

South Somerset's settlement hierarchy workshop discussion paper March 2011 – Are there any other settlements that should be 'upgraded' to a Rural Centre?

Introduction

The draft Core Strategy incorporating preferred options identifies 7 settlements as Rural Centres: Langport/Huish Episcopi, South Petherton, Stoke sub Hamdon, Martock, Ilchester, Milborne Port, Bruton. Following comments received during consultation, this discussion paper considers whether any additional settlements should be considered as Rural Centres.

Summary of issues

- With more than 50% of the existing population living outside the main urban areas, the strategy of concentrating all development within 14 urban and rural centres is over simplistic, too crude and not reflective of how the District has grown and its wider economic, environmental and community needs. Does not mean that past patterns of dispersed growth should be repeated, but it is not appropriate to exclude development that can help to sustain places like Sparkford.
- Templecombe should be identified as a Rural Centre as it is comparable to other Rural Centres with its current range of services and function, it would balance the location of Rural Centres in the District, and would allow for development within the eastern part of the District. There is potential to offer further retail services and employment uses associated with potential development at Slades Hill.
- Templecombe outperforms many of the Rural Centres in terms of employment, and the large manufacturing employer is understood to currently be expanding by 50%. Travel to work patterns can be achieved more sustainably due to the presence of a train station.
- Henstridge, Charlton Horethorne, Kingsdon, North Cadbury, Norton sub Hamdon, Compton Dundon, Broadway, Keinton Mandeville, Merriott, East Chinnock, West Coker and Barton St David – these villages are recognised as having a level of services/facilities having been identified as Villages in the Local Plan and met the criteria of Structure Plan Policy STR3. If defined as Rural Centres these places would be able to achieve greater self containment. Scale of growth can be controlled by a site allocations DPD and/or proposals map. This approach would comply with SP Policy STR1. Issue should be tackled by developing more sustainable transport policies rather than singling rural development out as unsustainable. Settlement strategy should provide a positive response in terms of regenerating rural communities.
- Villages like Shepton Beauchamp need development to keep school, shops, pub going. Need homes in the villages as well as the Market Towns, to ensure employees of businesses in Shepton Beauchamp can live where they work, thereby reducing travelling e.g. Branston employs over 120 workers.
- Object to the resistance to any conventional forms of growth at Sparkford. Amend policy to add a list of Village Rural Centres or Village Clusters (to include Sparkford) where some growth will be encouraged, especially where set criteria are met, or subject to a ceiling on overall growth (10% of existing settlement/cluster).
- Object to non-inclusion of Curry Rivel as a Rural Centre - Role and Function study specifically notes that all settlements could be regarded as a Policy C

settlement to a greater or lesser extent. Curry Rivel has a population of 2,500 and a range of services which make it appropriate for a Rural Centre.

- Without more clarity it may be necessary to add to the list of settlements where development should be generally permitted e.g. Curry Rivel, Keinton Mandeville, Merriott, Tatworth and Forton and others. Outside of the 14 main settlements there has been investment in infrastructure and facilities that provide a focus for peoples day to day lives.
- Merriott, like other similar settlements is neither a town or a rural centre, yet it has significant infrastructure or access to it which enables sustainable living. Merriott has shops, a filling station, pharmacy and plans to develop a doctors surgery - description of development that may be allowed in rural settlements may unintentionally preclude appropriate development in rural settlements. Policy should be amended to make clear that development opportunities will be considered on its merits.
- No distinction between substantial villages and the open countryside - recommend that the 45 villages listed in the adopted South Somerset Local Plan as "appropriate locations for development" remain so, or that a much more detailed, robust explanation of why these villages not acceptable for development be added.
- Fails to recognise Long Sutton in settlement hierarchy - an element of growth should be attributed to allow them to support their own populations and grow organically.
- Where settlements are not Rural Centres, some limited infilling should be permitted e.g. Hambridge. Small developments in villages should be looked on more favourably.
- Provision for future housing in villages is going to be almost non existent. Government cut backs and non delivery of housing in Yeovil will cause a vacuum in housing delivery. In the past Sparkford has been considered a suitable location for further housing and employment opportunities especially given its proximity to the main road network and availability of land close to it. Railway passes through and consideration could be given to re-opening the station or a platform.
- Sparkford is close to Queen Camel and they should be looked at as one rural centre as they share facilities. Concerned that the school may not have enough pupils, medical centre must have capacity, and bus service needs further passengers to sustain it as do the local pubs and shops. Believe the Parish Council want to promote employment opportunities - therefore there is a need for more housing to in the area. Risk that villages will fall into decline with the ageing population and people will be forced out of villages into Rural Centres and Towns.

Response to issues

Government policy states that away from larger urban areas (i.e. Yeovil and the Market Towns) most new development should be focused in or near to local service centres where employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together.¹ This should help ensure public

¹ PPG 13: Transport/ PPS 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth.

transport and access by walking and cycling is available. These local service centres could include a country town, a single large village or group of villages.²

Rural Centres should act as focal points for local employment and shopping, social and community activity, and will usually include a variety of small shops, together with health, cultural, financial, administrative and education services.³ The RSS makes clear that Policy C settlements should possess considerably more than a single shop and/or weekly bus service in order to be regarded as sustainable local service centres;⁴ and should be local hubs for community facilities and services, including public transport.⁵ Many other settlements provide individual services, e.g. a single shop, post office, primary school or community hall, which should be designated as Villages.⁶

The Settlement Role and Function study recognised that RSS Development Policy C is very open ended and that all of the settlements examined could be considered as Policy C settlements to a greater or lesser extent – the study highlights six settlements as the best candidates.⁷

The following table lists the settlements that were suggested should be Rural Centres by consultees. The ‘standard facilities’ set out by Baker Assocs in table 4.8 of the Settlement Role and Function study (excluding churches as these are everywhere, and broadening pubs to also include café/restaurant/take away), are used to compare the settlements with the additional criteria of number of jobs per settlement, and public transport opportunities. As the Role and Function study states,⁸ grading community service provision is not a clear cut exercise because roles are relative and no two settlements are the same – this is demonstrated by the findings in the following table, which shows facility provision varying between the rural settlements.

An initial review has identified several settlements where the level of community facilities and services, alongside job provision, is not of a level to be considered a “local hub,” and therefore not a potential Rural Centre – these are highlighted in grey.

The general issue that all of the ‘Villages’ in the Local Plan should remain as appropriate locations for development, or that a more detailed explanation of why these villages are not acceptable for development be added, is considered within the briefing paper ‘response to re-instatement of Development Areas and infilling policy’.

² PPS 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth.

³ The Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review 1991-2011, para 3.34.

⁴ EiP Panel Report, December 2007.

⁵ RSS Proposed Changes, July 2008.

⁶ The Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review 1991-2011, para 3.35.

⁷ Settlement Role and Function study, para 6.3, 6.4.

⁸ Settlement Role and Function study, para 4.25.

Table: Facilities and job provision within each settlement suggested as a Rural Centre

Settlement	Primary school	Health centre/surgery	Shops	Post Office	Pub/café/restaurant/take away	Village hall/Comm. centre	Children's play area & Sports pitch	No. jobs	Public transport ⁹
Templecombe	Y	Y	Y – 1	Y	Y – 2	Y	Y	700	Train; HFBS; DRT
Sparkford	Y (private)	N	Y – 1	N	Y – 2	Y	Y	600 ¹⁰	Partial HFBS; DRT
Queen Camel	Y	Y	Y – 2	Y	Y – 1	Y	Y / N	600 ¹¹	Partial HFBS; DRT
Curry Rivel	Y	N	Y – 4	Y	Y – 4	Y	Y	400	HFBS
Henstridge	Y	N	N	Y (with shop)	Y – 3	Y	Y	500	HFBS; DRT
Charlton Horethorne	Y	N	Y – 1	N	Y – 1	Y	Y / N	300 ¹²	Partial HFBS; DRT
Kingsdon	Y	N	N	N	Y – 1	Y	Y / N	300 ¹³	HFBS; DRT
North Cadbury	Y	N	Y	Y	Y – 1	Y	Y / N	500 ¹⁴	HFBS; DRT
Norton sub Hamdon	Y	N	N	Y	Y – 1	Y	Y	200	HFBS; DRT
Compton Dundon	Y	N	Y – 1	Y	Y – 1	Y	N / Y	200	HFBS
Broadway	Y	Y	N	Y (with shop)	Y – 1	Y	Y / N	200 ¹⁵	HFBS; DRT
Keinton Mandeville	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	300 ¹⁶	Partial HFBS; DRT
Merriott	Y	N	Y – 2	Y	Y – 3	Y	Y	300	DRT
East Chinnock	N	N	Y – 1	Y	Y – 2	Y	Y	100 ¹⁷	Partial HFBS; DRT
West Coker	Y	Y	Y – 3	Y	Y – 4	N	Y	100 ¹⁸	DRT
Barton St David	N	N	N	N	Y – 1	Y	Y / N	300 ¹⁹	Partial HFBS; DRT
Tatworth and Forton	Y	N	Y – 2	Y – 1	Y – 3	Y	Y	500 ²⁰	HFBS; DRT
Long Sutton	Y	N	Y (with PO)	Y	Y – 1	Y	Y	200	None
Shepton Beauchamp	Y	N	Y – 4	N	Y – 1	Y	Y	300 ²¹	DRT
Hambridge ²²	-	-	N	Y	Y – 1	-	-	-	-

⁹ HFBS = Higher Frequency bus service; DRT = Demand Responsive Transport.

¹⁰ Includes Queen Camel.

¹¹ Includes Sparkford.

¹² Includes Holton, South Cheriton.

¹³ Includes Charlton Adam, Charlton Mackrell.

¹⁴ Includes South Cadbury, Galhampton.

¹⁵ Includes Ashill.

¹⁶ Includes Barton St David.

¹⁷ Includes West Chinnock.

¹⁸ Includes Hardington Mandeville.

¹⁹ Includes Keinton Mandeville.

²⁰ Includes South Chard.

²¹ Includes Seavington St Michael, Seavington St Mary.

²² Any info refers to Hambridge and Westport, as Hambridge itself was not included in the Role and Function study.

The table shows that Templecombe contains each of the 'standard facilities' in the Role and Function study, with the additional benefits of a relatively high level of existing job provision, and a train station offering sustainable travel opportunities. Although the Local Plan Inspector's report identifies Templecombe as one of the larger villages in the plan, he did not consider the settlement a sustainable location for development, particularly on the scale proposed at Slades Farm.²³ Several other settlements were suggested during consultation that have the potential to be classed as a Rural Centre which are only missing one or two of the criteria in the preceding table:

- Curry Rivel
- West Coker
- Sparkford / Queen Camel – potential to be considered as one Rural Centre given their close relationship.
- North Cadbury
- Henstridge
- Broadway
- Keinton Mandeville
- Merriot
- Tatworth and Forton
- Shepton Beauchamp.

It is important to state that even for those rural settlements that are not identified as Rural Centres, the approach set out in Policy SS2 allows appropriate development to take place, subject to meeting the criteria set out in that policy.

Recommendation

No additional settlements should be added to the existing set of Rural Centres. It is considered that Policy SS2 allows for appropriate development at settlements not identified as Rural Centres.

²³ Slades Farm is a 6.3 ha site, incorporating 150 dwellings, 1 ha employment and 0.5 ha for school use.