

# Shepton LCN Local Plan Workshop

## 03 March 2025

### Purpose

The meeting was part of the early engagement phase for the development of Somerset Council's new Local Plan, which will guide planning and development across the county through to 2045. The session aimed to:

- Introduce the Local Plan process.
- Gather community input on key themes.

### Structure

1. Presentation by Louise Mansfield and Julia Dorrington (Allies and Morrison Architects) on:
  - What a Local Plan is
  - The planning timeline and process
  - The importance of early community engagement
2. Breakout Discussions on eight key themes (click on each one for details):
  - **Decent Homes for All**
  - **Shops and Services**
  - **Health and Wellbeing**
  - **Culture, Community and Play**
  - **Sustainable and Resilient Places**
  - **Character, Heritage and Design**
  - **Movement and Travel**
  - **Education and Employment**
3. Feedback and Plenary: Each group shared key points from their discussions, followed by open-floor comments and questions.

### Next Steps

- Continued engagement through LCNs as the Local Plan progresses.
- Follow-up on highways and devolution concerns.
- Sharing of resources (e.g. biodiversity officer contacts, rainwater monitors).
- Planning future meetings to address unresolved issues and deepen collaboration.

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## Decent Homes for All

"To meet the housing needs of our communities, the **infrastructure** needs to be appropriate, particularly for villages and and parishes around the the Shepton area. So the quality of the roads, the **highway network** itself being accessible, but also access to public transport and other means of being able to **get to and from work**, etc. In terms of need, there's a lot of discussion in the parishes about **affordable housing**, older people in particular **being able to downsize** or there being properties that they can downsize to, which might free up other houses in the parish.

Finally, being able to have those **balanced populations** in our villages and parishes and what might that look like, and how instead of working as individual parishes, we might **work as a collective** to identify where it might be best to build houses within this area of Somerset and to support those places like Shepton, that want some development, how might that work and how might that also serve to support the the parishes in the wider area."

- Lack of genuinely affordable housing, especially for young families and older residents wishing to downsize
- "affordable housing" only marginally cheaper than market rates, making it inaccessible in real practice
- Need for more diverse housing types, including bungalows and adaptable homes for aging populations
- Mismatch between housing development and infrastructure capacity
- Poor broadband connectivity
- Need to explore cross-parish housing strategies to meet collective needs
- Leverage community-led housing initiatives and local landowner partnerships
- Dominance in large-scale developments in other towns may be drawing resources from smaller communities
- Local development challenges
  - Shepton Mallet faces a unique challenge: despite having land and plans for housing, developers are not building due to more profitable opportunities elsewhere.
  - This contrasts with other villages experiencing unwanted or excessive development.

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## Shops and Services

"The first point made is what our services are and how they will change over the next 20 years, **bearing in mind the length of the local plan**. It is about ensuring there is an improvement in broadband and mobile so that everyone everywhere has good access to those services, as well as vital services such as pharmacies, doctors, and schools. This may lead to a **requirement for more buses and public transport** with more people working from home.

There may be a **need to strengthen community and business hubs**, particularly in the villages. As churches possibly closed, there is an opportunity to use those as community hubs.

As far as high streets are concerned, there will probably be more of a mix between retail and residential. To embrace that and make high streets destinations in other ways, **infrastructure considerations** also apply as far as shops and services are concerned. Many people don't have access to charging points, such as in terrace houses - will need to be addressed for a delivery of effective charging.

Final point - **balancing levels of development with maintaining and enhancing services**. Some villages struggle with keeping pharmacies and shops and some are without anything at all."

- What are services? What will change?
- Broadband/mobile
- Vital services accessible
- More busses
- Community and Business Hubs
- Churches
- High Street destinations
- Infrastructure constraints
- Flats above shops/more mixed retail and residential
- Electric charging points
- Balancing development with maintaining/enhancing services

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## Health and Wellbeing

"Need for access to facilities. There may be a demographic issue - how are we encouraging young people to stay?"

Access to nature - we can walk out of the door, but if you have a mobility challenge that is quite an issue; still having to get into a vehicle of some sort to get access to nature.

Looking at parks, allotments, keeping fit equipment, re-utilising old buildings for low-rise flats.

Pathway maintenance - how to get access when there's no bus?"

- Pollution - bypasses - stop cars continuing to run when stationary
- 40mph on country roads - cost of electric vehicles
- Parks, allotments, keep fit equipment
- Re-utilising olfactory buildings for low rise flats
- Allocation for community events
- Pathway maintenance - ramblers
- Potholes!
- Good transport links - affordable for leisure facilities and swimming, including national links
- Demographic issues
- Volunteering should be made easier
- Mixed housing

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## Sustainable and Resilient Places

"**Flooding** and **water run-off** are major concerns, especially for parishes located at lower elevations. The Environment Agency is offering free rainwater monitors to help communities collect local rainfall data to inform planning and resilience efforts.

Somerset Council is required to ensure a 10% biodiversity net gain for new developments. Communities are encouraged to submit ideas for **local biodiversity enhancements** to be included in the council's biodiversity strategy.

Strong support for expanding **off-road cycle paths** and **connecting villages to regional routes** such as the Strawberry Line. Need better integration of cycling and walking infrastructure into the Local Plan and transport strategies.

Suggesting **strategic investment in Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure** to support future demand.

Discussions around benefits of **working together across parish boundaries on biodiversity** projects and developing joint infrastructure proposals, e.g. cycle paths, EV charging."

- Climate resilience and flooding
- Need for better drainage, land management and flood mitigation strategies
- Balancing development with maintaining/enhancing services
- Enhancing local biodiversity
- Planting hedgerows and restoring ditches
- Creating shared green spaces across multiples parishes
- Promoting biodiversity in private gardens through local guidance
- Sustainable Transport and Active Travel
- Safety concerns for cyclists on narrow rural roads with heavy traffic
- Lack of EV charging points - a barrier to reducing carbon emissions
- Having shared or pooled charging stations in village centres
- Coordinating land use and green space planning
- Scalable models of community-led initiatives
  - a parish biodiversity officer advising residents on eco-friendly gardening
  - a local farmer offering to run educational sessions on sustainable farming practices

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## Culture, Community and Play

"A lot of activity around multi-use paths and getting a bridge, **increasing number of local volunteering.**

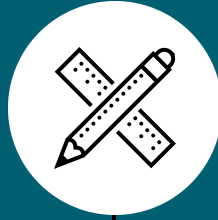
When talking about culture, community and play, we're talking about **events that might encourage people to think of community.** Sometimes the people that come are not necessarily aware of the traditions of the villages. For example, there are benefits and downsides to having the world's largest music festival on our doorstep, in Pilton. There may be more pressures than wanted. On the other hand, we really should be spreading the benefit of the festival to a wider area through the year, akin to the Edinburgh Festival. Identifying the **need for young people to have projects and facilities** that are actually lacking.

If you don't **link the communities through the day and into the night**, you end up having villages not being part of the wider community. Public transport becomes really important."

- Community assets, including village halls and pubs
- Cinema - theatre
- Community activities - events/festivals
- Need to identify activities for young people - support youth projects/play facilities
- Multi-use paths/cycleways
- Protecting existing traditions of villages/towns and ambience - need enforcement to ensure compliance to agreed plans
- Public transport to link communities (late night busses)
- Open Community Spaces (Amulet in Shepton?)
- Spread the benefit of Glastonbury Festival - wider geographic area - through the year

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## Character, Heritage and Design

"It's recognised that there is need to preserve listed building and period properties and also to protect the landscape while sort of creating a balance between preserving them and allowing them to adapt and deliver what needs to be delivered in terms of economic benefits. Allowing those to be adapted for modern living and energy efficiency.

Requirement, or wish, for smaller houses and affordable houses to be provided. Bungalows may affect the nature of developments and need more land to be developed. Recognising that transport can have a detrimental impact on the appearance of a village or an area.

With regards to access to gardens and outside spaces, the council need to adopt a consistent approach in designing those."

- Preservation of traditional/listed buildings
- Affordable housing - smaller houses - one-bed houses
- Bungalows
- Access to gardens/open space
- Design - consistent approach
- Balance between protection and adaptation for modern living/energy efficiency
- Removing transport pressures
- Protection of landscape/designations - AONB

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## Movement and Travel

"Why can't we have a **Shepton to Bristol bus**? We've got Shepton to Bath. How do you get from Shepton to Bristol other than going to Bath and getting on a train or going to? Now we're going into Wells and catching another bus. You have to drive to Wells. How do we get around? Do we bike well, not really. On these roads it's just horrendous. Where do we know most need investment? Where we something needs to be done about the the public transport network, especially in in a rural area? How can we **encourage active and sustainable travel**? Well, we're on the way with the **multi-user paths** but we still got to get to them and so on. So it's any number of issues on travel which need to be resolved."

- A real difference in urban/rural travel, especially on weekends
- Need more transport
- Shepton to Bristol bus - need to get on the Shepton to Bath bus then to Bristol or drive by car to Wells to get a direct bus
- Public transport needs to link for appointments as currently need a car to get to trains and approach and to get to appropriate bus links
  - medical appointments, interviews, places of education etc
  - for example in Doultling couldn't house refugees from Ukraine as no suitable transport links to education or employment
- Need a car to get to trains - need appropriate bus links
- Electric car prices going down but we need fewer cars on the roads
- Traffic congestion for Glastonbury Festival and Bath and West Showground as no other way of getting around
- Main roads - villages - need speed watch and intelligent traffic lights at main junctions in villages
- Expand footpaths, eg Strawberry Line, and cycle pathways from existing roads as they are too narrow

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## Education and Employment

"Stress the **need for local employment**, especially **support for start-ups** trying to keep young people in our villages because give them a reason to stay, **a range of employment opportunities** for them, with some high-work jobs. As well as the more blue collar jobs with the distribution centres, which we're very lucky to have around here. We **don't want to lose young talent**, keeping our cultural richness, keeping the best talent.

As for local schools, we have to support them because there could be a disconnect between the villages and schools, if they do get bussed away to the neighbouring villages."

- Local Employment
- Support Start-up Units/Tax Breaks
- Need for new high net worth jobs
- Require a Higher Education centre to develop new industry/start-ups
- Cultural Richness - welcome to all - using best talents
- Losing young people of talent - no reason to stay
- Distribution centres (more blue collar than high wage)
- Need wider range of work offers
- Need for local schools - disconnect by bussing children away from home bases

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