

Bredenbury Group Parish Council

I suspect that if I were to have started this month's update with the second sentence many of you would have decided not to read on – but I encourage you to do so as the issues below will have an impact on all of us.

In the last 2 months, the government has published two far reaching documents. The first is the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the second is a white paper entitled English Devolution. Both of these documents are designed to support the decision to build 1.5 million new houses nationally. In Herefordshire, the housing target has risen from just over 16,000 to more than 27,000. In order to achieve this target, the government wants to make significant changes to planning law. Buried in the revised NPPF is a statement that argues that Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) will only carry what is known as material weight if they are less than 5 years old. In other words, if they are more than 5 years old they can be ignored.

Previously, I shared that Bredenbury Group PC envisaged updating our NDP, which passed referendum in May 2021, to coincide with the implementation of the new Herefordshire Local Plan 2021-2041. This was because we need to make sure that our policies fit within the framework of that Local Plan. If the new Local Plan were to be implemented in 2026 that would have worked out very nicely. But the new housing targets have thrown the current draft Local Plan under the proverbial bus. So, we do not believe we can afford to wait while the County sorts out these problems which would leave us vulnerable as our NDP would be greater than 5 years old leaving our group of parishes open to speculative development.

As a result, we have decided to consult our specialist advisor, who helped us through the initial process, so that we can start preparing a revised and updated version of our NDP. Of course, we will arrange public meetings as we did previously so that everyone has chance to contribute, to review and to comment on the updated plan. Also, it will not be necessary to cover much of the groundwork which was needed for our original plan, as this is still fit for purpose, so our task should be simpler. But we can review and update our original policies as needed. We will also be asking did we miss anything first time round?

One key aspect of this will be to reconvene a Steering Group. For a successful NDP, we need to be sure that the Steering Group is a true reflection of the entire community. So, we will be looking for volunteers. If you would like to be part of this please can you contact our Parish Clerk, Vicky Hancock in the first instance clerk@bredenburygroup-pc.gov.uk . I know I can speak for everyone who took part last time that it was an enjoyable and worthwhile experience.

Next, the English Devolution white paper which sets out a radical overhaul of local government in England. The headlines are that the government plans to set up regional authorities headed by elected Mayors. However, the paper also states that the population of these new authorities will be 500,000. As Herefordshire currently has a population of less than 200,000 the rumour mill is already in overdrive! Will Herefordshire be forced to join Worcester or Gloucester or Shropshire or any combination thereof? In fairness, the white paper does say that there will be exceptional cases but I doubt that there will be many.

Beneath that the document does contain some interesting proposals which would have a local impact. The old Community Right to Bid will become a Community Right to Buy and there would be grants available to support the purchase of Community Assets. It is not clear how much or under what conditions but we will certainly be following these proposals closely

As always - *Our Place, Our Future!*

John Hulse – Chairman, Bredenbury Group Parish Council