

Statement to Blymhill and Weston Parish Council - J3 Development.

Bradford Estates appreciates that major development can be controversial. Even before the current pandemic and its severe economic and social consequences, we already faced significant challenges in providing enough jobs and homes to meet the needs of both Shropshire and the country as a whole.

Responding to those challenges, the Council started down the path of preparing a new Local Plan more than three years ago. In doing so, they acknowledged early on that there is a need for more growth to take place. However, circumstances are changing around us rapidly. The pressures to make significant strategic decisions about how much growth, of what type, and where, have increased even more over the last few months.

The Council has consequently agreed to pause and take stock by carrying out a further round of consultation, before settling on what they consider to be an appropriate and up to date strategy to guide the future of Shropshire over the next few years.

That additional round of consultation - which is wide ranging and open to all - runs until the end of September. The Council Cabinet are then presently scheduled to make a decision on the proposed contents of the Local Plan in November. If the current programme is maintained, there will then be a final round of consultation before the plan is submitted to the Government, probably early next year. Any objections to it will then be considered by an Inspector and the outcome finally settled sometime later in 2021.

In respect of our proposals at J3, the Council, so far, have taken the view that, in weighing up the site specific considerations, both positive and negative, and giving consideration to the consultation responses received to date on this matter, they consider there is insufficient justification to progress an exceptional circumstances argument for the release of this land from the Green Belt. Clearly, we disagree with that current assessment.

Our proposals are for up to 50 hectares of modern employment land at J3. There is also room for up to 3,000 new homes. As a strategic employment site of significant scale, J3 is in a premier location to attract major inward investments. We believe that the site is viable and deliverable promptly. J3 will thus deliver thousands of new jobs into Shropshire and boost its economy too. Likewise, the potential to build associated high-quality new homes, including many affordable and lifetime designed homes, will bring significant, direct and tangible benefits to many local people.

Those benefits would also include:

- 510 hectares of new public open space, accessible to existing local communities, including public access to the 222-acre Lizard Wood.
- A new 70-metre wide green corridor protecting and enhancing the Monarch's Way.
- A safeguarded, landscaped green buffer to Tong village – the development will only be west of the A41, maintaining at least a 500m separation.
- A total of 10 miles of new safe walking and high-quality cycling routes connecting with existing communities, as well as Cosford station etc.
- New and enhanced bus routes, again connecting with other local communities and linking with the station, and Shifnal town centre etc.
- Two new local primary schools.
- New healthcare facilities.
- New community facilities, including halls and small shops only.
- A new training and skills hub working in partnership with local further and higher education establishments to help local people develop their careers and take advantage of the jobs on their doorstep.
- An embedded net zero carbon strategy from the outset to ensure a positive, local response to climate change.

These are not just aspirations. They are well thought through plans.

Bradford Estates is proud of the area we manage and would remain in control as “master developer” throughout the process, to ensure the site integrates sensitively with the current Estate and area. We would also adopt the principles of quality and attractiveness set out by the Government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. The Council, as the local planning authority, can also ensure that binding legal obligations are put in place to make sure that what we say will happen does happen.

If the Council does, after further reflection, decide to include a development at J3 within their Local Plan, then the local communities will then be asked by us and the Council to become involved further in shaping J3 as a place and community.

So, we will continue to progress the case for J3 as we believe that, in light of all the current circumstances, J3 is an exceptional opportunity, can be soundly justified, and will bring real benefits to the local area. It is needed now more than ever.

Bradford Estates

August 2020.