

South Somerset's Chard allocation and Market Town growth locations workshop discussion paper, 5th July 2011 – Chard – Alternative Sites

The purpose of this paper is to address the issues raised regarding the proposed alternative sites for strategic growth in Chard arising from the consultation on the Draft Core Strategy (incorporating Preferred Options). The Snowdon Farm and Mount Hindrance sites are identified on the attached map.

Alternative Sites:

Snowdon Farm

- Preferred option for growth does not flow from the Vision and Objectives for the Core Strategy. The option seeks the development of peripheral unsustainable sites ahead of more sustainable ones. Disregards the benefits of land at Snowdon Farm. Believe that the overarching objective of the growth strategy is to improve road infrastructure rather than securing sustainable patterns of development. Applying a levy to all development sites irrespective of location would ensure key highway infrastructure is delivered. Proposed growth to the east of Chard will not deliver an improved range mix and quality of housing within walking distance of the town centre whereas land at Snowdon Farm can, including affordable housing.
- Given the estimated cost of the Millfield Link and the ransom issue likely to require CPO it is unlikely that the Millfield Link will be delivered in 2-3 yrs as stated in LDA's implementation plan. Because of the need to have a 5yr housing land supply advocate that sustainable sites which are deliverable now with the potential to reduce car usage and not exacerbate traffic capacity problems should be prioritised e.g. Snowdon Farm, Chard.
- Concerns re: phasing of development not being adequately justified on the basis of traffic modelling results. Sites have not been justified against wide accessibility principles. Modelling work should be re-run and land at Snowdon Farm included in early phases of development. Original SHLAA contains an inaccuracy regarding access which has been clarified in the 2010 update.

Mount Hindrance

- Over the last 10yrs SSDC have failed to deliver the Chard Key site development (identified in the adopted South Somerset Local Plan) - for a number of reasons including ownership, viability, lack of planning brief and the reluctance to adapt to change. In the meantime Land at Mount Hindrance has been available and deliverable for housing and an extension to the Business Park for the whole of this period, however the Council's view was that the site was too intrusive in the landscape . However, this view has changed as part of the site has been identified for an extension to the Business Park and the relocation of the football club. Respondents have submitted a masterplan for an Eco-Village on land at Mount Hindrance - can be delivered in the first 5 years.
- Paragraph 6.57 - states that Chard is dependent on the implementation of the MOVA enhancements to the Convent Signals and the Millfield link - this is dependent on public funding from the HCA who now have a much diminished role and no access to funding. So the strategy for Chard is unsound as it cannot be delivered. If the Council include land at Mount Hindrance for mixed use development the employment and housing can be delivered early in the plan period together with the preferred location of the football club. This land should be included to avoid another 10yrs of stagnation in the town.

- Whilst part of the land at Mount Hindrance is identified for growth at no time was the landowner contacted about these proposals and despite a request were not allowed to meet with the Council before the LDA work was published. If a meeting had taken place the Council could have been informed that the Football Club wish to be located on the western side of the site and the remainder of the site could have been considered for the delivery of housing and a route from Crimchard to Furnham Road thus avoiding the rat run through Cuttisford Door and alleviating the existing accident black spot at Hornbury Mill. The proposal in the Core Strategy is an ill-conceived attempt to re-hash the failed strategy in the adopted Local Plan.
- The Chard Regeneration Framework on which the Council have based their strategy is ill conceived, with no evidence base or viability assessment and has been delivered to the Council to justify their failed Key Site proposals in the Local Plan. It does not tackle the issues of delivering housing and employment and evades the issue to through traffic. There has been no engagement with key stakeholders. How can the Council to seek to advance a strategy that has failed despite favourable market conditions? It has been maintained for 15 yrs that the land at Mount Hindrance is available, but allocating only part of the site makes no sense in development terms.
- Strongly object to Council's proposals. Land at Mount Hindrance is suitable, available and deliverable. The Key Site cannot be delivered and land at Mount Hindrance should be included in the early phases – masterplan of proposed eco-village submitted.

Other

- Respondent has submitted a detailed document setting out an alternative road layout including plans, photographs and costings. Considers the Chard Regeneration Plan contains unbuildable plans, gives unsubstantiated opinions and omits vital details - should be audited for errors and omissions. The loss of the eastern relief road is short term thinking of the worst sort. Avishayes area will be abandoned to heavy traffic - costs will be higher than expected and the plans are dangerous. No radical proposal for traffic management in the town centre is proposed - has one been considered and rejected? Respondent considers that the alternative presented should be seriously considered as it largely replaces the need for a relief road and provides a foundation for Town Centre rejuvenation - proposals are based on the approach take in Lyndhurst, New Forest. The proposal is to include a short length of relief road on the existing proposed alignment some 850m long. This can be largely funded by not upgrading Oaklands Avenue, downgrading the new spine road and not constructing two lengths of new road. Costings are presented.

Response:

Snowdon Farm

Redrow Homes have been in contact with SSDC for some time with the objective of seeking to bring land at Snowdon Farm forward for development. The Redrow site is held to be sustainable by the developer given its proximity to the A30, their agreement with the various landowners comprising the plot and the comparatively low infrastructure & utility costs required in bringing this site forward. The site is identified as part of the residential development area within the Chard Regeneration Scheme (CRS), but only within the maximum growth Option 4 (growth to natural limits). Growth Option 4 was found through the Sustainability Appraisal process to be less beneficial to the town than growth to preferred Option 3 level, not least as some of the towns' junctions begin to collapse under the volume of associated traffic (PBA 'Saturn' modelling provided evidence of this in the Transport

Assessment¹). The Snowdon Farm site was not included within Option 3 because of the visual impact of development on the elevated Western edge of the town and because the proposed road layout connects sites within the Eastern growth area in such a way as to distribute traffic by reducing pressure at the Convent signals in the most deliverable way. The respondent is absolutely correct in noting the significance of bringing forward road infrastructure improvements at the same time as the development given the adverse social, environmental and economic implications of additional congestion at the convent link signals. The Highway Authority (SCC) has endorsed the view that securing improvements in infrastructure is the route to delivering sustainable development in Chard.

There are design issues concerned with this site, which have been discussed with SSDC officers, these concern the specimen trees to the north of the plot and the area of protection they require. It has also been noted that the site, lying uphill of the town centre, is not well served by public transport and could potentially add significant vehicle pressure at the central A30-A358 junction which, when extant planning permissions are factored in is believed to be close to capacity. Further, it should be noted that the guidance provided in the Implementation Plan² (Diagram 1: Flow diagram for assessing the acceptability of development proposals against highways capacity and place-making criteria) which has been signed off by all 3 councils³, makes it clear that this site is not compliant with the Chard Regeneration Plan as it does not lie within the Eastern Growth Area. The Highway Authority was also satisfied with the results of the PBA traffic modelling (completed twice) as a means of demonstrating the most optimal series of transport improvements to facilitate significant growth in the town⁴.

Redrow's representatives have expressed a willingness to look more closely at the town wide infrastructure requirements.

The issues regarding a tariff approach are set out in the Chard Strategic Growth Area Allocation paper. It is noted that the SHLAA inaccuracies have been addressed through the update.

Mount Hindrance

The steps being taken by the recently formed Delivery Team to further ensure the deliverability and viability of the proposals at Chard are set out in the Chard Strategic Growth Area Allocation paper. Funding for the MOVA enhancements has now been secured.

Representatives of the Blackburn Trust have been in communication with SSDC Officers throughout the production of the Chard Regeneration Scheme (CRS) during that process they have voiced strong support for the approach taken at the developer consultation event held at the end of 2009. The Trust is keen to maximise land value by developing as much of their landholding in the North of Chard as possible. The aspirations expressed by the Trust's representatives to date include residential development northwards to meet the Cuttiford's Door settlement this is something the Cuttiford's Door Resident's Association (CDRA) have made SSDC aware that they are vehemently opposed to – regardless of the tree planting proposed as a buffer. The CDRA have provided written support for the balanced level of development proposed by the CRS on Mount Hindrance. They endorse the extension to the Business Park and the relocation of Chard Town FC to a site south east of their settlement – both components of the first phase of development in Chard. They remain supportive of the way in which LDA Design (authors of the CRF) propose that the existing hedgerows are

¹ Chard Regeneration Framework, Strategic Transport Appraisal Report, Peter Brett Associates (PBA) (August 2010)

² Chard Regeneration Framework, Implementation Plan, October 2010.

³ South Somerset District Council, Somerset County Council and Chard Town Council

⁴ PBA have been sent a copy of the respondents submitted transport paper and will be commenting in due course.

preserved and mark the northern-most boundary to development in their direction to avoid them being enveloped by the town's expansion.

Development on part of Mount Hindrance is supported by the CRS, as part of Option 3 and Option 4, the residential element being in Option 4 (not the preferred Option). However the site does play an important role in bringing forward an early portion of the employment land required by the growth plan.

With regard to public funding for the required transport infrastructure, funding for the MOVA traffic control software has already been secured through obligations from planning approvals. The work being undertaken on behalf of the Delivery Team will identify any funding gaps and potential problems in funding this work needs to be co-ordinated with the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Discussions are taking place with a number of developers on the Eastern Growth Area to consider their suggestion that they forward fund the Millfield Link and recoup part of this investment from the residential and employment development it gives capacity for.

It is commented that, "Whilst part of the land at Mount Hindrance is identified for growth at no time was the landowner contacted about these proposals and despite a request were not allowed to meet with the Council before the LDA work was published". It is however noted that SDDC maintained communication with Blackburn Trust agents throughout the LDA masterplanning process. A representative attended the Developer Consultation on the Trust's behalf and commended the approach taken by the work. Officers met both agents on numerous occasions throughout the development of the Chard Regeneration Framework and were open in sharing its (draft) contents and the rationale LDA employed in making proposals for the Trust's landholding. Each meeting was recorded and minuted. The same open approach was taken with numerous landowners and developers from the schemes inception, throughout local business and resident's consultations and have done so since the public exhibition on 11th Sept 2010. It's worth noting that communication has been maintained with the Chard Town Football Club, both through their representation on the Chard Community Forum and directly in meetings, their aspirations helped identify the proposed site as most suitable on balance for their relocation. It is entirely understandable why the Blackburn Trust would promote the relocation of the Football Club to the West of the landholding as this would be onto land proposed for limited residential development in Option 4 and would also breach the existing horizontal hedgerow that LDA propose as the northern most boundary to development to preserve Cuttiford's Door as an identifiable settlement.

Land at Mount Hindrance Farm was considered through the 2003 Local Plan Public Local Inquiry and was rejected for a number of reasons including landscape grounds, the impact on Cuttiford's Door and the potential impact on the A30/A358 Junction.

The strategy proposed within the Chard Regeneration Framework takes full account of the lessons learned from non-delivery of the Chard Key Site allocation (KS/CHAR/1) it is far more flexible in its approach and is designed to remove the flaws and prerequisites that hindered delivery previously. However, if as a result of the ongoing work it becomes clear that the Chard Strategic allocation cannot be delivered it is possible that this site may have to be given further consideration.

Other

Having looked at Lyndhurst in the New Forest and Chard, the justification for the comparison of their road systems is not clear. Oaklands Avenue was designed and built to perform a distribution function therefore to ignore the development purpose of a significant section of existing road in favour of building a new one at substantial cost seems illogical. The respondent's proposed alternative road layout is likely to cost in the region of £200,000 -

£300,000 more than the layout proposed in the Regeneration Plan, this is a significant sum of money particularly in the current economic climate. No indication is given of where this additional money would come from.

Conclusions

Whilst it is understood that the owner/promoters of the land at both Snowdon Farm and Mount Hindrance would want their land to be included within the growth proposals for Chard the combination of land use and phasing set out in the Implementation Plan has been designed with deliverability and viability in mind whilst trying to achieve the objective of delivering the Chard Vision. Neither respondent has demonstrated how their proposal will integrate with the rest of the growth proposals for Chard. The Sustainability Appraisal process showed that growth Option 3 presents the benefits of large scale of growth without the emerging disbenefits of undue traffic congestion and pollution. It is accepted that further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the strategic allocation at Chard is deliverable and this work being undertaken by the recently formed Delivery Team⁵. If at the end of this process it becomes clear that the proposals cannot be delivered or are not viable then these alternatives may have to be re-visited.

Recommendation

No change to the strategic allocation for Chard set out in the Draft Core Strategy nor to Policy CV2: Chard Phasing pending the outcome of the work being undertaken by the Delivery Team and the completion of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

⁵ Details can be found in the Chard Strategic Growth Allocation Paper – 5 July 2011

