

Report for Discussion

Report Author: Bob Young

Subject: Community Clusters: The Case for a Nash Proposal

Summary:

- This issues paper takes forward the discussion surrounding the ongoing Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan review at the January meeting of the Parish Council, with particular reference to the potential for development within the civil parish area and the possibility of designating one or more Community Clusters unilaterally or in concert with one or more neighbouring Parish Councils.
- Shropshire Council's policy framework and recent history is summarised together with specific officer guidance received and local settlement morphology and context is reviewed to establish a basis for consideration.
- Feedback from Parish Councils with existing Community Clusters in the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan area is reviewed and some conclusions drawn to inform consideration of the potential in the Nash PC area.
- Drawing on the policy guidance and feedback a possible way forward is offered if the Parish Council is minded to pursue a Community Cluster designation.

Key Recommendations:

- 1) That the Parish Council agrees in principle to examine the potential to promote one or more Community Clusters within the Nash Civil Parish boundaries recognising the need to:
 - a) carry out a Local Housing Needs Assessment;
 - b) prepare a Parish Plan; and
 - c) secure local community support;to underpin any Community Cluster proposals the Parish Council may wish to bring forward.
- 2) That the Parish Council identifies a budget for the purposes of carrying out a Local Housing Needs Assessment; preparing a Parish Plan and undertaking the community consultation required to both inform and validate these activities and the subsequent outcomes and proposals attaching thereto.
- 3) That prior to commencing the activities defined in recommendation 2 above, the Parish Council enters into discussions with neighbouring Parish Councils with a view to jointly undertaking a Local Housing Needs Assessment and Parish Planning exercise in collaboration with Hope Bagot PC, Coreley PC and Caynham PC in connection with Knowle.
- 4) That more generally in connection with the development of a Parish Plan, the Parish Council consults more widely with Milson & Neen Sollars PC; Boraston PC; Greete PC; Whitton PC and Burford PC.
- 5) That Shropshire Council is advised of these decisions.

Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Review of the Shropshire Council Place Plan was discussed at the 24th January meeting of the Nash Parish Council and Minute 5 of the draft Minutes refers as follows:–

“Council discussed at length the draft proposal document circulated by Shropshire Council.

Unitary Cllr Richard Huffer said a site was identified at Knowle which the landowner would have put forward as a prospective site for development but otherwise Nash was identified as open Countryside, Shropshire Council had to take into account the facilities available when considering development such as schools, Doctors ,transport etc.

The Chairman stated that it was very important to seek the views of Nash residents and that council needed to ensure this was done. He suggested that this should be done at the May Parish meeting.

Bob Young proposed that he was willing to produce an Issues Paper looking at the pros & cons of any potential development and whether Nash should become part of Cluster and if so with which local parish, this was seconded by L. Roberts and carried unanimously.

Bob Young would produce this and circulate for council to consider at the March Meeting and he was given the council map of the area to assist with the task. The Clerk would submit a response to the consultation before the 8th Feb deadline stating that Nash PC was seeking public views and would formulate an official response when this process was complete”.

1.2 The response to the consultation referred to above was submitted to Shropshire Council in the following terms: “Nash PC is currently seeking public views and will submit an official response once this process is complete”.

1.3 Liam Cowden MRTPI, Principal Policy Officer with Shropshire Council Planning Department provided the following guidance to assist the Parish Council in its consideration of the potential for one or more Community Clusters:

- 1.3.1 *A Cluster can include a single settlement or a group of two or more settlements*
- 1.3.2 *A cluster must be designated by the Parish Council that administers the settlements included in the Cluster.*
- 1.3.3 *All the settlements in the Cluster must be located within the civil parish boundary of the Parish Council suggesting the Cluster.*
- 1.3.4 *The settlements must be recognisable villages and hamlets with individual housing layouts that enable infill plots to identified.*
- 1.3.5 *The requirement to identify infill plots reflects the criteria of the Cluster policy published in October 2017 which requires Clusters to provide:*
 - a) Building conversions or small scale infill sites of 0.1 hectare or up to 3 dwellings*
 - b) On sites within or immediately adjoining the built form of the settlement...*
 - c) Using sites with built development on at least two boundaries of the site...and...*
 - d) Avoiding an overall cramped layout of housing within the settlement.*
- 1.3.6 *The Cluster should be supported by the communities affected and so, the Parish Council must:*

- a) *Decide to form a Cluster in the Parish*
 - b) *Determine the settlements to be included in the Cluster:*
 - c) *Resolve to opt these settlements into the Cluster;*
 - d) *Inform Shropshire Council of their resolution:*
 - i) *To form the Cluster*
 - ii) *Identifying the settlements included in the Cluster.*
 - e) *Request that the Cluster be included in the new Local Plan.*
- 1.3.7 *The Cluster in Nash Parish could include the principal locations of:*
- a) *Nash*
 - b) *Knowle*
 - c) *Knowlegate; and*
 - d) *Any other hamlets in Nash Parish that fulfil the requirements of points 1,2,3,4,5 & 6*

1.4 The Chairman provided additional advice and guidance as follows:

1.4.1 How Shropshire council moves the place plans forward is changing and the meeting we have in May where we can send the clerk and a councillor will advise us how SC wants us to move forward and evaluate the Place Plans in the future.

1.4.2 I have recently taken over as Portfolio for Communities and Place Plans and I would urge that not too much work is undertaken at this stage until we understand where the goal posts are and what information SC will require. The new arrangements are being developed as we speak with working groups including SALC and the Clerks forum and an internal task and finish group on CIL. This maybe mirrored with a new community strategy.

1.4.2 For the March meeting I would suggest simple draft options for our attention and then we can see how they relate to the Place Plan meeting in May. I reiterate that if you are considering clusters outside Clee village that you may need to undertake a housing needs survey and possibly a parish plan to vindicate any decisions the council may make. You May also want to consider working with neighbouring parishes. Please be aware at present we have no clerk after the end of March and anything undertaken needs to be done in relation to the size of the parish .We are not a district or county council and need to keep everything in proportion .

1.4.3 For reference I was a town councillor at Cleobury but I have overseen the creations of hubs and clusters and their objections in Cleobury Unitary Ward which is the town and 8 parish councils all of which gave different answers, some having clusters, some vehemently staying open countryside with large angry public meetings.

1.4.4 I believe the CIL funds held for Nash are for an historic new build and are yet unspent in the place plan area. We do not have to do annual returns. Please be patient and I urge you not to put the cart before the horse.

2.0 Some Background to Shropshire's Place Plans

2.1 Nash Civil Parish area was included in the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan 2015/16 which aimed to summarise and prioritise the local infrastructure needs required to support the sustainable development of the area and identify the wider investment needs to assist delivery of the community's vision and aspirations. It was one of 18 Place Plans in Shropshire, each of which is based around one of Shropshire's 18 main towns and its wider hinterland, which comprises Community Hubs, Community Clusters and rural parishes within the surrounding countryside (referred to as the "rural hinterland").

2.2 Shropshire Council intended the Place Plans to be 'live' documents informed by an 'annual conversation' with Town and Parish Councils, infrastructure and service providers. As such, the Place Plans were meant to provide an up to date record of infrastructure and investment needs within an area and those priorities which should assist in providing a focus for delivery of investment in the year ahead. However it appears that resource constraints have contributed to some slippage in the process as we are only now, in 2019, reviewing the 2015/16 Plan.

2.3 Place Plans are comprehensive documents providing a huge amount of detail and are of course a key component of the framework for the distribution of Community Infrastructure Levy funds – an innovative development tax introduced by the Localism Act 2011

2.3 The bulk of the visioning work and public consultation that underpinned the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan content and Core Strategy strategic vision and objectives was undertaken prior to publication of Shropshire's Core Strategy in March 2011 and was captured within the following key Core Strategy Policies:

- CLEOBURY MORTIMER TOWN (Core Strategy Policy CS3) Cleobury Mortimer will have development that balances environmental constraints with meeting local needs.
- COMMUNITY HUBS (Core Strategy Policy CS4) Community Hubs will have development that helps to rebalance rural communities by providing facilities, economic development or housing for local needs that is of a scale appropriate to the settlement.
- COMMUNITY CLUSTERS (Core Strategy Policy CS4) Community Clusters are comprised of two or more smaller settlements, where the combined settlements offer a range of services contributing to a sustainable community. Community Clusters will have development that helps to rebalance rural communities by providing facilities, economic development or housing for local needs that is of a scale appropriate to the settlement.
- RURAL HINTERLAND (CORE STRATEGY POLICY CS5) New development will be strictly controlled in accordance with national planning policies protecting the countryside and Green Belt. Subject to further controls over development that apply to the Green Belt, development proposals on appropriate sites which maintain and enhance countryside vitality and character will be permitted where they improve the sustainability of rural communities by bringing local economic and community benefits.

2.4 A number of proactive Parish Councils in the Cleobury Mortimer and Ludlow Place Plan areas developed Parish Plans and made representations in connection with both the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and the Site Allocations and Management of Development Plan in the 2009/2010 consultation round.

2.5 Farlow PC, Kinlet PC, Neen Savage PC and Stottesdon and Sidbury PC all made representations on the Core Strategy and Cleobury Mortimer PC, Hopton Wafers PC, Farlow PC, Stottesdon and Sidbury PC, Neen Savage PC and Boraston Parish Meeting all made representations on the SAMDEV; alongside Caynham PC which made representations in connection with Clee Hill. Malvern Hills DC made representations in connection with bridge safety considerations connecting Burford and Tenbury.

2.6 Nash PC and its neighbours Coreley PC, Hope Bagot PC and Greete PC appear not to have actively engaged in the extensive consultation programme organised by Shropshire around the formulation of the Core Strategy and subsequent SAMDEV Adopted Plan which identified "Community Hubs in the Ludlow area at Burford, Clee Hill and Onibury; and 5 Community Clusters in the Cleobury Mortimer area as follows:

- Kinlet, Button Bridge, and Button Oak
- Hopton Wafers and Doddington
- Oreton, Farlow and Hill Houses
- Silvington, Bromdon, Loughton and Wheathill
- Stottesdon, Chorley and Bagginswood

2.6 In drafting this report on the potential for a Community Cluster proposal in Nash it was therefore considered appropriate to explore the experience of those Parish Councils within the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan area which had promoted Community Clusters. Following a discussion with Shropshire Association of Local Councils a questionnaire was prepared and circulated to the Clerks of the five Parish Councils identified in the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan document with a view to prompting feedback. The responses to the approach are set out below.

3.0 Community Clusters

The Local Experience in the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan Area

3.1 Dorothy McBride Hopton Wafers PC

The SAMDev kicked off a number of years ago with a lot of controversy for some local parishes. Generally speaking we have not been overly happy with the whole planning process as invariably we get overridden by Shropshire Council. There is a lot of pressure to take more housing but often little support for the Parish's viewpoint. Planning is a very emotive issue in the Parish and it will be interesting to hear how your Parish goes forward with your position with the Core Strategy. Response to Questionnaire:

1) Parish Council reasons for promoting a Cluster

Following very robust Community Led Parish Plan process it was felt that we could have some housing (8-12 houses over 20 years but none outside the two villages which are classed as rural countryside). We accepted the Cluster but are not overly enthusiastic about the labelling.

2) Consultation with Shropshire Planning including formal/informal contact and feedback

We have been under pressure to take more housing but do comment on all relevant consultations regarding the Local Planning Policies as we wish to keep development under strict control in our parish.

3) Canvassing views of residents and businesses in the Parish including methods of consultation: public notices/website etc. public meetings, leaflets, e-canvass etc.

All of the above for the Community Led Parish Plan and always clearly advertise our Agendas and any matters to do with Planning.

4) Outcome of Consultation, including positive/negative feedback

Some acceptance of housing but only in villages in single plot small (affordable) sites.

5) Parish Council Resolution to opt nominated settlements into the cluster including Parish Council objectives; any performance metrics; copy of Resolution etc.

Council put together a formal SAMDev statement to cover the above.

6) Identification of infill plots and consultation with adjoining owners/occupiers and feedback

Not directly as we had good return on CLPP questionnaires.

7) Identification of potential building conversions and consultation with adjoining owners/occupiers and feedback –response as 6 above

8) Planning Applications for infill plots and building conversions including description of proposed development: market housing/ discount sale/shared ownership/ starter homes/ affordable rent/ social rent; and yield in units/bed spaces by type. See Q.4.

There is no support for multiple developments nor for social housing. Council feels under a lot of pressure to take both.

- 9) Planning Approvals obtained including description of approved development: market housing/ discount sale/shared ownership/ starter homes/ affordable rent/ social rent; and yield in units/bed spaces by type.** *We have had a variety of market housing applications. Council has not supported those which don't meet our criteria set as they inevitably are 4-5 bedroom properties far outwith the reach of many young local people.*
- 10) Development Activity/investment delivered Description of development: market housing/ discount sale/shared ownership/ starter homes/ affordable rent/ social rent; and yield in units/bed spaces by type.** *Delivered to date All delivered to date apart from 3 houses with legal issues over land rights*

3.2 Derek Bromley Farlow PC:

"No formal decision was made with the Planners to form any cluster(s). The natural inhabited clusters in the Parish are Farlow village, Oretton Village and Hillhouses.

The Parish Council formulated its planning policy when it commissioned its Parish Plan. This was by public consultation/questionnaires to which there was a 60% response. The plan has subsequently been revisited without any changes to the planning criteria first established. In addition there was Housing Needs Survey again with encouraging response numbers.

The outcome of these was to set the policy as follows "Our Housing policy is set out in our SAMDev submissions. Our policy is to allow a very limited amount of single plot private housing with the emphasis on smaller properties within 'defined' clusters. Larger multi-unit developments are not acceptable. In addition we will support Self build Single plot exception sites outside of these recognised clusters subject to compliance with the local connection rule, the approval of the site by the Planning department and subject to usual Planning rules/approvals. Limited support for the provision of small business units was identified and the Parish Council will support any appropriate business development as and when the occasion arises."

3.3 Derek Bromley Wheathill PC

"It is a similar situation for Wheathill. The natural clusters are Silvington, Loughton, Bromdon and Wheathill.

A Parish Plan was adopted after extensive consultation within the Parish and feed back from questionnaires. In essence "development must be sympathetic to local environment and existing community." Strong support for the conversion of existing buildings for housing and small businesses. Major support for provision of Affordable housing and for infill development between existing properties or groups of properties.

There was a mixed response for further caravan site extensions. Overall all future developments should be in keeping with the local character and not spoil the countryside, protect the Greenfield sites and scenery, flora and fauna. All of these criteria were included in the SAMDev submissions"

3.4 Janette Burgess Kinlet PC:

"Some little while ago we did identify 3 cluster areas -Button Bridge, Button Oak and Kinlet village and these are included on the current neighbourhood plan. However we have found that we need to extend these areas and be specific on the boundaries as we have found that planning applications have been

turned down by Shropshire Council because they feel they are out of the cluster whereas we were quite supportive for this development to take place.

We shall be endeavouring to rectify this on the new plan together with possibly other items which are being discussed at our March meeting. Hope this helps.

3.5

Freda Morris Stottesdon PC:

Response awaited following Stottesdon PC meeting.

3.0 Prospects and Potential

3.1 Examination of the Community Clusters identified in the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan demonstrates a wide diversity of settlement morphology, built form, function and articulation and Nash exhibits comparable models in connection with Knowle, Nash and Harthall, the latter two recorded as settlements in the Domesday Book. However Liam Cowden's identification of Knowlegate has no local precedent and may have been included in error inasmuch as Knowlegate does not present as a *"recognisable village or hamlet with individual housing layouts that enable infill plots to identified"*.

3.2 However, Knowle, Nash/Lower Nash and Harthall do all appear to allow the *"identification of infill plots reflecting the criteria of the Cluster policy published in October 2017 which requires Clusters to provide:*

- e) Building conversions or small scale infill sites of 0.1 hectare or up to 3 dwellings*
- f) On sites within or immediately adjoining the built form of the settlement...*
- g) Using sites with built development on at least two boundaries of the site...and...*
- h) Avoiding an overall cramped layout of housing within the settlement.*

3.3 To some extent Nash/Harthall could be regarded as a bi-polar Cluster with the potential for limited infilling around Nash village core and existing "stead clusters" exemplified by The Cliffords, Lower Nash, Ellendene, Harthall and Greenway Head, each of which already exhibit multiple units of residential accommodation delivered by way of extension/conversion of former agricultural buildings.

3.4 An examination of the potential for further evolution of this approach aimed at delivering limited residential development could form part of a wider Parish Plan process. The objective would be to define a local policy framework that delivered on local housing need, not only affordable housing for new young households, but also to provide support for carers and aged/disabled relatives. Such a process could be focussed on Nash residents alone as the locations identified are all within the Nash Civil Parish boundary.

3.5 The prospects for Knowle are more complex, in part because the settlement straddles three parish boundaries, but also because of its proximity to Clee Hill Village with little if any settlement separation and also the added complication of the Green Belt designation in the existing Local Plan. Indeed it may be timely to reconsider its inclusion within the Clee Hill Community Hub to ease settlement growth away from the more environmentally sensitive areas around the Clee Hill village core. (Gillespies Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Assessment of Clee Hill 28/11/2018 revision 01)

3.6 The wider context in which the development of a Parish Plan might be considered requires sensitivity to the plans and interests of neighbouring Parish Councils and to wider developments which may have an impact over the medium to long term. There will clearly be some common concerns and shared interests, which in the case of Nash will include our inclination towards Tenbury Wells as our

local shopping and service centre and therefore the emerging Burford/Tenbury Neighbourhood Plan will be of relevance.

3.7 Setting boundaries is always problematic but Shropshire Council's arbitrary attachment of Burford to the Ludlow Place Plan rather than to the Cleobury Mortimer Place Plan is questionable, as is the inclusion of Clee Hill Community Hub (albeit in Caynham Parish), Whitton, Greete, and Hope Bagot. Interestingly Clee Hill produced a Parish Plan in 2005 but thus far like Nash, none of the remaining three have so far produced one. Going forward with the review of Place Plans some reconsideration of these boundaries – or at least the strictures placed on representative consultation from Parish Councils, might be appropriate if Shropshire Council wants a rational and inclusive process of review.

4.0 Way Forward and Next Steps

4.1 If the Parish Council is minded to proceed with the development of a Parish Plan and an associated Housing Needs Survey, it will need to scope the exercise, establish SMART parameters and make appropriate budgetary provision. The exercise would have the added possibility of stimulating local interest and maybe the prospect of further co-options to the Council both of which should be seen as beneficial spinoffs.

4.2 Housing Needs Surveys are used by Planning Authorities alongside other methods of enquiry and data analysis to inform their Strategic Housing Market Assessment which underpins the formulation and review of their Local Plan. At a Parish Council level a more basic process can be implemented the objective of which is to inform and underpin the quantum, type and pricing (rent or sale) of new housing provision by way of construction or conversion within the Civil Parish boundary. In addition it may pick up other aspects of housing need which are not directly related to the new build/conversion narrative as referred to in 4.3 below.

4.3 Essentially housing need is determined from a number of enquiries and then subject to integration and comparison as follows:

- a) Expressed Need: may be recorded on the Council's housing waiting list in connection with households looking for larger or smaller homes or to move to different locations to be nearer to employment, schools, needy relatives or because of current or impending homelessness or sickness/disability; but will also include recorded unmet demand for aids and adaptations, house renovation and disabled facilities grants and right to buy applications indicating a wish to change tenure. Increasingly the ageing demographic has boosted the recording of need for Extra Care schemes and Retirement Villages.
- b) Normative Need: Includes disrepair, dampness, dangerous gas or electric services, unwholesome water supplies and other conditions of existing housing warranting action in connection with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System hazards analysis. It also includes problems of overcrowding and environmental factors such as noise, vibration, air quality and proximity to hazardous industries e.g. chemical plants.
- c) Specific Need: Includes physical and mental disabilities and difficulties; resettlement of refugees, service veterans, persons escaping violence and witness protection schemes; and the need for emergency accommodation following fires, bombs and other incidents.
- d) Felt Need: Covers the data collected from social surveys, the Census, focus groups etc. in which respondents reveal their housing aspirations and concerns e.g. wish to become owner occupiers as opposed to tenants; wish to be self builders, homesteaders, co-housing participants, co-operators etc.
- e) Comparative Need: The assessment of pathways to resolve competing claims on housing resources such as whether to undertake adaptations or offer alternative accommodation; whether to rehouse tenants or pursue enforcement action and/or work in default against private landlords; or whether to provide site and service support to potential self builders etc.

4.4 Clearly data from Shropshire Council in connection with the housing waiting list will be key but in addition a household survey designed to capture current housing problems, aspirations and anticipated future local demand will be required. Such standard survey systems are widely available as is the processing suite to analyse and produce reports.

4.5 The formulation of a Parish Plan could be initiated by attaching a wider questionnaire to the housing need survey and following it up with one or more local themed “visioning” workshops to test the survey’s results and formulate an outline plan which could then be considered at a full public meeting. Parish Councillors would be well able to organise and run such events without the need for outside assistance though publicity/questionnaire processing/publication costs and the hire and/or purchase of workshop equipment and materials would need to be budgeted for.

4.6 It should be noted that the formulation of Parish Plans is not limited to nor even mainly concerned with residential uses and development. Perusal of a number of Parish Plans reveals particular concerns around health and social well being; access, including internet access, and transport; education and early learning/nursery provision; recreation and amenity issues; business support; and especially environmental and sustainability concerns.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 It is worth reflecting on the fact that whilst Nash is not alone in failing to have engaged proactively with Shropshire’s commendable process of formulating its Local Plan over the past decade, it is ironic that it appears to be the only Parish Council whose members resigned en masse citing a lack of engagement and responsiveness from Shropshire Council!

5.2 The present Council, on the other hand, has an opportunity to make good the reticence of our predecessors and demonstrate to our community an active interest in the planning process going forward by way of engaging with our residents and neighbouring Parish Councils and promoting a Parish Plan. Whether the corollary to this is a proposal for one or more Community Clusters remains to be considered as the process of Parish Plan development is taken forward.

5.3 In considering the way forward we should recognise the need to resist developer pressures for expensive market housing. The point was well made in Mark Barrow’s report to the Shropshire Council Cabinet on 7th November 2018:

“Ensuring the availability of an appropriate quantity and type of housing to meet local needs is a recognised national and local priority. The availability of appropriate housing is a potential constraint on economic growth in Shropshire and actions and interventions to address this are an important contribution to the delivery of the Council’s adopted Economic Growth Strategy.

Whilst Shropshire Council has adopted a positive and pro-active approach to delivering housing growth through the adopted Core Strategy and SAMDev plans, this has not always in practice delivered housing which helps to meet local needs. In qualitative terms, there has been a tendency for the type of housing to reflect the greatest marketability, which is for larger, detached properties.

However, Shropshire is acknowledged as having a low-wage economy and such housing is therefore often beyond the means of local employees and existing residents. This issue presents a significant risk to economic growth since there is a clear and growing mismatch between housing needs and the housing options available locally.”

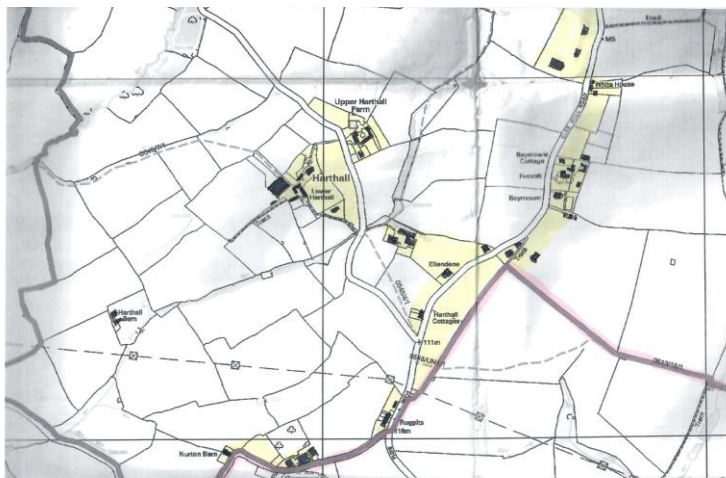
5.4 It follows that where local communities have facilitated limited housing growth within Parish Plans that acknowledge the Council's concerns, and have provided the necessary checks and balances, local aspirations are not frustrated by adverse officer decisions leading to expensive and disruptive planning appeals such as those referred to in the Parish Council feedback noted above. Having perused seven appeal decisions all of which were dismissed by the Inspector, it is clear that careful consideration must be given to development boundary definition especially at settlement edges in formulating Community Cluster proposals. If therefore downstream, Nash Parish Council is minded to propose one or more Community Clusters, clear and consistent advice from Shropshire's planning professionals will be key to achieving a successful outcome for the prospective beneficiaries of development in particular and our community in general.

6.0 Appendix 1 Example of Oretton, Farlow and Hill Houses Community Cluster

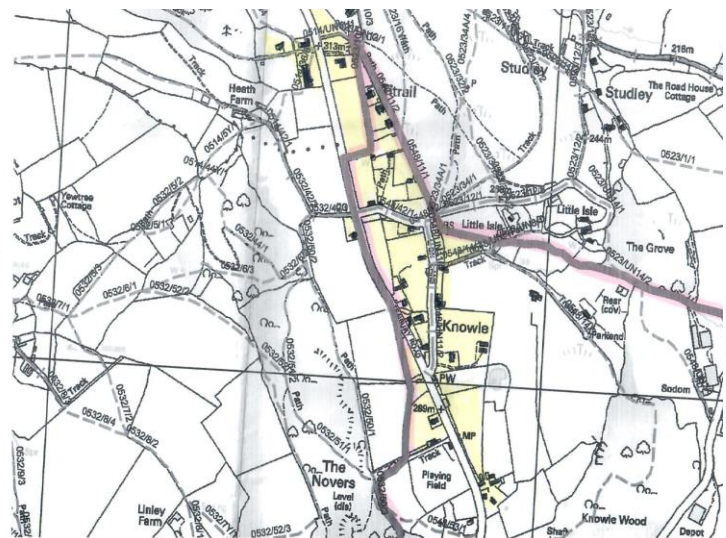


Inset for Farlow showing
development boundary

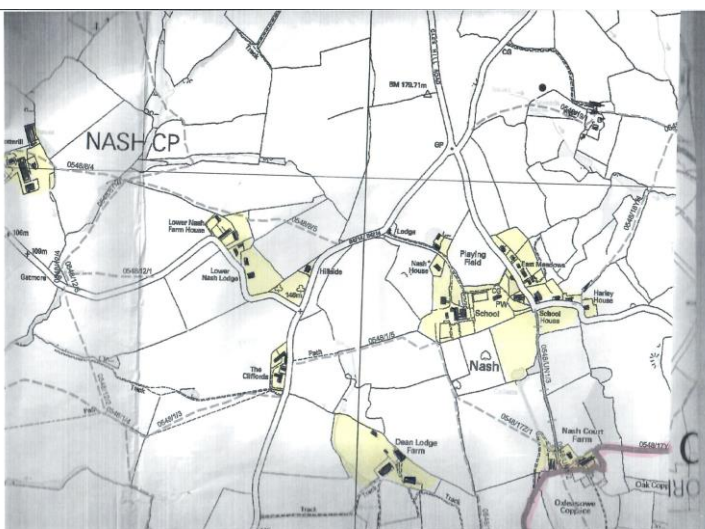
6.0 Appendix 2 Possible Nash PC sub clusters referred to in the text



Possible Harthall Sub Cluster and Steads
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Possible Knowle Sub Cluster and Steads
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Possible Nash Sub Cluster and Steads