-library/examination-stage-documents/>

**Reaction to the news:** The BBC's Shropshire News reported on the 10th of January that Lezley Picton, the leader of Shropshire Council, having had early sight of this letter says she is "extremely disappointed" by the new NPPF housebuilding target set by the government for Shropshire. She continues that the council has been asked to contribute 1,994 properties a year - a 34% increase in the number of homes built annually since 2021. She said slightly more than 1,500 had been built in 2024, and to be told to build 1,994 properties a year meant a "considerable supply of housing sites" would be required.

On the 13th of January, Chris Schofield, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for Planning, said on the Council's website: "Unfortunately, it seems that on a number of issues the Inspectors have sided with the arguments put by promoters of sites not included in the draft Plan. This is very disappointing,...Inspectors are also now [asking] the council to accommodate additional site allocations for Black Country needs, and to increase the Plan period by three years, which would require the council to identify sites for around an additional 4,000 dwellings. We are in a similar situation to many other councils and will be considering the Inspectors' views very carefully in the coming weeks and assessing a range of options as to how best to proceed, while taking account also of the implications of recent Government announcements on planning reforms. A report on this will come to Cabinet in February. However, above all we must consider what is best for Shropshire's communities and how best to maintain a positive framework for making decisions at a time of significant upheaval in the national planning system."

**What does this mean?** These new targets and planning guidelines must be used by Lynn Parker and the Planning Appeal Inspectors to help inform the decision over the Boningale Homes' Albrighton South development and other applications in the future. Boningale Homes no doubt hope that the Shropshire Local Plan will fail to meet the demands of the government inspectors in the time period allocated for its revision. If this comes to pass, the flood-gates would be opened to speculative overdevelopments such as ours.

AVAG is following these developments closely and will keep fighting for the village's future. We are encouraged that Shropshire Council is engaging barristers to fix the Shropshire Local Plan and to ensure that the decision on Albrighton South can be defended robustly if (as seems likely) Boningale Homes take it to planning appeal.

**The Albrighton South Planning Application Documents** (this can be viewed on the Planning Portal at <https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/> and then searching by entering **24/02108/OUT** ), have continued to be issued for review; and this meant that public consultation was opened again until 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The new documents give mixed responses and included the following:

- Boningale Homes' updated documents on highways, Biodiversity Net Gain Calculations, Flood Risk Assessments and Ground Surveys.
- Boningale Homes' responses to AVAG objections including legal opinions from barristers. This underlines the importance of Shropshire Council making a decision on the application which is sound legally – and it shows how likely it is that Boningale Homes will fight all the way to win permission to build out their speculative overdevelopment proposals.
- Severn Trent Water responses saying that their modelling results concluded that there is a risk of flooding on the network with the additional flows from the proposed development – and additional capacity will require upgrades to the network. This is good news in our fight against the proposals.
- Active Travel England response saying that they would accept planning conditions with revised travel plan targets and public transport strategy, local centre facilities to be delivered on completion of phase 1. This is disappointing news given what we believe is the deeply unsustainable location of the site; so far away from the high street and train station

AVAG is concerned about what 2025 will bring and we will need your incredible support again at some stage. If Shropshire Council manage to amend the Local Plan and refuse the application, Boningale Homes will take this to Planning Appeal, then we will need further funds so that we can employ legal and professional consultants again. If we lose this fight because we simply don't have the war-chest we need we will never forgive ourselves.

Thank you and please keep in touch with our campaign via our website <https://albrightongreenbelt.co.uk/> and our Facebook Group 'Albrighton Village Action Group'.