

2400 New Houses Proposed For Rural Areas of Tewkesbury Borough

In recent issues of West of Severn News there have been articles reporting on the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) for housing development in areas around Tewkesbury, Gloucester and Cheltenham. During the current phase of consultation, Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC) has been holding seminars primarily to brief Parish Councils on the JCS and solicit initial comments from them. Individuals have also had the opportunity to present their views in various ways including through the JCS web site.

The consultation period was set at mid December 2011 to 11th Feb 2012 which has provided very little time for any of us to absorb this complex proposal and respond in an informed way. Nonetheless, Ashleworth Parish Council (APC) has taken the view that a response is appropriate and has produced this note both to alert you to the potential implications of the JCS for Ashleworth and to let you know how APC will respond.

What is the Joint Core Strategy?

In summary, the JCS is being prepared by Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Councils to set out a plan for new housing and job creation in the area covered by the three councils through to 2031. The strategy is expected to be in place in 2014. Currently the three councils are consulting on which of four scenarios to pursue – ranging from 16,200 to 40,500 houses in total. In what we understand to be the favoured scenario the rural parishes of Tewkesbury Borough would provide 2,400 new homes beyond those for which planning has already been granted. Total new houses for all three councils would be in the region of 33,000-40,500 over the 20-year period. Further information can be found in the accompanying leaflet and full details can be found online at the JCS web site – www.gct-jcs.org.

How might the Joint Core Strategy affect Ashleworth?

At present, planning policy for Ashleworth specifies “infilling only” with no development outside the village envelope (a policy known as HOU3). In the JCS, Ashleworth has now been grouped with Winchcombe and Bishops Cleeve amongst other settlements for planning purposes (for full details see the document “Developing the preferred option’ consultation document” in the Public Consultation section of the JCS web site). Although we do not yet have a clear indication of any new planning policies under the JCS, grouping Ashleworth with much larger settlements that have already had their boundaries broadened might suggest that future planning for Ashleworth would permit significant developments outside the village envelope, particularly as TBC may not achieve the planned rural housing quota on infilling alone.

Ashleworth Parish Council’s response

APC feels it important to provide immediate feedback on the proposal as it stands. As TBC’s consultation proceeds over the coming months APC will have the opportunity to provide further feedback and this will incorporate any new information that we obtain from local consultation.

APC's initial comments to TBC will be based on the most recent consultations with the community, namely the Parish Plan (2005) and the Affordable Homes Survey (2009). The Ashleworth Parish Plan contains a number of guiding principles for new housing including maintenance of the present nature of the village by limiting the number of new buildings which should, in any case, be designed in sympathy and scale with the character of the village. In addition, preference should be given to any future development that provides housing for first time buyers or older people. The Affordable Housing survey identifies a potential need for around six new affordable homes.

Accordingly, APC's response to the current proposals will be based on 4 points:

1. Ashleworth should not be grouped for planning purposes with towns like Bishops Cleeve and Winchcombe which, according to the JCS, are characterised by:

"These settlements provide important local facilities reducing the need to travel to the principal locations of Cheltenham or Gloucester, this is particularly important for access to shops, schools or health care which are needed on a regular basis."

More appropriate to Ashleworth is the group which includes villages such as Apperley and Stoke Orchard and characterised in the JCS by:

*"These settlements contain services and facilities but on a **reduced** level when compared with the larger settlements. They primarily serve the needs of local residents and visitors but may serve a wider rural area to a more limited extent."*

2. New housing in Ashleworth should follow the current infilling principle and no significant developments be permitted on green field sites outside the village envelope.

3. We encourage modest developments which include housing within budget for first time buyers and/or suitable for retired people looking to downsize from other properties in the locality.

4. The initial APC response is based on best available information and not on a new consultation. A response based on a consultation with Ashleworth residents will be submitted in the coming months.

Next steps

As the situation becomes clearer APC will consult further with the community – probably in the form of a public meeting which will not only provide for discussion of the JCS and the emerging Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan but also introduce the idea of producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Ashleworth.

Meanwhile, any individual can submit their own comments on the JCS – either through the JCS web site or directly to Tewkesbury Borough Council. If you would like to express your views to Ashleworth Parish Council please email ashleworthpc@gmail.com or leave written comments at the Post Office in an envelope addressed to "Ashleworth Parish Council".