

**South Somerset's scale of growth workshop discussion paper
29 March 2011 – Consideration of the scale of growth for Wincanton**

Introduction

This paper examines the potential scale of growth that might be delivered through the Draft Core Strategy at Wincanton in the light of issues raised by respondents. 4 representations in support of the scale of growth at Wincanton has been received, 56 objections and 5 observations. Key issues arising from objections are set out and considered below.

Issues:

Housing

- Object to the scale of growth at Wincanton - goes beyond the need to provide balanced growth. Due to impact on A303 and distance from rail corridors.
- There is a lack of evidence to justify a further 350 dwellings in Wincanton - should wait until the existing approved 703 dwellings are occupied. The 703 homes already committed in Wincanton will result in a 40% increase in the population. These commitments should be built and phased first and impacts of those developments considered before additional housing.
- If the 703 existing commitments are built and occupied this will result in C. 1500 additional residents (average 2.12 adults per household) and their cars. Wincanton has a population of just over 5,000 this implies a roughly 30% increase in the population of the town. This will have significant implications for social the cohesion of the town - will people be able to find jobs. Congestion is likely to arise on the High Street.
- Wincanton Town Council strongly object to 350 additional homes as 703 existing commitments have yet to be built – no further development for 10 years until the New Barns Farm and Deanesly Way developments have been assessed for this impact on the town's infrastructure. Disagree that growth in housing will bring employment opportunities and community benefit - Wincanton has lost employment land to housing and has failed to attract business despite its location, excellent road network. Wish to see a balance between housing and employment growth.
- Suggest that the housing target in Wincanton is reduced to about 200 homes with the balance of about 150 re-distributed pro-rata to Castle Cary /Ansford and Milborne Port.
- Not enough land allocated in Wincanton, suggest increase from 1053 to 1249, leaving a new requirement of 546 as opposed to 350.
- Development attributed to Wincanton is substantially out of proportion compared to Castle Cary, Bruton, Langport etc.
- Prefer greater growth at Crewkerne ahead of Wincanton.
- Who will live in the new homes? No point in building more homes as there are many unsold and empty properties and many unemployed people in Wincanton. Has a survey been carried out to ascertain the level of unoccupied housing in Wincanton? If not this needs to be done.
- Proposed level of growth will have a detrimental impact on existing infrastructure such as town centre car parking. Infrastructure is overloaded, no train service, meager bus service and routes within the town are congested. There is little scope for improvement.

Employment

- Given the proposed housing growth in Wincanton, Cary/Ansford and Milborne Port, the comparative proposed levels of additional employment land seems low for Wincanton and will fail to sustain the Council's policy of self containment. Danger of creating a commuter town in Wincanton the A303.
- Employment figures seem arbitrary. Surely existing large employers such as RNAS Yeovilton, Westlands helicopters and Thales will provide sufficient jobs for new inhabitants. The 1.5ha of employment land means nothing unless it has occupiers.
- More employment is needed before housing. Wishes of Wincanton People's Plan have been ignored.
- Support need for 1.5ha of employment land, may not be enough though.
- Unemployment ratio in Wincanton is lower than South Somerset and national average, but a large proportion of those working travel out of Wincanton for work. To rebalance the issue Wincanton requires 6ha of employment land, not 1.5ha - based on fact that lapsed land is not available, employment land has been lost to housing and need to work more locally to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Wincanton needs jobs for local people who cannot travel. Jobs in Wincanton will support the High Street, which has been struggling.

Response:

Housing

The Draft Core Strategy defines Wincanton as a Market Town. It identifies that 703 dwellings were committed¹ in the settlement (as at Autumn 2009) with 350 additional dwellings to be built giving a total housing provision of 1053 dwellings. The Annual Monitoring Report 2009-2010 shows that as at April 2010, 682 dwellings are now committed.

The 2010 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) confirms that there is sufficient suitable, available and viable land to accommodate the proposed additional 350 dwellings. The Peripheral Landscape Study for Wincanton (2008) supports this proposed level of growth by identifying that there is scope within the landscape around Wincanton to accommodate within the region of 860 new homes.

It has been suggested that the additional growth in Wincanton should be set at 200 dwellings and 546 dwellings, based on 682 commitments these figures would give a total housing provision of 882 dwellings and 1228 respectively. It is agreed that the Draft Core Strategy designates Wincanton a level of growth in excess of Castle Cary/Ansford, Bruton and Langport/Huish Episcopi however it should be noted that Bruton and Langport/Huish Episcopi are Rural Centres not Market Towns and as such would be expected to see lower levels of growth.

Local concern has been expressed regarding the scale of growth proposed in Wincanton and it is accepted that Wincanton does have a relatively high level of existing commitments compared to the other Market Towns in the District (3rd highest after Chard and Crewkerne). Most other Market Towns within the District are proposed to see a total housing provision of around 500 dwellings over the plan period and this has been taken into account when considering the overall strategic approach to the levels of growth required across the whole of the District in the light of the evidence arising from the Baker Report². As a consequence, as part of that strategic approach it is considered that there should be no provision made for

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

² Housing requirement for South Somerset and Yeovil, Baker Associates, January 2011.

additional housing growth on top of those existing commitments. The retention of the Development Area means that opportunities for windfall development will still exist. Such an approach will reflect the scale of the settlement and allow for the assimilation of growth in the recent past and present and will allow for a more permissive approach to employment provision reflecting considerable loss of employment land provision in the past (discussed below). The issue of phasing employment and housing development is also discussed under employment below.

Another issue to consider is the projected reduction in household size – the Settlement Role and Function study identifies that this will cause Wincantons’s population to reduce by around 450 people in 20 years, if no additional housing development were to come forward in the town this could negatively impact the provision of shops and community facilities. Around 210 houses would be required to maintain Wincanton’s current population in order to offset the forecast reduction in household size, approximately 446 of the existing commitments are still to be built³ which would accommodate that reduction.

With regards to the housing market in Wincanton, whilst the country may not be in recession the economic climate is still uncertain, however it would be expected to see an upturn at some stage during the plan period. Added to this developers are not likely to build new homes unless they have some confidence that they will be able to sell them, therefore the number of new homes built in Wincanton will ultimately be dictated by the market. The Local Planning Authority will continue to monitor house building over the plan period and may have to review it’s strategy as a result of new housing development not coming forward. No survey of the Wincanton property market has been undertaken and if one were to be carried out it would only represent a moment in time and would not be representative of what might happen over the plan period. As explained in the Draft Core Strategy, South Somerset District Council operates an Empty Property Grant scheme⁴, which can be used to help bring empty properties back into use.

There is concern regarding infrastructure provision in Wincanton, however it is not possible to respond to infrastructure issues in detail until the Infrastructure Delivery Plan has been produced.

Recommendation:

Amend the total housing provision for Wincanton to 703 dwellings (700 rounded) to reflect the overall strategic approach to the delivery of housing across the District.

Employment

Policy SS5 of the Draft Core Strategy states that a minimum of 1.5 ha of employment land will be provided at Wincanton over the plan period.

The South Somerset District Council Employment Land Review (ELR) Stage 3 Draft, 2010 clearly sets out the methodology for arriving at a figure of 1 ha of employment land.

Concern has been expressed regarding the balance between housing and employment growth in the town; within Wincanton there is an aspiration to maintain a vibrant Town Centre and facilitate employment growth. It has been argued that Wincanton has seen significant losses of employment land to residential development compared with other settlements and the supply quoted in the ELR is incorrect - the 2 ha of vacant employment land currently calculated as part of the supply is not truly ‘available’ for employment use (this matter would

³ As at April 2010

⁴ Draft Core Strategy (incorporating Preferred Options), October 2010. Paragraph 8.44

need further investigation), and 1 hectare of 'B' use employment land has been lost from the New Barns Farm Key Site (ELR attributed 2.2 ha to this site). Discussions have also taken place with the Economic Development Manager and it is considered that Wincanton's proximity to the A303 and the south east makes it well placed in terms of transport connectivity. Whilst Wincanton has a supply of 2.5 ha, it is suggested that an additional 5 ha be provided as a minimum, taking the Wincanton figure up to 7.5 ha. This will make Wincanton more attractive to potential developers, providing the opportunity to have a range and choice of sites and help support a more balanced, self contained settlement. The loss of further employment land to residential development in the future should be resisted through planning policy and it has been noted in the Draft Core Strategy that the Development Management process should be mindful of employment losses, Policy SS5 is clear that the ELR figures are a "minimum".

The possibility of having a policy within the Draft Core Strategy that phases residential development to deliver employment land has been investigated, this concluded that whilst employment land would be developed there could be no guarantee that units would be occupied and jobs created. The majority of land in some settlements is owned by a small number of landowners and such a policy would give them greater power over Section 106 negotiations, such a policy could also have a negative impact on the delivery of housing and affordable housing, potentially leading to a stagnant market and resulting in the overall cost of housing going up. The policy would have to prevent ANY house building in those settlements that have reached the threshold, including a single house as otherwise it would be ineffective and the Council could be accused of treating larger house builders unfairly.

It is agreed that delivery of employment land is an issue that needs consideration/discussion not just with regards to Wincanton but district wide. The option of clearly promoting mixed-use development within the text of the Core Strategy or an employment land allocations Development Plan Document could be discussed.

Recommendation:

Revise Policy SS5 to deliver a minimum of 7.5 ha of 'B' use employment land in Wincanton.