

South Somerset's Chard Allocation and Market Town growth locations **Workshop discussion paper 5th July 2011 - Direction of growth for Somerton**

Three options for urban extensions to Somerton were proposed in the draft Core Strategy incorporating preferred options and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal, with the west (Option 2) identified as the preferred option due to less environmental impact, potential to use/enhance existing bus service, and clear evidence of housing deliverability in the SHLAA. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the key issues raised during consultation, respond to these key issues, and recommend which option should be taken forward in the 'publication' Core Strategy.

Issues

Somerton received the highest volume of comments during consultation on the draft Core Strategy incorporating preferred options of any settlement apart from Yeovil, with a substantial number of these relating to the potential locations for extending the town. Option 2 (the preferred option) raised the most issues, and Option 3 had the most support. The issues raised during consultation for each option are summarised below, followed by other more general comments.

Option 1 (south):

- Development of this area is unacceptable due to unsuitable topography, flood risk, the river corridor barrier, adverse visual impact and lack of need, and would spoil easy access to the countryside.
- Potential to develop as it is closest to town centre and in order to 'balance' out the town, but there would need to be a large investment in the roads to achieve this i.e. Pestors Lane, Parsonage Hill, Badgers Cross Lane (from Sutton Road), Perry Hill road.
- Locate new development to the south and east of Somerton, near the B3151 - this is within walking distance of the town centre, there would be easy access for lorries, and would encourage passing trade from B3151.

Option 2 (west):

- This has merit if reduced by 100 houses.
- Object due to the presence of wildlife, including deer, and protected species and habitats.
- Given the proposed development at Somerton, consider building new train station - the area of Option 2 would be the best location.
- Should not be developed as Ricksey Lane is well used by walkers and riders and Somerton would lose a precious area of open space amenity.
- Should not go ahead as this would create ribbon development and is furthest and therefore most inaccessible from the town centre – this would encourage car travel for which the road network is insufficient, increase CO2 emissions, pressure the town centre car parks, cause air pollution and will mean the west side of town will become a dormitory area serving larger towns like Yeovil, Chard and Crewkerne and not Somerton itself.
- Concern that development here would benefit shopping in Tesco, Langport, as there is very little parking in Somerton.
- Environment Agency request further work to evaluate the flood risk of the preferred site as it is susceptible to surface water flooding.
- The railway bridge on Ricksey Lane is very narrow, as is Ricksey Lane, which will need to be improved to accommodate the extra traffic – need a link to the B3165 through Melbury to enable traffic to reach the south without coming back through the town centre to reach the Sutton Road.
- The presence of the railway line will negatively affect future residents' amenity – need to ensure the barrier separating the railway from the houses is maintained.

- Object as it is good quality agricultural land.
- Somerton must take extra houses due to flooding at Langport/Huish Episcopi, but why is the restriction on development to the furthest end of the town not viewed as a constraint at Somerton?
- Strongly support the preferred location, and it is of a scale that could accommodate housing, employment and convenience retail development if appropriate. A series of technical studies are being prepared (by RPS planning consultants) to investigate the potential of developing this land – since discussed in a meeting with RPS.
- A key benefit is its location adjacent to the main route into Somerton from the west and has great potential to enhance the gateway into Somerton and provide a new and better defined edge to the town.

Option 3 (north west):

- This area is best as it is high and dry, with good access to the existing sewage plant.
- Roads will require alteration to ensure traffic flows easily as can only be reached by a very narrow lane with houses on both sides, or through residential areas.
- Provides a natural extension to development limits, is less intrusive on the countryside and shielded by employment.
- If new houses are to be built in Bancombe Road already, it makes sense to continue along that road, as road access should already have been addressed, less visual impact on other houses, any extension to the trading estate could be to the west.
- This land is largely constrained by landscape characteristics; any residual elements that could be considered appropriate would be too small to deliver appropriate growth in Somerton.

Other:

- Oppose any development on greenfield sites outside the current development limit - there are dozens of brownfield sites and derelict buildings in Somerton that should be redeveloped.
- Only one direction for growth would move the town away from shops and facilities so spread around the town such as beyond St Cleers, south of the Mill stream, towards Ricksey Lane.
- The section of Option 2 north of Langport Road and Option 3 north of Bancombe Road should be the preferred option, as this would give better road access to the town, better opportunity for workers to access the trading estate, and would avoid the south western part of Option 2 which is subject to severe flooding every year.
- Build new development on the edge of Kingsdon, the old Somerton Wireless station, or Compton Dundon to help support their school, instead of Somerton.
- As there is no proposed Site Allocations DPD, there is a need to establish a greater deal of certainty and clarity by setting growth locations out in a policy; either within Policy SS4 or a separate 'Directions of growth at the Market Towns' policy.

Response

Option 1 (south):

Most of this option is identified as being of moderate landscape and visual sensitivity, and having moderate capacity to accommodate built development (Peripheral Landscape study, 2008). Accept that topography may be an issue as the north of the area slopes down towards the river, and that areas of high flood risk (flood zone 3b), which adjoin the northern/western edge of this location, should be avoided.

Development further east is unlikely to be acceptable as it is within the Conservation Area.

This option is located close to the town centre (approximately 300m), so there is good potential to walk/cycle to the town centre, although inadequate road access is a potential issue, as highlighted by consultees.

Option 2 (west):

The Local Development Framework Project Management Board concurred with the suggestion to reduce the scale of housing at Somerton by 100 to 400 dwellings.

There are no designated wildlife sites in this option, but the south east part of the site is within the potential foraging range of pipistrelle bats (European Protected Species), so mitigation measures may be required.

Feasibility assessment would be required prior to any firm proposal in the Core Strategy to build a new train station; it is considered unlikely that the proposed level of development would be sufficient to fund a new station in Somerton. The Somerset Future Transport Plan (2011) aims to encourage more people to travel by rail, which could include researching the need for new services (Policy SUS7). However, decisions in the Core Strategy will be made on the basis of no new train station at Somerton.

There is a Right of Way which crosses the middle of the site that should be protected; informal open space covers part of the option but this can also be protected from built development if necessary.

Options 2 and 3 are similar distances (approx 1 km) from the town centre. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan should provide further detail on the potential 'strategic' road improvements that may be necessary to accommodate development. There is potential that new residents will travel to larger towns elsewhere, but this should be mitigated through appropriate job creation and ensuring appropriate provision of community services and facilities at the town.

Although this option is not within an area of high fluvial flood risk, surface water flooding is an issue in the southern section, which will require further work to assess and mitigate. Noise from the railway line is not considered to represent an overriding constraint, although mitigation measures may be required. The option is not classed as Best and Most Versatile agricultural land.

Regarding the comparison with development at Langport/Huish Episcopi, the lack of potential sites within the existing town means that development on the periphery of Somerton is necessary to meet the needs of the town up to the year 2028. Given the constraints of geographically closer areas to the town centre to the north, east and south, the most realistic option is to develop the town to the west or north west.

Option 3 (north west):

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan should provide further detail on the potential 'strategic' road improvements that may be necessary to accommodate development.

It is agreed the northern part of this option has landscape constraints (moderate-low capacity in the Peripheral Landscape Study), but given the proposed reduction in the scale of housing at Somerton, it would now be possible to accommodate the proposed housing numbers on land between the Northfield Farm allocation and the Bancombe Road Trading Estate with a high landscape capacity. However it may be

difficult to also accommodate the emerging increased requirement for 3 ha of employment land, whilst still allowing for any necessary buffering between the housing and employment (akin to that proposed in the Deposit Draft Local Plan).

Other:

Evidence in the SHLAA suggests there are relatively few sites within the town, and certainly would not be sufficient to accommodate the proposed scale of housing growth at Somerton. Similarly, there is no evidence in the SHLAA that alternative sites are available on the edge of Somerton in addition to the options considered; except to the east but that has not been considered due to adverse impact on the historic environment (within a Conservation Area). It is worth noting that the section of Option 2 north of Langport Road currently lacks evidence in the SHLAA as to the availability of this area for development, but is still considered as part of the general direction of growth.

The other areas suggested to take development instead are all in less sustainable locations than Somerton i.e. would result in large scale development in the countryside away from existing towns, and would require most new residents to travel to work, shops, key services etc, which is likely to be by car given the lack of alternatives.

Agree that the proposed directions of growth require a formal policy in order to set a clear and certain basis for delivering the required development.

Conclusion

- Option 1 should not be pursued due to environmental constraints, and due to a lack of evidence that the land is available and deliverable.
- The northern section of Option 3, where there would be a major landscape impact and there is a lack of evidence as to site availability, should be removed.
- There is little to choose between the Option 2 and (refined) Option 3.

Recommendation:

- That a combination of Draft Core Strategy Option 2 to the west and the refined Option 3 to the north (i.e. excluding area north of Bradley Hill Lane) should be identified as the preferred location for strategic growth at Somerton.
- Include a 'Direction of Growth' policy in the Core Strategy, which indicates that in Somerton the direction of strategic growth will be a combination of land to the west and north as shown on the following map.

