

South Warwickshire Local Plan – Issues and Options Consultation

Response from Bishop’s Tachbrook Parish Council

At a meeting on Thursday 9th March 2023 members of Bishop’s Tachbrook Parish Council considered aspects of the Issues and Options consultation, this paper summarises their response.

The council had already decided that, due to the complex nature of the consultation they would concentrate on 3 key areas:

1. The projected need as defined in the HEDNA.
2. How the parish of Bishop’s Tachbrook was being described in the consultation document and supporting evidence.
3. The five options for growth.

The projected need as defined by the HEDNA

The HEDNA proposes that we move away from an approach where future needs are based on 2014 household projections towards a trend-based approach. The council’s view is that there is no way anyone can say whether this is reasonable or not, since all methods are based on educated guesswork. The concept of being able to accurately predict the need in 2050 is doubtful. 5-year reviews of what is actually happening in the plan area will be critical.

The fact that the projections place an even higher development burden on South Warwickshire than the 2014 figures is a cause for concern. We are not sure that the numbers involved, in terms of both employment land and housing, are actually sustainable. The burden could prove to be too high both for the countryside, the environment and our infrastructure. In addition, to cope with the projected growth there is bound to be an impact on the Green Belt. Whilst we think that Greenbelt allocation needs challenging and changing, if guidelines on building on Greenbelt land stay the same, or get stricter, a lot of options are blocked. If this were the case, we very much doubt the ability of the remaining countryside to deal with the projected growth in a sustainable way.

Issues for the Parish of Bishop’s Tachbrook

- The fact that the village of Bishop’s Tachbrook and the new estates around Harbury Lane are divorced from one another throughout the consultation document make it difficult to envisage the overall impact on the parish that we as councillors are responsible for. It also doesn’t really highlight the huge changes that have taken place across BT parish. Whilst we acknowledge that new housing has been positive for the parish, and we welcome new residents. However, the quadrupling of the population of the parish has threatened the rural identity of the village. Some of the sites offered in the ‘call for sites’ would dramatically cut the space between the village and South Leamington increasing the feelings, already prevalent amongst villagers, that the village is losing its rural identity. When allocating sites in the next stage of the plan this needs to be taken into account.
- Referring to the above, it is great concern that none of the maps and diagrams we have looked at, contain the Country Park or Oakley Grove school. To not show them could lead to bad decision making. As an example of what this could lead to, we refer you to the Arup urban capacity map for the area. This shows the old Seven Trent waterworks site as not suitable for development when, under the WLP to 2029, part is already allocated for housing (the planning application is expected soon) and part is in the Country Park.

- In the consultation document the village settlement of Bishop's Tachbrook is referred to as a small town/large village. In other supporting documents it is referred to as a small settlement. We certainly do not see ourselves as a small town and the implication that this means we could have 50-500 extra houses on top of the 200 that have been built under the WLP to 2029, fills us with trepidation. Even the lower figure of 50 houses would mean another village changing development. We think we ought to be reclassified to village status i.e. a small settlement.

The five options for growth

The extent of growth shown on each of the 5 option maps is immense. Trying to fit all that development land and housing in is, as the consultation document admits, a difficult job!

The council has agreed that the key driver for choosing options is the minimise the impact on the environment. To this end creating the conditions where walking/cycling to work or taking public transport has to be prioritised. The climate emergency is real so options that are the most sustainable must be given priority.

Option 1 – Rail Corridors

The council think this is an appropriate strategy to use. It is probably the best option in terms of limiting the negative impacts of the proposed growth. However, the downside is the impact on the Greenbelt. The council is worried that, in none of the documents they have seen, is there any indication of Government's attitude to development of this scale on Greenbelt land. Is this really an option or just a wish? Having said that the council's view is that this is the best option to use.

Option 2 – Sustainable travel

The council are neutral on this option. We are not sure that the current provision of bus services is fit for use at present, let alone with such growth. In our Housing Needs Survey of March 2023 lack of effective bus services was one of the most common complaints of residents. Basing a decision on the effectiveness of bus companies seems fraught with danger.

Option 3 – Economy

The council think this could be an appropriate strategy. We acknowledge the potential benefits outlined in the consultation document however we are unsure of the basis for believing new business will be attracted to the suggested sights. The danger of the option is that you get housing development without the jobs that make the sites sustainable. For instance the 3,000+ homes built south of Harbury Lane and at the ASPs, both of which are in our parish, have not been associated with new local employment opportunities. This has led to an increase in traffic and its associated problems. The idea, as shown, of new employment land close to this housing would be welcome whereas more homes would not.

Option 4 – Sustainable travel and economy

The council thinks this could be an appropriate strategy and acknowledge the benefits of this hybrid approach. Our comments on bus travel under option 2 equally apply to this option as do the potential benefits outlined under option 3 on the economy. We are again worried by the feasibility of using a lot of Greenbelt land.

Option 5 – Dispersed

The council does not think this is an appropriate strategy. Although it ducks some difficult issues it seems like it is just spreading the pain of development far and wide.