



## Despite the Covid 19 Lockdown, Things Still Stir

### Oswestry Masterplan

You may have heard of the Future Oswestry Group. This is a committee composed of Councillors from Shropshire Council and the Town Council, and members of the BID, elected by the business community who pay a small supplementary rate for the privilege. Future Oswestry is in the process of appointing consultants to produce a Masterplan for Oswestry. You may think that Oswestry is the most planned place under the sun, what with the Core Strategy, SAMDev, Place Plan, Oswestry 2020, The Economic Plan, the Local Plan Review and the Public Realm Strategy. Nevertheless what it is difficult to see is the effect of many of these plans on the ground. This one is different, perhaps. It starts off on the right foot by requiring an investable plan, and the consultant is required to engage with stakeholders and community groups to develop a vision including the repurposing of empty buildings and the treatment of the public realm.

The committee has kept abreast of developments on this front, and since we anticipate difficulties in the normal ways of engaging the community in exercises of this sort, we have formed a loose association of people who are interested in having an input. We have called this the Oswestry Masterplan Engagement Group (OMEG). The object of this is to have a list of interested people and groups identified, and supplied with the means to understand the background to change. At present there are about 20 people involved, and we would of course welcome any (or even all) Civic Society members to become part of OMEG. It involves as much or as little work as you might please, and it is not aimed at getting everyone to adopt a particular line – rather, it is to ensure that those who wish to engage in the study are given the opportunity and knowledge to do so.

For more information please click this link

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HihNGfBKUSA6yLJ2e7WTB94nfh\\_NRSRt/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HihNGfBKUSA6yLJ2e7WTB94nfh_NRSRt/view?usp=sharing)

Please e-mail [dave@hempyards.co.uk](mailto:dave@hempyards.co.uk) to register your interest.

### Recent Planning Applications

The Committee has made comments on two recent planning applications:

1 Application 20/02216/FUL: Erection of 7 No dwellings and formation of vehicular access and parking court following demolition of dwelling house and commercial premises Land East Of 56 Salop Road Oswestry Shropshire

We objected to this proposal on the grounds that the loss of buildings in the Oswestry Conservation Area would harm the distinctiveness of this part of the town, and that the replacement buildings were of poor quality design. You can see the full comments here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/15rhIDKo6CTtscHrUUu-iU\\_9PdA-64FS8/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15rhIDKo6CTtscHrUUu-iU_9PdA-64FS8/view?usp=sharing) To see the application, go to the Shropshire Council web site <https://pa.shropshire.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=simple&searchType=Application> and insert the application number

2 Application 20/02058/EIA | Use of land part of existing golf course as a static holiday caravan site Henlle Park Golf Club, Gobowen Shropshire

This application is for a 120 static caravans, reducing the golf course to 9 holes.

We objected to this proposal in support of objections from others concerning the effect of the development on the important parkland landscape of the site, and that the proposal would come nowhere near to meeting the requirements of planning policy for high quality in itself (CS16) and for being landscaped and designed to a high quality (MD11). Furthermore it fails utterly to achieve a well-designed place, which is a key aspect of sustainable development (NPPF12). You can read the full comments here

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RFnI41\\_SFhdapoQVAtTkDnaXeDhPWSyu/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RFnI41_SFhdapoQVAtTkDnaXeDhPWSyu/view?usp=sharing)

## THE CIVIC SOCIETY EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNMENT ADVICE TO

### LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES.

From time to time the Government publishes advice to planning authorities. Best known is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), but other advice is given from time to time. The importance of this is that planning authorities are expected to apply this advice when considering applications for planning permission. If they do, they are likely to be supported by Inspectors if developers choose to appeal against the application of government guidance, so of course developers generally fall into line with the guidance. But this needs a planning authority to show that it takes the advice seriously.

Here we look at a number of bits of guidance, and the way they have (or have not) been applied by Shropshire Council. Because we're all denied hours of fun watching Eurovision, we've given points for performance. We take the most recent first.

#### Design for All in the Sustainable Urban Extension

In October last year the Government published guidance on Design, including policies for **Effective Community Engagement on Design**. These include:

- *Early engagement .... empowers people to inform the vision, design policies and the design of schemes.*
- *Engagement activities offer an opportunity to work collaboratively with communities to shape better places for local people.*
- *local planning authorities or applicants should demonstrate how all views are listened to and considered.*
- *It should be clear to communities that scope is there for them to influence the design policies or scheme being developed.*
- *Local planning authorities and applicants are encouraged to proactively engage an inclusive, diverse and representative sample of the community, so that their views can be taken in to account in relation to design*

- *Design workshops with members of the local community can take many forms, ..... improve the quality of that place for local people and organisations.*
- *design workshops that can be used to generate a shared understanding of the opportunities and constraints of a site between members of the community, other stakeholders including council members, parish councils and external consultees and an inter-disciplinary team of built environment professionals including local authority officers that leads to the development of options.*
- *Community panels or forums can be set up by local planning authorities or third sector organisations, such as civic societies, to represent the views of local communities by scrutinising plans, policies or applications.*

This guidance is a response to the long standing public complaint that developers tend to take little notice of local people and local needs, and that the quality of design in the UK is in general poor. This guidance is highly relevant to the proposals to carry out the development termed the Oswestry Sustainable Urban Extension, where outline planning permission now exists for 750 dwellings. If the advice set out above were to be applied the planning authority would be encouraging (by threat of refusal of planning permission) the developer to engage with the community on his proposals for design and layout of this development. Nothing has happened so far, and requests to the Planning Services Manager for this to be taken forward have not resulted in any action. So *Nil Points* there.

*Could we have this:*



Stirling Prize Winner 2019 – Goldsmith Street, Norwich



Communal space with safe play areas



Low energy development –Langport, Suffolk



Even Wimpey can get it right – Staiths, Gateshead

*“Early engagement .... empowers people to inform the vision, design policies and the design of schemes.”*

*Or will we get this:*

“Most new housing so poorly designed it should not have been built, says Bartlett report”



Could be anywhere, or everywhere.



Did this developer employ an architect?

*We are waiting, still*

## Access for All at the Sustainable Morrison's Store

In the NPPF there are policies which state that *applications for development should give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport.*

The Civic Society referred to these policies in comments they made on the layout of the new Morrison's. It was pointed out to both the developer and to the planning authority that the design proposed, with the shop being separated from the road access by the filling station and the car park, could not possibly fulfil this policy. The layout should have been the other way round, with the shop on the road frontage and the car park and filling station behind or to the side. No account was taken of these policies in the decision.



The result is that a pedestrian has to walk 250 paces to get from Shrewsbury Road to the store

entrance, in the distance. All of this is come rain or shine, young or old. This is the "priority first" for pedestrian access. "Access to high quality public transport" is a massive 450 paces away. Certainly that is "so far as possible", but we don't think that is quite what the government had in mind!



By contrast a car user going to shop at the store has, on average, 50 paces to walk to get to the shop door.

Morrison's are advised by Chartered Town Planners, who know the significance of government advice. Similarly, Shopshire Planners are professionally qualified. Surely,

they knew this development was not what the government wanted. Can none of them read?

So, once again, *Nil Points*.

The NPPF also says that development should be "plan led". The Plan is SAMdev, and Policy MD2 requires *that developers should demonstrate how good standards of sustainable design and construction have been employed*. This requires a technical assessment of the carbon emissions arising from the development, and whether they are avoidable. Morrison's proposed a filling station. At that time the Government had announced that petrol and diesel cars must cease production within 20 years. So, over the next 30 years a filling station would be expected to become more and more redundant. Very large amounts of carbon are emitted in the production of cement, steel, aluminium and glass used to build the filling station, and all of this embedded carbon would have a very short "life" before being wasted. It could not be argued





that the filling station was “sustainable” development, nor would it fulfil a need, there being plenty of provision close by. No account was taken of this, although drawn to the planners’ attention by the Civic Society. *Nil Points, aussie!*

### The Aldi Store and the Telford Gatehouse

The NPPF is now in its second iteration. In its first iteration it stated that *it is proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness, and that planning authorities should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.*

Aldi proposed for their new store on Shrewsbury Road that the Toll Gate house which had stood at a corner of the site for 200 years should be demolished. Many people said that the Gatehouse was an heritage asset, of significance by association with



Thomas Telford, one of the greatest engineers who ever lived, and with particular links with Shropshire, where he was County Surveyor. The planning authority concluded that whilst this might have been so, this should not stand in the way of a convenient layout for the store. The Civic Society objected on the grounds that the Gatehouse was a distinctive feature of Oswestry, and a development which would lead to its loss should not be permitted. No account was taken of this



government advice in the decision, and a distinctive, irreplaceable historic feature was lost to the town in favour of an off the peg

anywhere supermarket.

Once again, *Nil Points*.

We would argue that the planning authority has the task of balancing a contract between the public (whose servants they are) and developers. In doing this they are guided by the Government, and so to properly discharge their contract the Planning Authority must always take careful account of government guidance. All the instances we give are not those where a careful balance has been struck between the tensions around development, but where the planning authority totally failed to take any account of the guidance, even though it was drawn to their attention. There are only two explanations for this behaviour. One is corruption and the other is incompetence.

These developments are the most important changes to take place in Oswestry. Government gave the planning authority the power to get better results and they failed to use them. Oswestry is the worse for it, and we are being poorly served by our servants.