

District Council Report 5th March 2025

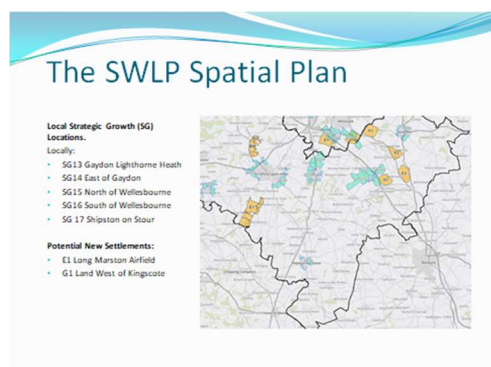
This Month's report covers the recent Budget, South Warwickshire Local Plan [SWLP], and the potential effects of the Government's Local Government Reform and Devolution White Paper.

SDC Budget 2025/26

At the last Full Council Meeting the Administration's Budget for 2025/26 was passed by a majority. I personally voted against a number of items and this is a matter of public record as all votes were recorded. The reason I voted against a number of the proposals was because they were focussed almost exclusively on Stratford upon Avon with little attention to the District as a whole. In particular I was very much against the River Avon Hydro-electric Turbine Scheme. In "headlines" this proposal at a cost of £1.2m is for a scheme that might generate electricity from the flow of the River Avon at the weir. On questioning it was clear that no Cost Benefit analysis has been completed for this project without rigorous research into potential customers. There was a suggestion that the RSC might be interested in purchasing the output but as no capacity calculations have been worked through this is meaningless. My thoughts are that if this scheme were to be commercially beneficial to SDC the production would be need to be considerable and a 3-phase output. No ecological survey has been completed. No initial construction and commissioning costs presented. No lifetime cost of ownership calculations presented, and no overall return on investment shown. This is simply a headline grabber in the year of elections.

SWLP

The South Warwickshire Local Plan is now at Regulation 18 and in consultation. The consultation period ends this week on the 7th March, Friday. I think that you will all, have seen a considerable amount of literature already so I will not repeat that but ask that responses are made by your respective Parish Councils.



Whereas your Parish may not be earmarked for development the issue as I see it is that the proposals as they are would well put unmanageable load on already struggling public services and the general infrastructure of South Warwickshire especially as the Governments new instruction on calculating Housing Need has increased the annual house building target by 104% for our District.

Local Government Reform and Devolution

You will be aware of the Government's White Paper on Devolution and Local Government reform. The consequences for SDC are that this tier of Local Government will be abolished, and a new Unitary Authority will replace both the County Council as well as District and Borough Councils,

and it is possible that it will be necessary to join more than one Local Authority with parts of Warwickshire; Worcestershire for example is one option, as a new Unitary Authority.

The Government has required all authorities to propose a mutually agreed plan which may come into being by 2028/29. Much has to be worked through, and nothing is either set or fully explored at this stage. If agreement across the six Warwickshire authorities cannot be achieved, the White Paper suggests that a plan will be imposed.

A working Group has been set up at SDC to explore the options, and I am a member of that group. I will try to keep you all informed as far as I am able.