

LDF PMB and MAG Combined Group

Core Strategy Workshop 9 – November 23rd 2011 Policy SS2: Development in Rural Settlements – further guidance

Report by Keith Lane – Policy Planner

Purpose

To present members of the LDF PMB the draft revised Policy SS2: Development in Rural Settlements and further supporting guidance as previously requested.

Recommendation

That members of the LDF PMB note and endorse the draft revised Policy SS2 and further guidance as to how the policy should be applied, which will form the basis for the policy and supporting text for the Core Strategy Publication Plan.

Background

Policy SS2 in the draft Core Strategy (incorporating preferred options) set out the type of development that was appropriate at ‘Rural Settlements’ i.e. settlements outside Yeovil, the Market Towns and the Rural Centres. Following consideration of consultation responses, the general approach set out in Policy SS2 was supported at the Project Management Board meeting on May 26th 2011. However, the public consultation did raise some issues with the policy and its supporting text, and the report to the PMB recommended the following key changes:

- Identify the level of development that is likely to take place at the Rural Settlements tier.
- Explain what is justified and commensurate in any given location.
- Make it clearer that the policy allows a mix of market and affordable housing.
- Further guidance/explanation as to how a development can be considered to increase the sustainability of a settlement.
- Separate the ‘rural exceptions site’ element of the policy.

The PMB particularly requested that the fourth bullet point be pursued. This report presents the draft revised Policy SS2 and in particular the supporting text to reflect the need for further guidance. It will form the basis for re-writing the policy and the supporting text for the Publication Plan.

Report

The text from the next paragraph below will broadly constitute the supporting text for the policy SS2. The actual policy is shown in this paper for completeness and to demonstrate a change in one regard. The policy wording is as previously agreed by the Project Management Board and does not include reference any more to rural exception sites. The one change reflecting the content of this report is the introduction of the last two sentences of the policy. These seek clear local support for proposals and consistency with neighbourhood plans, parish plans or village design statements where produced. Clarity that housing development should only be permitted in settlements with key services is also set out in policy and clarified in the proposed supporting text.

The Core Strategy focuses new development at the most sustainable locations in the District i.e. Yeovil, the Market Towns, and the Rural Centres. However, the rural nature of South Somerset means that there are many smaller settlements scattered

across the District that do not meet the criteria necessary to be considered a Market Town or Rural Centre, but where some development to enhance their sustainability would be acceptable. The settlements in this tier of the hierarchy are known as 'Rural Settlements'.

Policy SS2 seeks to ensure the development needs of Rural Settlements can be met, whilst restricting the scale of such growth to be consistent with the spatial strategy that focuses most development at Yeovil, the Market Towns, and the Rural Centres. The Rural Settlements tier of the settlement hierarchy covers a range of settlements that vary widely in size, role, function, local priorities, and constraints. Therefore, the interpretation of Policy SS2 will depend on applying these factors in considering proposals at each individual settlement; for example a proposal that is acceptable in one of the larger Rural Settlements such as Templecombe, which has a relatively strong employment function and good sustainable transport links with the presence of a train station, will be different to a smaller Rural Settlement such as Compton Dundon which doesn't have these features.

Applications for development in Rural Settlements should include necessary supporting evidence to justify that the criteria have been met. Such proposals should be based upon the meeting the needs of the Rural Settlement in question, and should undergo early engagement and preferably demonstrate support from the community, consistent with the Government's 'localism' agenda. Clearly the more types of development a proposal contains the more broad based a case can be made for sustainable development. Given that policy SS2 is starting from the premise of no development unless certain conditions are met the evidence for development being of a strong sustainable nature is particularly important to provide. Furthermore the local community are best placed to determine local need and what will make their settlement more sustainable and there will be an expectation that development proposals have either emanated from the local community or been tested and checked through local consultation and engagement. There may be occasions when nearby settlements effectively provide local services for each other that a case can be made for development in one settlement to meet the needs of the cluster. Clear evidence of the functional service relationship between the settlements will be needed.

The following sub-headings provide further explanation on meeting the three key criteria on the types of development that will be appropriate in Rural Settlements i.e. employment, local services and housing.

Employment opportunities

National policy¹ supports small scale economic development where it provides the most sustainable option in villages or other locations that are remote from local centres, and recognises that a site may be an acceptable location for development even though it may not be readily accessible by public transport. The draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that policies should support sustainable economic growth in rural areas. Some examples of employment opportunities that are likely to be acceptable in Rural Settlements include starter units to support individuals or small companies, workshops, and businesses that require a rural location e.g. farm diversification, tourism (see Policy EP9 and EP7 and 8 for further detail – current draft Core Strategy numbers are given and these may change for the actual Publication Plan). The Government initiative to deliver high speed broadband across the country is likely to provide more opportunities for small enterprises to be located in rural areas; and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership

¹ PPS 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth.

believes this broadband initiative is a vital stimulus that businesses need in the area to help the economic recovery.

The scale of employment development that is acceptable in Rural Settlements will vary depending on the size and nature of each settlement.. Policies EP4 and EP6 provide further detail on how applications for economic development in the countryside will be assessed.

Local services

Accessible local services that reflect community needs and support well-being are vital to creating strong, vibrant and healthy communities. The draft NPPF supports the delivery and safeguarding of community facilities and services, and allowing established facilities to develop and modernise. Supporting local services and facilities is particularly important in Rural Settlements in South Somerset where car travel is often the only realistic way of getting around, which contributes to increased CO₂ emissions, traffic congestion, poor health, is costly for individuals, and makes it difficult for those without a car to access services. Therefore, Policy SS2 generally supports proposals to create or enhance community facilities and services in Rural Settlements – this could include local shops; community halls; pubs; health and social care facilities; cultural, sports, recreation, faith and education facilities.

Housing

National policy states that policies should take into account the need to provide housing in rural areas, in order to enhance or maintain their sustainability;² and although the focus should be on existing towns and identified service centres, some new housing should be provided to meet identified local need in other villages.³

It is important to ensure that the occupiers of new homes in Rural Settlements are able to live as sustainably as possible by having easy access to basic facilities that provide for their day to day needs, such as a local convenience shop, post office, pub, children's play area/sports pitch, village hall/community centre, health centre, faith facility, and primary school. Therefore, new housing development should only be located in Rural Settlements that offer a range of these services i.e. two or more (in simple terms it is not realistic to expect a small hamlet with little service base to be made a more sustainable location).

Housing proposals should also, where possible, demonstrate how they would support facilities, especially through their enhancement or replacement. The draft NPPF states that housing in rural areas should not be located in places distant from local services. The argument that extra housing units per se will support services is not considered tenable when there is clear evidence in the last 30 years of substantial rural settlement growth both nationally and in South Somerset whilst rural services in both have continued a steady decline. Small infill development per se would not therefore be considered sustainable however should it meet local need either for affordable housing, low cost market housing or a different form of housing in limited supply for locals (eg small bungalows for elderly local households to move to and remain in the village or two bedroom accommodation for young households setting up) then it may be considered more sustainable.

Meeting identified housing need refers to both market and affordable housing, although it will generally be expected that affordable housing is included in proposals at Rural Settlements. The draft NPPF removes the 'rural exception site' policy, with

² PPS 3: Housing.

³ PPS 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

the intention of maintaining the focus on affordable housing but giving greater flexibility for local councils to set their own approach to delivering housing in rural areas. This includes considering whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs.

Residential proposals, including infill, will need to consider the current mix of housing in the Rural Settlement and ensure they are making a positive contribution to the mix of housing in the settlement. For example, Rural Settlements that currently have a concentration of larger housing units would potentially benefit from a proposal for social rented, smaller family houses, and low cost market housing, which would help achieve a better overall mix of housing in the settlement. In consequence a more balanced community with better prospects for local people to obtain affordable housing or access a wider range of market housing can be achieved. Policy HG5 specifically considers housing mix.

Affordable housing in Rural Settlements will generally be supported when accompanied with evidence of local need and further detail on affordable housing is set out in Policy HG4.

Policy SS4 sets out the scale of housing development that should be delivered in the Rural Settlements tier of the settlement hierarchy. As a broad guide, and to be consistent with the spatial strategy, it is unlikely that development of 50 dwellings or greater will be acceptable in an individual Rural Settlement up to the year 2028, and in the majority of cases the scale will be much less. Each case must be assessed however on its merits and a development in excess of 50 dwellings could be justified in unusual circumstances. Annual monitoring of housing delivery in the Rural Settlements will be undertaken to ensure Policy SS2 is being applied as intended.

Policy SS2: Development in Rural Settlements

Development in Rural Settlements (not Market Towns or Rural Centres) will be strictly controlled and limited to that which:

- Provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement; and/or
- Creates or enhances community facilities and services to serve the settlement; and/or
- Meets identified housing need, particularly for affordable housing.

Development will be permitted where it is commensurate with the scale and character of the settlement, provides for one or more of the types of development above, and increases the sustainability of a settlement in general. Proposals should be consistent with the relevant Parish Plan/Village Design Statement/Neighbourhood Plan as appropriate, and should generally have the support of the local community following robust engagement and consultation. Proposals for housing development should only be permitted in Rural Settlements that have key services.