

# WREXHAM COUNTY BOROUGH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006-2021



## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS

### Introduction

The Local Development Plan will be one of the Council's four key policy documents (the others being the Community Strategy; the Health and Well Being Strategy; and the Children and Young People's Strategy). The Development Plan allocates land for various purposes and also contains the policies which the Council apply when considering applications for planning permission. It seeks to balance the need for future development against the equally important need to conserve the environment. It will replace the Council's current Unitary Development Plan when this expires in 2011.

### The Consultation Process

In the past, local authorities have prepared their development plans in draft form and invited comments and suggestions on possible changes. The drafts were usually modified a number of times and this lengthy process culminated in a public enquiry before a final version was agreed. The Welsh Assembly Government has now introduced a new system of plan preparation based on a significant increase in the amount of early public consultation. As a result, opportunities to influence the content of the Plan at the later stages will be much reduced. It is therefore essential that anyone wishing to contribute to the Plan does so as soon as possible.

The community consultation workshops form part of an extensive programme of engagement with interested parties. **The aim is to establish a preferred planning strategy** that will define the amount and broad location of future development. The strategy will then form the basis for considering more detailed land allocations, development proposals and environmental safeguarding policies. Work on these more detailed aspects has recently commenced and suggestions for possible development sites have been invited. These suggestions (together with all the other land use requirements that need to be built into the Plan) will then be assessed according to the extent to which they comply with the preferred strategy.

### The Timetable

The Plan is being prepared according to a timetable agreed with the Welsh Assembly Government. The preferred strategy must be established by the middle of this year when it will be issued for wider public consultation. A draft of the entire plan (known as the "public deposit" version) should be published in January 2009 and submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government later that year. The final plan is likely to be adopted towards the end of 2010 after a public examination by an Inspector appointed by the Assembly.

### The Workshops

The Workshops are being managed by Cass Associates who will guide and assist participants through the discussions. The aim is for the workshops to take an independent approach free of any preconceived ideas. The Council has, however, identified some key issues for the Plan to address and has set out some alternative strategic options. These are summarised in the attached notes. Participants at the workshops are invited to consider these options and also to put forward their own suggestions.

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## KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES AND OPTIONS

**Note** : The Council's reports "*Developing the Vision : Key Issues and Strategy Options November 2006*" and "*Sustainability Appraisal : Assessing Alternatives and Options December 2006*" contain more detailed background information. The reports are available in paper or compact disc form and will also be placed on the Council's website.

### ISSUES

The Local Development Plan will need to address a number of issues. These include:-

#### **Social**

- High levels of economic and social deprivation in some areas
- Health problems related to the industrial past
- Rapidly increasing house prices

#### **Economic**

- A need to enhance the skills of the workforce
- Improving access to job opportunities
- Recognising the oversupply of employment land
- Integrating development with improved public transport

#### **Environmental**

- The need to protect and enhance the environment
- Coping with climate change
- Safeguarding biodiversity
- Protecting flood risk areas
- Promoting waste recycling
- Dealing with contaminated land
- Safeguarding water quality

#### **Development Incentives**

- New development can help provide jobs, improve the environment and contribute to social improvements
- The County Borough continues to be an attractive area in which to invest
- Recent regeneration has successfully improved the environment
- Community initiatives have reduced levels of social deprivation
- There are reasonably good regional transport links
- A range of housing is still available
- There is a strong higher education sector and a major regional hospital
- Shopping facilities have been significantly improved

#### **Development Constraints**

- Wrexham Town. Surrounded by high quality agricultural land; valuable sand and gravel deposits to the north and east; attractive historic parkland to the south and east; limits on highway capacity; community services under pressure
- The Western Villages (from Llay through Brymbo, Gwersyllt and Coedpoeth to Rhos, Ruabon and Cefn). Steep slopes and special landscape areas adjoining the built-up areas; green barriers preventing villages from merging; adjacent to high quality agricultural land; highway capacity constraints in some villages; community services under pressure; below average demand for private housing
- Rural Villages (from Rossett and Holt through to the Maelor and Ceiriog Valley). Surrounded by high quality agricultural land, green barriers and special landscape areas; limited opportunities for new housing; flooding risks in low lying areas; deficient infrastructure and community services

## VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The Council intend to ensure that that “**the County Borough is a sustainable place to live, work and play**”. With this vision in mind, the Plan will need to address the following objectives:-

### Social

- Improving the transport system in a sustainable and integrated way
- Improving accessibility and reducing the need to rely on the car
- Ensuring developments contain a mix of uses and house types

### Economic

- Maintaining business growth and generating high quality employment
- Providing sites to meet educational and training needs
- Developing Wrexham Town Centre as the major retail, employment and leisure location
- Ensuring an adequate supply of land for future development

### Environmental

- Establishing a settlement pattern that minimises greenhouse gases and enhances biodiversity
- Recognising that entirely new settlements are unlikely to be justified
- Focussing development in the most sustainable locations
- Safeguarding areas vulnerable to flooding
- Making prudent use of natural resources
- Identifying locations suitable for waste management
- Providing energy efficient homes at the highest density appropriate to local areas
- Promoting well-designed buildings
- Conserving and enhancing the built and natural environment

## SUGGESTED STRATEGIC GROWTH OPTIONS

### Housing Need

Population growth generates extra households and demand for new homes. The County Borough's population is currently about 129,300, an increase of 3.5% over the last decade. The Local Development Plan will need to consider the housing implications of accommodating a range of possible population options. For example:-

**Option H1** This assumes that population growth will follow the trend set by migration into the County Borough over the last five years. The population would rise by 11,200 leading to a requirement for 9200 new homes (613 per year).

**Option H2** This assumes that population growth will follow the trend set by migration into the County Borough over the last ten years. The population would rise by 5,800 leading to a requirement for 7,200 new homes (480 per year).

**Option H3** This assumes that population growth would follow a long term migration trend rising by 5,200. This would lead to a requirement for 6,700 new homes (447 per year)

**Option H4** This is based on a continuation of the rate of housing completions over the last five years. The population would rise by 4,100 leading to a requirement for 6,300 new homes (420 per year).

**Option H5** This assumes a static population. There would be no population increase but there would still be a requirement for about 4,500 new homes to accommodate changes in household composition (300 per year).

**Option H6** This is based on natural change within the existing population which would decline by about 200. However, in order to accommodate changes in household composition, there would still be a requirement for around 4,200 additional dwellings (253 per year).

The Plan will need to decide which, if any, of the above options would be most appropriate. Other options could be considered.

## Employment Land

There is currently around 237 hectares of employment land available for development in the County Borough. Take-up of land has averaged around 7 hectares a year since 1996 leaving a current supply of over 30 years. There is little need in overall terms to allocate more employment land. However, it is debatable whether the current supply is of the right quality and in the right location to meet future needs. It is therefore likely that some existing employment land could be put to an alternative use although its loss might have to be offset by providing better quality sites in new locations. Some possible options to consider are:-

**Option E1** Continue the Council's current policy of ensuring that 20 hectares of land per year are available for employment purposes. This would require about 63 additional hectares of new employment land to be identified.

**Option E2** Provide land solely to meet the take-up rate of the last decade. This would only require 105 hectares, potentially leaving around 132 hectares of the current supply surplus to requirements.

**Option E3** Continue to provide sufficient land to meet the take-up rates of the 1980s. This would ensure that the County Borough could accommodate any employment land needs that might come forward over the Plan period. However, this option would need another 123 hectares to be identified.

## WHERE SHOULD GROWTH GO?

The future strategy for new development could be based on one of a number of locational options. For the purposes of the initial round of community consultation, five broad possibilities have been put forward for comment. However, the eventual strategy could be a combination of those suggested or might be a new option arising directly from the consultation process. The current suggestions are:-

**Option A : Wrexham Focussed.** This would concentrate most new development in or adjacent to the town of Wrexham.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Makes the best use of existing education, health, social and retail facilities	High market demand for housing in Wrexham would quickly use up any allocated sites
Has a high potential for employment generation	Partial loss of green barriers and special landscape areas on the edge of town
Opportunities for mixed-use developments (housing, shopping, employment, leisure etc)	Minimal investment in other settlements
More potential for developers to contribute towards funding of needed public facilities	Significant greenfield development and some loss of agricultural land
Best links to public transport	Substantial new housing could encourage commuting with increase in car travel
Popular with developers	No real benefit to deprived communities
No threats to protected sites	

**Option B : Dispersal.** This would spread new growth around small or medium sized sites throughout the County Borough.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Enables settlements to grow organically with new development having no overwhelming impact	More difficult to achieve mixed-use developments containing a full range of supporting services and facilities
Meets local housing needs and supports community facilities	Spread of development puts extra pressure on public and private finances
Variety of development meets needs of different market sectors	Few opportunities for significant developer contributions to funding new or improved services.
Spreading development could reduce the effects of losing greenfield land	Some settlements not well served by public transport
	Loss of green barriers

**Option C : Regeneration Focussed.** This strategy would direct growth to areas most in need of social, economic and environmental regeneration.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Concentrates development in areas of most need	Limited development potential due to difficult topography and poor infrastructure
Enhances range and quality of local services	Major site constraints (ground contamination, inadequate access, etc)
Potential for significant environmental improvement	Higher development costs
Uses brownfield land and minimises loss of greenfield sites	Only limited development in rural settlements
New job opportunities nearer to home reducing need to commute	Some loss of green barrier land on the edge of regeneration settlements

**Option D : Rail Transport Focussed.** New growth would primarily take place in those settlements served by rail. Growth elsewhere would generally be limited to existing commitments or rounding-off built up areas.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Concentrates development in sustainable locations served by both rail and road transport	Some need for greenfield sites
Emphasis on regeneration while not overburdening existing facilities	Development along A483 could exacerbate congestion at peak times
Recognises development needs in the south of the County Borough	Limited capacity on rail network to accommodate increased usage
Would provide significant opportunities for developers to contribute towards funding improvements to community facilities	Could encourage more commuting beyond the County Borough boundaries
	Minimal development in other settlements even though these might have benefited from further investment

**Option E : Employment Centre Clusters.** This option would direct growth to those areas containing or adjoining key employment centres.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Reduces length of journeys to work traffic congestion, emissions and air pollution	New growth adjacent to some settlements might still require greenfield land.
Development takes place in sustainable locations	Some settlements do not have an adequate range of community facilities
Enables surplus employment land to be used for other purposes	It is uncertain whether existing employment clusters will be attractive to new investment in future
Potential for providing new community facilities as part of new development	

### Your Comments

Following your discussions at the workshops, the Council would appreciate hearing your own views on the matters which the Local Development Plan needs to address. In particular:-

1. Is the Council's planning vision the right one for the County Borough?
2. Have all the main issues been identified?
3. Are the objectives realistic?
4. Which is the preferred growth option?
5. Where should development broadly be directed?

A questionnaire has been prepared based on the contents of these notes and a pre-paid envelope is enclosed for you to send in your response. A reply by 16 February 2007 would be much appreciated.