

Cressage Parish Meeting

Held on 29.09.20 at 7pm, via Zoom

Present: Cllr. Bott (Chair), 30 members of the public, Shropshire Cllr. Wild

Clerk: R Turner

Cllr. Bott welcomed everyone to this extraordinary parish meeting which had been called by 6 electors of the parish. He explained procedures for participation and be mindful that talking over each other in a virtual meeting makes it very difficult for everybody to hear. He asked people to put their hands up so can speak in order. He said that priority for speaking would be given to people from within the village.

Cllr. Bott addressed the meeting as follows:

“There appears to be a great deal of misinformation about the mechanics of the Local Plan Review process so Councillor Wild with the help of Shropshire Council’s Planning Department will present a factual statement of the current policy and proposed policies for the refresh of the Local Plan.

The current Local Plan designates Cressage as Open Countryside. This was the choice of the Parish Council. The Local Plan is under review the review started in 2017 and the Parish Council has engaged fully with the process.

In the Local Plan Review, communities cannot choose whether to be Open Countryside or Community Hubs as it is determined by a points scoring of services and facilities; the scoring system is set by Shropshire Council.

- In 2017, a Parish Plan was completed. This document has guided our response to the Local Plan review. In the 2017 Parish Plan the majority of respondents supported development in the community. The popular choice was 20 houses – including affordable housing over 5 years, which projected over 20 years would be circa 80 houses. The majority of respondents wanted to see The Eagles developed and a smaller number supported development of the former garage and the Glebe Field.
- In 2018/19 – we held a public meeting and responded to the Preferred Site Options stage of the review. This involved reviewing the points allocated to Cressage to make it a hub – we ensured the points were questioned for accuracy and points for a post office were removed. The total points for Cressage were still over the threshold to be a hub. We therefore advocated development to meet the community wishes in the Parish Plan – up to 80 houses in 20 years, a development boundary and The Eagles and Glebe Field allocated for housing.
- In 2020 Reg 18 consultation – the plan is little different than the 2018/19 draft and we supported the proposals again as they are consistent with the Parish Plan.
- The Parish Council has also been approached by Raby Estates about a site they own – the community was asked their opinions on this. It has not been supported by the Parish Council as the site is not part of the Local Plan Review consultation but we publicised the proposal to ensure transparency.

I will now ask Councillor Claire Wild to deliver her statement and explain the review process further.”

Cllr. Wild spoke as follows at the invitation of the chairman:

“I thought it would be helpful to give you some information and to also answer some of the questions I have been asked. All the information below has been checked by Shropshire Council Planning Policy

department and deemed accurate. I have tried to avoid planning terms and put it in plain English. Behind all of this are some complex policies and issues and I have tried to simplify them as much as possible.

To put planning and development into context England needs 5.5 million new homes by 2038 with a large proportion to be provided as affordable housing.

Shropshire Council's Local Plan runs from 2016 until 2038 and needs to deliver 30,800 homes to make its contribution towards the national requirement for new homes in England. Shropshire Council's methodology to identify suitable settlements for new housing addresses the wider concerns about increasing the scale of new development, tackling the affordability of housing and meeting the need for new homes in sustainable settlements. This means that Cressage and many other villages who previously chose to be open countryside, are now being proposed to accept higher levels of development to reflect their sustainability – by this we principally mean the ability for residents to access services and facilities locally.

In the currently adopted Local Plan (known as the SAMDev), the rural areas were able to choose whether their settlements should be open countryside or become a Cluster or a Hub. However, in some instances this has not produced the most sustainable pattern of new housing development. Shropshire Council also has to demonstrate it is maintaining a constant 5-year land supply to guarantee the delivery of new housing in Shropshire, as well as needing to demonstrate that there is sufficient delivery of housing on the ground. If Shropshire Council drops below a 5-year supply of housing, then any sustainable site may gain planning permission. This affected Shropshire in the period from 2012 to 2014. At this time, some villages received large housing developments on sites that were considered to be sustainable even though the parish/village had opted to be open countryside.

Shropshire Council, in this local plan from 2016-2038, has provided a degree of protection for its rural settlements. The Draft Local Plan has an agreed urban focus for delivering the 30,800 new homes. This will target the delivery of over 70% of the new housing into Shrewsbury, the 5 market towns (from Oswestry to Ludlow) and 12 key centres (including Albrighton, Church Stretton, Ellesmere, Much Wenlock, Shifnal and Wem).

Whilst Cressage is now proposed to be a Hub, as part of a group of 40 villages, it is expected that these villages will only provide around 5,000 new homes or about 16% of the overall requirement for new housing in Shropshire up until 2038. Hubs have already identified 2,200 homes and the new site allocations provide the remaining 2,800 homes. There is also a requirement for some new market housing in Cluster settlements and some new affordable housing in the countryside to provide around 14% of the 30,800 new homes. This will mainly be through affordable housing schemes including key worker housing, rural workers dwellings and now, some cross-subsidy development.

To identify the 40 Hub settlements, Shropshire Council developed a hierarchy of settlements policy, allocating points for services available in those settlements above a minimum population size (100 people) or number of dwellings (50 dwellings). This method is simply a 'minimum' or 'threshold' test to identify sustainable settlements and when they were identified, the policy then classified them by size as either a Market Town, Key Centre or a Hub. This process identified a total of 40 hubs. Below the points threshold for services (at 48 points), there were still villages that had some services or were located close together and shared services. The Town and Parish Councils were then asked whether those types of villages should be Cluster settlements to take small scale housing developments of 1 – 3 dwellings. Then all the remaining settlements became villages in the open countryside due to their location, size and limited service provision. This new policy is based on factual assessments of the

settlements rather than the preferences of the Town and Parish Councils. This helps to satisfy the requirements of national policy: for more housing; at more affordable prices; located in sustainable settlements.

Shropshire Council consulted on this policy in 2017, the Parish Council and I challenged the points awarded to Cressage and the total was reduced to 50 points, 2 above the threshold for a Hub (requiring 48 points). Shropshire Council received over 3,500 responses to this consultation and these responses have been collated and have been used to inform the Local Plan that will be submitted to the independent Planning Inspector appointed by the Planning Inspectorate. It is the Planning Inspector who will eventually decide whether Cressage will be a Hub. In the plan preparation process, so far, Shropshire Council did not have the capacity to respond individually to the 3,500 letters and responses that it received in 2017 and again in 2018. Nevertheless, where villages showed they did not have an adequate range of services, Shropshire Council did remove their Hub status such as Westbury on the Welsh border.

In relation to the policy to identify sustainable settlements, it is simply NOT true that any Parish Council can opt to be open Countryside. This is misleading as the Planning Inspector is unlikely to accept this outcome.

In addition, the definition of Open Countryside, does NOT mean there will be NO development. Certain types of housing can be built in open countryside such as those already mentioned including affordable housing, key worker housing or rural workers dwellings and cross-subsidy development. So, for example in the unlikely event that the Inspector decided that Cressage should stay as open countryside, then the vicarage site and/or the Raby site could still be developed for some cross-subsidy housing. A scheme would require around 10 homes with 70% being affordable or it could be developed as 100% affordable. Travellers sites can also be built in open countryside as can Country homes (these are larger homes with exceptional design quality that showcase the highest standards in architecture and significantly enhance their setting). Other examples are homes for specialist needs such as bungalows or adapted homes to meet medical needs including accommodation for a live-in carer.

Open countryside would also mean that Cressage would have NO development boundary, so these housing types could be built around the fringes of the village or anywhere within the Parish. Open countryside would also mean that NO open market housing would be built in Cressage and so, it is unlikely that The Eagles site could be redeveloped and the buildings would continue to deteriorate and adversely affect the character of the village. The formal listing of The Eagles building has now prioritised the restoration of the site but made the possibility of lower value affordable or cross subsidy housing or community uses very unlikely options for the landowner.

One positive aspect of being a Hub is that there will be a tight development boundary. This means that open market housing development can only take place within the development boundary. This will also provide affordable homes at the proposed level of 20% across the south of the County.

The Parish Plan has carried weight with the Planning Policy Team who tailored the Local Plan proposals around these local aspirations. This is likely to be an important consideration for the Planning Inspector when this person examines the refresh of the Local Plan in 2021.”

Question & Answer Session (questions/comments in italic, followed by answer in normal typeface)

- The Eagles listed building cannot be demolished but this does not preclude the development of the site. The developer has a duty of care re the listed building which should help renovate the site. Why would hub status preclude affordable housing there?*

Cllr. Wild said the developer purchased site for profit, affordable housing is subsidised so there has to be enough profit in the site to renovate the building and build affordable housing, doubtful that figures will stack up. Conversion costs higher as the building is listed. She felt open market housing would be more viable.
- If remain Open Countryside could have 100% affordable housing on The Glebe. A lot of people were onboard with affordable housing so Open Countryside not a bad thing if ensures for affordability.*

Cllr. Wild acknowledged the benefits of this.
- The council and Cllr. Wild were thanked for the detailed explanation and the point re threshold test for hubs is understood. Respects use of Parish Plan but countered this with feeling that petition organised by residents shows 300 people against it.*
- Hub scoring system incorrect and detailed analysis of it exemplifies errors within it e.g. in relation to the church, similar points for static vs mobile library points and for pharmacy vs dispensary which are different services.*

Cllr. Wild expressed some sympathy re the threshold test method applied. The Local Plan Inspector should review this and has to assess if LP is sound.
- Can the Inspector fail to pass the new LP if the points threshold is inadequate?*

Cllr. Wild explained the Inspector will examine the LP and may give an opportunity to remedy some issues or will find the plan sound or unsound. Being found unsound is bad news as it could mean no 5 year land supply.
- Prior to last PC meeting a survey was done but felt parishioners views not taken account of?*

Cllr. Lawrence explained that of the 70 responses returned out of circa 550 questionnaires sent, most of the 70 were not in favour with the Local Plan.
- Sites – Raby details published but no public plan for Glebe field since 2015 Savills plans for 16 houses. Are there any other plans?*

Cllr. Wild had asked SC Planning Policy team and they have asked the site promoters to forward plans to the parish council. Claire said the council look for sites that are “oven ready” and do a number of tests to assess this. Raby plans came in later in the day so not fully evaluated by SC and not all tests carried out. No plans been put forward since 2015. Cllr. Todd didn’t recall the 2015 plans showing the vicarage being demolished as the houses wrapped around it.
- If we do end up Open Countryside, what does sustainable mean in the context of if applications will be allowed if no 5 year land supply?*

Cllr. Wild highlighted the hierarchy of settlements policy – starting point for assessing sustainability.
- 5 year land supply – feels was spun negatively as each development judged individually. Feels this is actually a positive as residents get a say each time. Eagles – why are we allowing it to become rundown. The site should be protected for a community site.*
- The Glebe - site is dangerous on that hill and even with traffic calming would be dangerous, including access to Wood Lane down on a slope. Drainage issues and compaction of the land including on Wood lane, area of nature interest. Need more facilities for people in the village.*

- *Post Office wasn't suitable in village hall long term and footfall fell over time. Questionnaires – 10 to 15% often lucky to get that response. Criticising making assumption based on non-respondents.*
- *Eagles could be a community facility*
- *Is community hub status based on silent majority? And are we in the dark re plans for The Glebe?*
Cllr. Lawrence explained the council were acting in interests of the community. Arrived at decisions after deliberation. Cllr. Todd explained that re The Glebe the site has had development potential for last 30 to 40 years, the Savills plans were from 5 years ago.
- *A non-parishioner asked if the parish council are going to have a vote at the end of this meeting to to affirm its view?*
The chair explained this not a PC meeting but the outcome of any vote can be considered at the next PC meeting agenda.
- *A non-parishioner said that SC opted for a higher level of housing as SC policy is to go for high level of housing. It was his understanding that Local Plans don't always run for 20 years and may refresh every 3 to 5 years. If have Open Countryside, may be houses of diff types. He read out a quote from Berrington Parish Pump from an article by Cllr Wild Claire re 5-year land supply and said there is now a 7 year land supply. He noted that development has to be within the proposed boundary and if there is no boundary can't have development anywhere but there may be some small-scale development*
- *A member of the public asked the non-parishioner why he is so interested when a non-parishioner? The non-parishioner replied that he has lived in Cross Houses for 14 years and looked into planning over a number of years and issues it has caused. Concerned re lack of local involvement and engagement and helping people to avoid issues they may encounter. Wants communities to have a proper say and get correct infrastructure. Two members of the public welcomed the presence of the non-parishioner at the meeting.*
- *Has enough thought been given to infrastructure capacity – school up to capacity, 98 pupils, class in portacabin and doctors very busy. Level of traffic already very busy and traffic needs calming near narrow pavements. As a result People drive children to school as dangerous.*

Vote

It was proposed and seconded that it is the wish of this meeting that Cressage remain as Open Countryside. The chair sought votes and the motion was passed with the votes being as follows:

- Abstain 6
- In favour of the motion 19
- Against motion 1

The chair thanked all for attending and the meeting closed at 8.36pm