

REPORT 9 South Somerset's scale of growth workshop discussion paper 6 April 2011 – Consideration of the scale of growth for Ilminster

Introduction

This paper examines the potential scale of growth that might be delivered through the Draft Core Strategy at Ilminster in the light of issues raised by respondents. There are five responses in support of the scale of growth proposed at Ilminster. Issues arising from the sixteen objections are set out and considered below.

Issues:

Housing

- There is insufficient evidence to support the considerable increase in housing for Ilminster. Increase in speculative housing would change the market town environment and character of Ilminster. Housing in the town is dense with little open space further building would result in an over built, hard environment in the Town Centre.
- Do not believe that Ilminster requires an additional 340 homes, the 191 already committed is sufficient, especially combined with the Canal Way development, this should be ample for the town, or it will lose its character.
- Object to the scale of residential development proposed for Ilminster, 150 would be more suitable for a small town.

- Object - as policy stands 70% of new homes will be in Yeovil and Chard, just over 12% in Crewkerne & Wincanton, just over 10% in Ilminster, Somerton, Martock and the rest meaning less than 10% in the remaining small towns and villages. Almost 25% of growth is proposed at Keyford - this would involve building a medium sized town with 3,700 houses for up to 8,000 people.

- Ilminster's housing figure should be flexible - balance between housing and employment is the key, cannot sign up to a 2009 figure.
- Do not believe that Ilminster needs additional housing until jobs are available. Also any housing that is built should include p.v electricity generation to get consent.

- Support and understand that Ilminster requires additional houses to grow, but concerned about how infrastructure will be delivered.
- Accept growth, but concerned that there are no facilities, particularly educational facilities provided, especially taking into account recent growth at Station Road.
- Is there sufficient capacity in existing schools (particularly Ilminster primary, Chard Holyrood and Crewkerne Wedlam)?
- To accommodate the growth, additional infrastructure (schools, health services, shops, recreational services) will be required.

Employment

- Ilminster Town Council will only support this allocation (without the need for further allocations) if the Environment Agency confirm that all the land is 'fit for purpose'.

- 107.43ha seems excessive - Ilminster's figure is too high.
- Ilminster does not need any additional employment land, there is ample land (still undeveloped) which has been available for employment for many years.

Response:

Housing

The Draft Core Strategy defines Ilminster as a Market Town. It identifies that 191 dwellings were committed¹ in the settlement (as at Autumn 2009) with 340 additional dwellings to be built giving a total housing provision of 531 dwellings.

The latest housing supply position in Ilminster is set out in the recent Annual Monitoring Report (2009-2010) and shows a total of 190 dwellings are either built, under construction, have planning permission or are allocated.

The 2010 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) suggests there is the potential to deliver sites accommodating some 1930 dwellings, confirming that there is sufficient suitable, available and viable land to accommodate the proposed additional 340 dwellings cited in the Core Strategy. The Peripheral Landscape Study for Ilminster (2007) supports this proposed level of growth by identifying that there is scope within the landscape around Ilminster to accommodate this level of growth.

The Settlement Role and Function Study² provides evidence of the need for the scale of growth identified in the draft Core Strategy. Population projections identify that over the plan period there will be a reduction in household size, from 2.36 persons per household to 2.12 persons. Based on the 2001 Census population for Ilminster (4750 population), if there were no additional dwellings built in the town, there was no migration and household reduction occurred as projected (i.e. reduced from 2.36 to 2.12) Ilminster's population would decline by 500 people to 2026. This could negatively impact on the provision of shops and community facilities. On this basis around 240 houses would be required to maintain Ilminster's current population alone.

It has been suggested by respondents wishing to see less development in Yeovil, that additional development should be accommodated across the District, including in Ilminster, but there is no evidence of further need is submitted, therefore no case is made to change the Core Strategy position, which is a result of evidence from the Settlement Role and Function Study.

Respondents suggest that there should be no additional homes until jobs are available. The Core Strategy has sought to balance the requisite amount of employment land to economically active persons who will be generated from the additional homes, this sufficiently balances the amount of jobs to homes, delivering the land is more difficult and is considered below.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will assess what infrastructure improvements would be required by the proposed level of growth. Despite concerns regarding highways and education Somerset County Council, as the Highway and Education Authority has not objected the proposal. Additionally, highways impact and education contributions will be considered as part of any planning application that might be received in the future.

It is considered that this level of housing growth coupled with balanced employment growth will contribute towards creating a more sustainable and self-contained settlement. Additionally, the scale of growth recommended in the draft Core Strategy reflects the town's economic growth potential and the trajectory shows this growth is possible.

Recommendation:

¹ Includes completions 06/10, under construction, commitments not started, and allocated without permission.

² South Somerset Settlement Role and Function Study Final Report April 2009, Baker Associates

No change in approach.

Employment

The draft Core Strategy attributes 19.4 hectares of employment land to Ilminster. Evidence for this level of employment land comes from the South Somerset Employment Land Review Stage 3. The ELR explains how Ilminster is a strategically significant employment location, given its proximity to the A303 and A358, and retaining Saved Local Plan allocations (ME/ILMI/3,4 &5) provide opportunities to secure major investment into the District. The ELR also illustrates how the draft Core Strategy is providing sufficient employment land for jobs, it identifies that Ilminster requires approximately 3 hectares of employment land to meet the economically active population that would be generated from 531 dwellings.

The Parish Council are concerned that there is not sufficient strategic employment facilities as the Environment Agency have concerns, they did not object to the Core Strategy carrying forward the employment land allocations from the Local Plan and they are working closely with Development Management officers to maximise employment potential in a sustainable manner, the ELR will review employment land allocations and recommend changes to the level of employment land should they be required.

Concern has been expressed regarding the delivery of employment land in Ilminster through the Development Management process, given the history of undeveloped land. It is likely that mixed use developments will be encouraged therefore both housing and employment growth will be delivered in tandem, but it is accepted that it is a risk to rely on this approach, particularly given that profits from housing development are higher and therefore more attractive to developers. One possible approach could be that text is added to the Core Strategy clearly setting out the expectation that housing and employment will be delivered together, alternatively a commitment to the production of an employment allocation Development Plan Document could be considered.

Recommendation:

No change to the scale of employment provision, but consider inserting additional text to the Core Strategy clearly setting out an expectation that mixed-use development will come forward or consider a District wide employment allocation Development Plan Document.