

Appendix D

Worcestershire Minerals Local Plan (WMLP) Community Engagement and Communications

By definition, plan making is a collaborative process which should include well conceived and effectively executed consultation, communication and feedback processes in order to meet the requirements of national, regional and local planning policies.

With regard to the Worcestershire Minerals Local Plan, and notwithstanding the strictures of the Covid pandemic, the engagement and communication procedures employed during the plan making process have failed to meet these policy requirements both in general and specific ways.

National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021) states that plan making should '*be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees*'

The fundamental flaw in this respect is that such engagement with local communities in particular has been discouraged by the failure to provide a development plan document (DPD) relating to specific sites. Without the focus of specific sites, local communities have found it difficult to engage with the process relating to policy elements only. Other stakeholders such as those representing the industry, environmental organisations and other businesses are much better equipped and resourced to engage in these more esoteric considerations. The result has been that during the first Examination in Public sessions by way of example, local communities were represented by one person only against the serried ranks of Worcestershire County Council, developers and bodies such as Natural England.

Local communities have been at a severe disadvantage because Worcestershire County Council's strategy has failed provide the necessary focus for those communities to understand and appreciate how they will be impacted.

By failing to include specific sites for consideration in tandem with the policy proposals, the plan making process has not demonstrated any intention to '*include planning for and allocating sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area*' (NPPF Plan Making para 23).

Although, the pandemic may have limited the Council's ability to engage with communities in the usual way, it has not deployed those means available for communicating more effectively with local communities although this has been suggested to them on a number of occasions. The use of regular updates in community newsletters or websites was considered too difficult by officers but the result has been that communities have found it simply too difficult to understand and become involved in the process.

Through the fundamental flaw of failing to include specific sites at this stage and through poor and inconsistent communication, many local communities have found the process of becoming involved too difficult and hence have remained detached. This may not have been an overt intention of the Council but it has nevertheless resulted in a low level of engagement and has thus been inconsistent with the objectives of the NPPF and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

