

District Councillor Report from Cllr Anne Parry – Wellesbourne North and Rural

South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP)

The development of the SWLP has been totally consuming and is currently not fit for purpose, which is of serious concern.

Following the Planning Inspectorate advisory meeting (19th May), prior to the Joint Cabinet Meetings of Warwick District (WDC) and Stratford on Avon District (SDC) Councils on the 1st of June, the initial response by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS report) clearly highlighted flaws in the SWLP.

The report highlighted issues with site viability due to requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain and Net Zero Carbon requirements that exceed legislative and Government requirements, and consequently the low level of Affordable and Social Housing possible. The Inspector also questioned how realistic the evidence base was regarding the anticipated supply of “windfall” sites within the Housing Land Supply calculations.

Neither Authorities can show a Five-Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS) currently. SDC has adopted a “stepped trajectory” plan because of the considerable shortfall of sites in the first three years. This approach has been criticised by the inspector, and this means a radical change to the plan and its priorities in the short run. The inspector also considered that the amount of “headroom”, or contingency sites was unrealistically low at 6.8% in SDC and 1.4% in WDC. The expected number is around 10%.

Allocation of both Gypsy and Traveller sites and Travelling Showman Yards requires clarification. There remain questions over allocations within the Greenbelt following changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and with regard to affordable housing allocation rates on those sites.

There remain questions over the funding of the Stratford upon Avon Western Relief Road that would enable further development of the sites around the Long Marston Airfield developments. Highway funding details must be available before the next stage which is to submit Regulation 19. This is the test of deliverability of the plan and without firm answers to the above issues the SWLP cannot be delivered and therefore found to be unsound. Funding in the region of £110 million+ is reported to be required with no indication of where this would come from without huge borrowings undertaken by SDC at council tax payer’s expense! In a nutshell panic has set in at SDC!

In addition to proposed housing in Wellesbourne, I am particularly anxious about proposals for Bishops Tachbrook and the cumulative impact this will have on all my villages including Lighthorne.

Five Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS)

As mentioned above, the 5YHLS is unmet in both WDC and SDC geographies. This is partially due to the changes to Housing Need calculations imposed by this Government, but also to a level of complacency on behalf of both administrations since 2024.

The government did change the calculations, and the current 5YHLS calculations have almost doubled the “local need” in Warwickshire and almost halved the need in the suburban areas of Coventry, Solihull, and Birmingham. In my mind this is unsustainable because to move from the urban/suburban centres will require new employment centres in South Warwickshire or an increase in commuting. Considering the lack of transport infrastructure in our districts, this is unsustainable and definitely does not make “Green Sense”. The plan for over 28,000 new homes could mean up to 56,000 new jobs in the period of the plan. The economic development plan alongside the SWLP does not seem to adequately address this question satisfactorily in my opinion.

The 5YHLS is very important. Without meeting the number, the Local Plan (currently the Core Strategy (CS) and possibly soon to be made the SWLP), neither plan could be considered to be up-to-date. This means that the “tilted balance” referred to in the current NPPF (paragraph 11) applies and is balanced towards presumed granting of planning application.

The current Local Plan is out of date as it relates to housing policies, locations, and numbers because of a lack of a demonstrable 5YHLS. The other policies in the current CS remain up to date and can be relied upon in determining planning applications. With a demonstrable 5YHLS the entire CS would be valid until 2031.

This also has implications for Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) where all but 5 of the ‘made NDP’s are themselves ‘out of date’. Details are still awaited on the criteria to apply for a grant in developing a new NDP or reviewing an old one. A budget allocation was agreed in February but still the council have not published anything on the website which is unhelpful, despite raising this as a question to the Leader at the Full Council meeting in April.

Regardless of which Local Plan is being considered, to avoid a development free for all in our District, we need to secure a demonstrable 5YHLS. This is the critical objective, and one we need to achieve to maintain and protect our part of the County and provide homes, environment, and employment for our children.

Unfortunately, it is not clear to me that all parties involved in these immensely important decisions for a generation have recognised this reality.

As I write, there has been an announcement that another by-election has been triggered by the resignation of the LibDem member for Kinwarton Ward. This is the third by-election announced since the middle of March the joint cost of which amounts to something just

under £40,000. As a result, the Extraordinary Council Meeting set for the 8th June has had to be cancelled as the Council is in Purdah and no political decisions can be made during that period. This means that Councillors will not have the opportunity to scrutinise and debate the merits of the SWLP until mid-July. I will update you all if and when any significant changes occur.