Our beautiful and world renowned hillfort, Old Oswestry, remains at risk. Shropshire Council continues to support proposals that would see a significant part of its ancient green hinterland and archaeology blotted out by a large housing estate.

In the face of fierce public opposition, the Council dropped two other housing schemes by the hillfort from SAMDev, the County's masterplan for development to 2026. But it is holding on to the largest with 117 houses, called OSW004 (land off Whittington Road), to meet five-year housing targets.

Construction by the hillfort would be fast-tracked to deliver twice the number of houses by 2018 of any other SAMDev site in Oswestry, including the Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE). It would also set the precedent for a new and destructive direction for town growth - right through the hillfort's eastern setting and Oswestry's heritage corridor. This senseless development would desecrate an important multi-period landscape and significant Iron Age hinterland while ignoring thousands of objectors worldwide.

That is why the fight over OSW004 is not just of local but also national importance. A planning decision in its favour could be seized on by developers to exploit heritage for housing across the country – WE MUST MAKE A STAND.

SAMDev is out for final consultation on 'soundness' until April 28th.

If you are against this mindless housing scheme, you should make every effort to respond, even if you have objected at previous stages of the consultation. YOUR ACTIONS COULD STOP THIS. They have so far – OSW002 and OSW003 were dropped, remember.

See page 2 for more on SAMDev.

Battleneiles drawn over OSW004

“Countryside across England is being lost as a result of the Government’s planning policies, but the proposal to build over a hundred houses in the setting of Old Oswestry Hillfort is notably philistine and short-sighted. It is bad enough that the developer thinks this is an appropriate place to build; the fact that the Council is supporting the scheme beggars belief. Of course we need to build more houses, particularly affordable houses, but it is not necessary to trample on our history and despoil beautiful places to do so.”

Shaun Spiers, Chief Executive of CPRE, Campaign to Protect Rural England

“Archaeological monuments such as hillforts like Old Oswestry cannot be understood or appreciated if they are divorced from their landscape setting by its destruction through development. It is not simply the banks and ditches which give them meaning but their topographical location and relationships with the surrounding natural and manmade landscape”.

Dr Catherine Hills, University of Cambridge (On right of picture with Dr Carenza Lewis of Channel 4’s Time Team.)

“No votes for hillfort housing supporters

Councillors who have supported proposals to build by Old Oswestry will face a backlash at the next elections, say campaigners.

In a recent street poll of over 100 people, more than 99% said they would not vote for candidates that had backed the hillfort bids when local elections come round.

HOOOH said: “This is an indicator that communities suffering similar bids to build on sensitive sites under new government planning will be actively looking for heritage and environment champions at the next local and general elections.”

MP Owen Paterson on the hillfort on page 2.

http://oldoswestryhillfort.co.uk/ Hands Off Old Oswestry Hillfort
Why OSW004 is unsound

The soundness of the SAMDev plan is based on a series of important questions. Here's our response to some of them:

**Question: Is the plan justified?**

The council have to show evidence of participation of the local community and others with a stake in the area. Sadly, the council have largely ignored the views and in some cases have never formally responded. For example:

1. A professional Landscape and Visual Impact Report was commissioned and presented to the council showing the major impact of the OSW004 development on the significance of the hillfort. Shropshire Council: No response.

2. Oswestry Town Council formally requested a review of all relevant archaeological reports before final decisions are made. Shropshire Council: No response. Instead they have based their decisions on a widely criticised and non-compliant Heritage Impact Assessment commissioned by the land owner.

**Question: Is the plan effective?**

As part of this question, the council have to show that there are no national planning barriers to delivery, which there plainly are in the NPPF. They have to show that the ‘delivery partners’ are signed up to it. Neither Oswestry Town Council, Selattyn & Gobowen Parish Council, nor English Heritage are signed up to their plan.

**Question: Is the plan consistent with national policy?**

As mentioned above, clearly a schedule ancient monument has the same protection whether it be Stonehenge or Old Oswestry Hillfort. The same rules apply. The council needs to show that this is a sustainable development.

**Question: Have reasonable alternatives to the quantum of development and overall spatial strategy been considered?**

We do not believe that the council have sufficiently explored the alternatives with respect to brownfield sites in the area.

**Question: Are the council working to ‘a strategy for the historic environment based on a clear understanding of the cultural assets in the plan area, including assets most at risk’?**

Again, the council plan to permanently damage one of their most important heritage assets based on inadequate reporting and a refusal to consider reports which are counter to their intent.

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**Global support**

Oswestry Town Council, English Heritage, Selattyn & Gobowen Parish Council, heritage and environmental groups are against OSW004.

Numbers for our petition and Facebook supporters have climbed well past 10,000 and include people from all over the world.

**Responding to SAMDev**

Use the Shropshire Council link below to respond to the current consultation—deadline April 28. Refer to our tips sheet on the HOOOH website for help, and check Facebook for updates—links below.

http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy  http://oldoswestryhillfort.co.uk/  Facebook: OldOswestryHillFort

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“Old Oswestry is a key site for miles around. It would be appalling to consider any development that would damage it.”

Owen Paterson, Environment Secretary and MP for North Shropshire

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“This is a spectacular hillfort. One of the impressive things about it is there are some unusual features which we don’t quite understand, which make it unique and really quite unusual. It’s important that we treasure the past. The zones around the hillfort, the penumbra, are just as important as the hill. Even in prehistory these areas had meaning for religion and history.”

Stewart Ainsworth, Channel 4 Time Team

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“Old Oswestry is an immensely significant site of undoubted national importance.”

Bill Klemperer, English Heritage, Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments

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“Old Oswestry is one of our most important Iron Age monuments. To build modern housing in its hinterland is unacceptable.”

Dr Rachel Pope, Senior Lecturer in European Prehistory, University of Liverpool

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HOOOH’s petition against housing by Old Oswestry is at: http://tinyurl.com/hillfortpetition
Creeping development would eventually erode the views, tranquillity and sense of place preserved within Old Oswestry’s green and historic farmstead setting.

Shropshire Council leader Keith Barrow announced that OSW004 must stay in SAMDev to meet Shropshire’s 5-year housing supply – it currently has 4.95 years. But why plunder the hillfort to make up the numbers? Why isn’t Oswestry’s Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) contributing more, for example?

Located in an uncontentious spot to the east of the town, the SUE has been allocated for development for several years. In SAMDev it is earmarked for 900 houses overall, but only 63 (7%) have been included in 5-year figures compared with the 117 (100%) of the hillfort scheme.

In a poor piece of strategic planning, Shropshire Council has put the site in the hands of just one developer who is sitting on it until they feel the market is ready. Land banking like this is going on across the County, even at sites with planning permission. It is leaving prime locations close to heritage and in collars of greenfield just outside town boundaries extremely vulnerable. Where the Local Planning Authority does not have a 5-year supply, developers can make indiscriminate planning bids that are more likely to succeed under the NPPF’s* ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’.

The sites we most treasure are now becoming targets for developers. As Shropshire’s Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement (September 2013) says: ‘It is the experience of many local developers that ‘the right site sells well’ in Shropshire.’ But does this mean that our valuable heritage has to suffer?

Without the five year noose around OSW004’s neck, there would be greater scope to replace it with alternative housing sites making up SAMDev’s longer term figures to 2026. Shropshire has been asked during two years of consultation to find alternative sites. They have failed a clear obligation in planning and community consultation.

All this noise about development goes against nationally applied heritage planning criteria which are meant to safeguard archaeologically sensitive sites and landscapes. These criteria, in addition to English Heritage documentation, clearly inform us that development of OSW004 is a non-starter. However, Shropshire Council planning department, its planning committee and heritage team seem to think otherwise. See p4 for more.

No response to: Oswestry Town Council’s request, as a condition of its SAMDev response, asking Shropshire Council for an independent review of the site promoter’s Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) to ensure it is NPPF compliant. Parts of this HIA have been criticised by heritage experts for being flawed and non-compliant with the NPPF.

In its SAMDev Plan Pre-Submission Draft, Shropshire Council indicates that the heritage assessment is key to determining proposals that will affect heritage assets:

MD13. 1. ‘Ensuring that proposals which are likely to either directly or indirectly affect the significance of a heritage asset, including its setting, are accompanied by a Heritage Assessment.’

But surely not one challenged as being flawed?

No response to: The Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment by Dr Ben Edwards of Manchester Metropolitan University. This concludes that landscape and visual impacts from development would be ‘major’, disputing the promoter’s HIA that assesses them as ‘minimal’.

No response to: Oswestry Town Council’s request to Shropshire Council for a commitment after SAMDev to develop planning guidance for the hillfort and its surrounds for the future, looking to the historical and archaeological protection and promotion of the site.

No response to: HOOOH’s 17 point objections document.

No response to: HOOOH’s request to Shropshire Council to explain how the inclusion of OSW004 in SAMDev does not contradict Shropshire’s Core Strategy policy which says: ‘(4.36) Shropshire’s Market Towns and Key Centres all have distinctive identities, which new development is expected to reinforce. Respecting each town’s distinctive character includes being sensitive to its landscape setting, historic features and the towns’ functions (past and present).’

*National Planning Policy Framework

Respond to SAMDev final consultation by April 28th here: http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy
On one hand, Shropshire Council is promoting the concept of build, build and yet more build (by the way, their housing numbers for SAMDev are completely arbitrary). Even we understand that development is important to the economy. However, it appears they want to collide full-on with the general public (that is, the very people who voted them in) and ignore a number of contentious sites where protection of heritage is paramount.

On the other hand, their policy statements – see below - promote the importance of heritage, including Old Oswestry Hillfort.

We would really like to know where Shropshire Council stands. A simple answer would really assist the public in making an informed choice when Councillors want our vote.

Excerpts from Shropshire’s Core Strategy:

‘Shropshire possesses a rich and important historic environment...’

Strategic objectives No 11, 3.7: Ensure that the character, quality and diversity of Shropshire’s built, natural and historic environment is protected, enhanced and, where possible, restored, in a way that respects landscape character, biodiversity, heritage values, and local distinctiveness, and contributes to wider environmental networks.

Policy CS6, 4.82: There are a substantial number of heritage assets in Shropshire, which are of significance because of their historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest. Such assets require careful consideration and management in accordance with national guidance where change is proposed.

Policy CS17: (Ensure development)... Protects and enhances the quality and local character of Shropshire’s natural, built and historic environment, and does not adversely affect the visual, ecological, heritage or recreational values and functions of these assets, their immediate surroundings or their connecting corridors.

The Spatial Vision – Shropshire in 2026:

‘...Shropshire will have raised its profile...as a tourism destination, capitalising on its unique landscape and heritage assets without damaging their value for residents and visitors.’

‘The character, quality and diversity of Shropshire’s natural and historic environment, the County’s greatest asset, will have been protected, restored and enhanced.’

‘In Shropshire, we need to plan for...the protection and enhancement of our natural and historic environment, its character, quality and diversity.’

Not many—the landowner, his consultants, the developer and a handful of Councillors and planners juggling with housing numbers. Otherwise, there is very little perceived benefit and potentially highly damaging impacts from housing on OSW004.

This will be the deciding factor, as stated in Shropshire Council’s own SAMDev Plan Pre-Submission Draft (17/3/2014):

MD13. 4.139. Heritage assets are a finite, non-renewable resource and great care must therefore be taken when determining applications which result in a loss of significance, either partial or total. Proposals adversely affecting either the significance or setting of designated or non-designated heritage assets will therefore be rejected unless the harm to the significance of the asset is outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal and there are no satisfactory alternatives. In making this decision the significance of the asset, its level of importance, the degree of impact and opportunities for a viable beneficial use of the asset will be taken into account. Proposals which would result in harm, or a loss of significance, to a designated heritage asset, including the setting, will be determined in line with national policy.

HOOOH: “Shropshire Council is risking public money through the unnecessary inclusion of OSW004 in SAMDev. If it is rejected by the Inspector on the grounds that the Council has failed to undertake compliant studies or to fulfil their obligations towards national planning policy for the protection of the settings of designated heritage assets, such as scheduled monuments, then the plan will be thrown out at considerable cost to Shropshire taxpayers. Our elected members would be responsible for this.”

Make sure you respond to the final SAMDev consultation at http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy
Deadline: 5.00pm, Monday 28th April, 2014