

Consultation Response – Garry Nicholson (CPRE Shropshire) - Organisation

Question 1: Which Main Modification does this comment relate to?

MM006

Question 2: Do you consider that this Main Modification is:

Legally Compliant

Question 3: Please give details of why you consider this Main Modification is not legally compliant and/or unsound. Please be as precise as possible.

This Main Modification fails the tests of being Justified and Consistent with National Policy. The revised strategy fails to protect the borough's Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land, thereby directly undermining national food supply security. By increasing the housing target to 20,680 homes and extending the plan period to 2041, the modifications codify a disproportionate reliance on large-scale greenfield allocations—most notably the Sustainable Communities at Bratton (SC1), Muxton (SC2), and Wappenshall (SC3). This approach is unsound due to the following critical flaws:

- Inconsistency with NPPF Paragraph 187(b):** The National Planning Policy Framework explicitly mandates that local planning authorities must recognise the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land (Grates 1, 2, and 3a). The modifications allocate extensive tracts of prime Shropshire farmland for development without demonstrating that lower-quality land or available brownfield alternatives have been fully exhausted. The plan treats food-producing soil as an easily traded commodity rather than a finite national asset.
- Failure to Align with the National Land Use Framework:** The modifications fail to reflect the strategic shift introduced by the government's Land Use Framework for England. This framework requires local plans to actively balance housing targets against domestic food security and climate-driven agricultural resilience. Paving over highly productive soils in a major agricultural region directly contradicts this national directive.
- Absence of Stringent Local Protection Policy:** The wording within the modified policies (including Policy EC3) remains weak and permissive. It fails to provide an explicit, robust veto against the loss of BMV land. Instead, it allows developers to override food security considerations by simply prioritising housing quotas, a flaw highlighted by recent local planning decisions where hectares of productive land were permanently lost under the guise of meeting growth targets.
- Flawed Regional Cooperation:** Under the Duty to Cooperate, Telford and Wrekin has absorbed unmet housing needs from neighbouring West Midlands authorities. However, this cross-border coordination has focused purely on housing numbers, entirely failing to address the cumulative, devastating impact that regional farmland fragmentation will have on domestic supply chains, food miles, and agricultural infrastructure.

Question 4: Please set out what change(s) you consider necessary to make the main modification legally compliant and/or sound, having regard to the test you have identified above where this relates to soundness.

To remedy these flaws and make the Local Plan Review sound, the following changes should be directed by the Inspector:

- Mandate a Sequential Land Test:** Insert a strict policy requirement enforcing a brownfield and lower-grade land first sequential approach specifically for BMV agricultural land.
- Strengthen Policy EC3:** Amend the policy text to state that development resulting in the loss of Grade 1, 2, or 3a agricultural land will be refused unless exceptional circumstances and a lack of alternative regional capacity can be robustly proven.
- Review Strategic Allocations:** Re-evaluate and reduce the physical boundaries of the Sustainable

Communities allocations at Bratton (SC1), Muxton (SC2), and Wappenshall (SC3) to fully exclude and safeguard active, high-yield food-producing fields.

NEW RESPONSE

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MM007

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MM064

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While the Affordable Housing Topic Paper claims to prioritise social rent, the overarching modifications must defer to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Mismatch: National guidelines place a heavy emphasis on affordable home ownership models (such as Shared Ownership or First Homes). The Failure: By aligning with national frameworks to ensure soundness, the modifications fail to secure a strict, high percentage of social rented housing—which is the specific tenure type most desperately needed by lower-income residents in Telford.

NEW RESPONSE

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MM074

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None of the above

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The most direct flaw introduced in the modifications is the active lowering of affordable housing targets in specific locations. The Cut: Following the examination hearings, Planning Inspectors recommended cutting the required affordable housing target for new developments in a key town from 25% down to 20%. The Failure: This modification directly reduces the net number of affordable homes developers are legally obligated to build, failing to maximise delivery in areas experiencing acute housing stress.

Question 4: Please set out what change(s) you consider necessary to make the main modification legally compliant and/or sound, having regard to the test you have identified above where this relates to soundness.

Restore the required affordable housing target to 25%.

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The modifications retain and potentially exacerbate a reliance on viability assessments. The Loophole: If developers argue that local infrastructure costs (like the borough's high brownfield remediation costs or the updated 20% biodiversity net gain target) threaten their profits, they can legally negotiate their affordable housing obligations downwards. The Failure: By layering complex, competing demands onto developers without strict ring-fencing for housing, the plan allows affordable home quotas to become the "flexible variable" that gets cut first. The plan's policies (such as Policy HO4 Policy HO5) accommodate off-site cash contributions in place of physical, on-site affordable homes. The Loophole: Developers are permitted to pay a minimum 10% cash-in-lieu contribution if they can claim on-site delivery is "not feasible or practical". The Failure: This allows developers to construct exclusively high-value, market-rate homes on premium sites, pushing affordable housing delivery to cheaper, less sustainable outskirts and delaying construction timelines.

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MM067

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The strategy relies on delivering three massive new sustainable communities to fulfil its increased 20,680-home target up to 2041. The Risk: Historically in Telford, large strategic sites suffer from severe delivery delays due to initial infrastructure lag (roads, utilities, schools). The Failure: Because affordable housing is tied directly to the build-out rate of market housing, back-loading delivery onto massive long-term developments means affordable units will not materialise fast enough to address the current housing emergency. This Main Modification fails the tests of being Justified and Consistent with National Policy. The revised strategy fails to protect the borough's Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land, thereby directly undermining national food supply security. By increasing the housing target to 20,680 homes and extending the plan period to 2041, the modifications codify a disproportionate reliance on large-scale greenfield allocations—most notably the Sustainable Communities at Bratton (SC1), Muxton (SC2), and Wappenshall (SC3). This approach is unsound due to the following critical flaws: Inconsistency with NPPF Paragraph 187(b): The National Planning Policy Framework explicitly mandates that local planning authorities must recognise the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land (Grates 1, 2, and 3a). The modifications allocate extensive tracts of prime Shropshire farmland for development without demonstrating that lower-quality land or available brownfield alternatives have been fully exhausted. The plan treats food-producing soil as an easily traded commodity rather than a finite national asset. Failure to Align with the National Land Use Framework: The modifications fail to reflect the strategic shift introduced by the government's Land Use Framework for England. This framework requires local plans to actively balance housing targets against domestic food security and climate-driven agricultural resilience. Paving over highly productive soils in a major agricultural region directly contradicts this national directive. Absence of Stringent Local Protection Policy: The wording within the modified policies (including Policy EC3) remains weak and permissive. It fails to provide an explicit, robust veto against the loss of BMV land. Instead, it allows developers to override food security considerations by simply prioritising housing quotas, a flaw highlighted by recent local planning decisions where hectares of productive land were permanently lost under the guise of meeting growth targets. Flawed Regional Cooperation:

Under the Duty to Cooperate, Telford and Wrekin has absorbed unmet housing needs from neighbouring West Midlands authorities. However, this cross-border coordination has focused purely on housing numbers, entirely failing to address the cumulative, devastating impact that regional farmland fragmentation will have on domestic supply chains, food miles, and agricultural infrastructure.

Question 4: Please set out what change(s) you consider necessary to make the main modification legally compliant and/or sound, having regard to the test you have identified above where this relates to soundness.

Reduce the unsustainable and unnecessarily high housing target. Mandate a Sequential Land Test: Insert a strict policy requirement enforcing a brownfield and lower-grade land first sequential approach specifically for BMV agricultural land. Strengthen Policy EC3: Amend the policy text to state that development resulting in the loss of Grade 1, 2, or 3a agricultural land will be refused unless exceptional circumstances and a lack of alternative regional capacity can be robustly proven. Review Strategic Allocations: Re-evaluate and reduce the physical boundaries of the Sustainable Communities allocations at Bratton (SC1), Muxton (SC2), and Wappenshall (SC3) to fully exclude and safeguard active, high-yield food-producing fields.

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