

South Somerset's settlement hierarchy workshop discussion paper March 2011

Rural Service Provision

Introduction

In September 2000 District Executive were informed of research undertaken to respond to the concerns of Area East Committee regarding emerging planning policy and the sustainability and viability of rural communities. Attention was focused on issues around rural services and new housing development over the period 1991-1997, although wider issues around the future of rural communities were briefly reviewed. The report concluded that there was little evidence to justify the notion that significant levels of development in villages will sustain existing facilities. The research has been updated in order to assess if that conclusion is still valid and will form part of the Core Strategy evidence base.

Sustainable Development - National Context

The key focus of national planning policy is the delivery of sustainable development. Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1)¹ expects planning authorities to set a clear vision for the pattern of future development accompanied by clear objectives for achieving that vision. They should consider the problems (social, economic and environmental) of their communities and relate them the use and development of land. Local spatial planning should aim to contribute to place shaping and delivery by contributing to the achievement of sustainable development (PPS12)².

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) reiterates the aim of national housing policy to *“ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live”*³. In order to achieve this a number of objectives are set out, including to increase the supply and affordability of housing and *“to create sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities in all areas both urban and rural”*⁴. Paragraph 10 states that an expected outcome of housing policy is that the planning system should deliver housing development in locations that are suitable and offer a good range of community facilities as well as access to jobs, key services and infrastructure. The PPS requires a strategy to be made for the planned location of new housing development, which takes into account a number of factors including, accessibility of proposed development to existing local community facilities, infrastructure and services, including public transport and the need to provide housing in market towns and villages in order to maintain or enhance their sustainability by considering the way they function⁵. Affordable housing in rural communities is expected to be high quality and contribute to the creation and maintenance of sustainable rural communities in market towns and villages. It is recognised that a Rural Exception Policy can be used to deliver sites for affordable housing only in rural settlements⁶.

Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (PPS4) expects most development that is not in larger urban areas to be located in or near to local service centres where employment, housing, services and other facilities can be provided close together, thereby helping to ensure that there is public transport provision and opportunities for access by walking or cycling are improved. These locations could include a country town, a single large village or a group of villages⁷. This stance reflects that in Planning Policy

¹ PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development, 2005. Paragraph 32

² Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning, June 2008 (PPS12). Paragraph 2.1

³ PPS3 (2010) Paragraph 9

⁴ PPS3 (2010) Paragraph 9

⁵ PPS3: Housing, June 2010. Paragraph 38. Role and Function of Settlements has been considered by Baker Assoc (2009)

⁶ PPS3: Housing (2010) Paragraph 30

⁷ PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth (PPS4). Policy EC6

Guidance 13: Transport (PPG13) where a key planning objective is to ensure that jobs, leisure, services and facilities are accessible by public transport, walking, and cycling (which is especially important for those who do not have access to a car). In preparing their development plans local authorities are expected to take accessibility into account when deciding where such uses should be located.⁸ PPG13 does however recognise the importance of promoting employment opportunities in rural areas and increasing pressure for the diversification of agricultural businesses or re-use of existing farm buildings and that development plan policies should be realistic about the availability of alternatives to the car⁹.

In order to ensure that development plan policies are achieving sustainable development objectives the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that local development documents be subject to a sustainability appraisal, which will incorporate the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive¹⁰.

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS)

The Government is committed to the revocation of regional spatial strategies; this was initially sought in July 2010 however a successful High Court challenge has re-established that they are part of the development plan. This is a temporary position until the Localism Bill is enacted, which could be in 6-12 months time. In the meantime the RSS is a material consideration in planning matters. Despite this period of uncertainty it is clear that it is the Government's intention that decisions on matters such as housing allocations and settlement hierarchies will be determined at a local level.

Given its position within the district as the focal point for economic activity and service provision Development Policy A of the RSS¹¹ identifies Yeovil as a Strategically Significant Town. The designation of other settlements is left to individual local planning authorities. The RSS distinguishes between towns that already play an important role in the provision of jobs and services (Development Policy B – development at Market and Coastal Towns) which are expected to be the focus for locally significant development in the future and smaller towns and villages where small scale economic and housing development to meet local needs and enhance services should be promoted (Development Policy C – Development at Small Towns and Villages).

Draft Core Strategy (incorporating Preferred Options), October 2010

Draft Core Strategy Policy SS1 sets out the settlement hierarchy for South Somerset; this has been determined by the role and function of settlements¹² and Development Policies A to C Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Whilst the RSS will be revoked it is considered that these policies present a strong rationale for determining settlement hierarchies within the context of national planning policy outlined above.

The Draft Core Strategy preferred option for the spatial distribution of growth outside Yeovil concentrates development primarily in Yeovil (49%) and the Market Towns (35%) with the remainder in Rural Centres (9%) and other Rural Settlements (7%).

Whilst Draft Core Strategy Policy SS4: Delivering New Housing Growth does not provide a figure for future provision in Rural Settlements, it is expected that further growth will be

⁸ PPG13: Transport, 2001 (updated Jan 2011).

⁹ PPG13: Transport, 2001 (updated Jan 2011). Paragraph 43

¹⁰ Directive on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (2001/42/EC).

¹¹ The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West Incorporating the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes – For Public Consultation July 2008

¹² South Somerset Settlement Role and Function Study Final report April 2009

permitted where appropriate in line with draft Policy SS2¹³ which seeks to provide for the delivery of sustainable development in Rural Settlements. In these countryside locations development will be restricted to that which:

- provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement and/or
- creates, contributes to or enhances community facilities and services to serve the settlement; and/or
- meets identified housing need, particularly for affordable housing.

Development which is commensurate with scale and nature of the settlement, increases the sustainability of the settlement and provides for one or more of the types of development above will be permitted.

Research Methodology

The research presented examines the change in facilities and housing growth in South Somerset between 1991 and 2010. The 8 facilities included in the original survey and therefore in the update are:

Food Shop	Non-Food Shop
Bank/Building Society	Pub
Post Office/Shop	Post Office
General Store (may be in petrol station)	Café/Restaurant/Take-away

In October 2010 Area Development staff collected data on the 8 categories of village facilities at parish level to be used to update that collated from the 1991 Rural Services Surveys¹⁴. Whilst an effort was made to collect primary data from every parish unfortunately 1991 data was not available for all parishes therefore only the parishes with data available at both 1991 and 2010 have been used in this analysis (69 parishes). The 2010 data for the remaining parishes is however shown in Appendix A¹⁵. In order to retain consistency and aid comparison with the 1991 data the settlements are grouped according to their position in the settlement hierarchy in the adopted South Somerset Local Plan (2006). Towns as defined in the adopted local plan are not included in the study.

The number of dwellings in each parish was taken from the 1991 census data and the number of new dwellings (net completions) over the period 1991 to 2010 has been calculated using the Spatial Policy Team’s own housing development monitoring database.

Findings

The detailed spreadsheets setting out the findings of this study are shown in Appendix A. The main findings are summarised below:

- For the District overall, in the period 1991 to 2010 dwellings increased by about 16% whereas facilities decreased by about 20%. Excluding the figures for Yeovil Without, which includes parts of the built up area of Yeovil, results in a dwelling increase of about 8% but a reduction in facilities of about 29%;
- In terms of facilities banks/building societies showed the greatest decline (down by 79%) followed by post office/shops (down 55%) and food shops (down by 49%),

¹³ What that level of provision might be will be discussed in a paper at the next workshop.
¹⁴ Devised by the Rural Development Commission and supplied to the District Council by the Community Council for Somerset.
¹⁵ If a settlement is not listed at all this means that no data was provided.

general stores declined by 8% café/restaurants/take-away are down by 7% and non-food shops declined by 6%. The only service to increase overall is post offices (up 67%). This seems contrary to what might be expected given the recent programme of post office closures, however as already noted post office/shops have declined by 55% which could suggest that the post office facilities that have been lost fall into this category. It is likely that some post offices may have previously existed whilst the shop element remained viable and ceased once viability decreased. Data returned from Area North indicated that 3 post offices are mobile and 1 travels in (it is noted that the Stoke sub Hamdon Post Office is now shared with a shop - from March 2011) whilst in Area West the East Chinnock post office is part time;

- Of the 69 Parishes in the survey 35 lost facilities, 12 gained facilities and 22 remained the same over the study period;
- Of the parishes that lost facilities there was an overall growth in dwellings of 67% (ranging from 41.8% to 5.6%);
- In the parishes that gained facilities, there was a 12.5% overall housing growth (ranging from 3.5% to 36.4%);
- Where the level of facilities remained static there was an overall housing growth of 40% (ranging from 2.9% to 34%);
- In the 10 parishes (excluding Yeovil Without) with the lowest housing growth (2.4% to 6.8%) 6 were no change, 4 lost and none gained facilities;
- In the 10 parishes with the highest housing growth (41.8% to 23.8%) 4 gained facilities, 3 lost facilities and in 3 the level of facilities stayed the same. The parish with the highest level of housing growth lost facilities;
- Only 12.5% of overall housing growth came from parishes that gained facilities.

Figure 1 shows the total number of facilities for the whole district in the years 1991 and 2010.

Figure 1. District Total Facilities 1991 and 2010

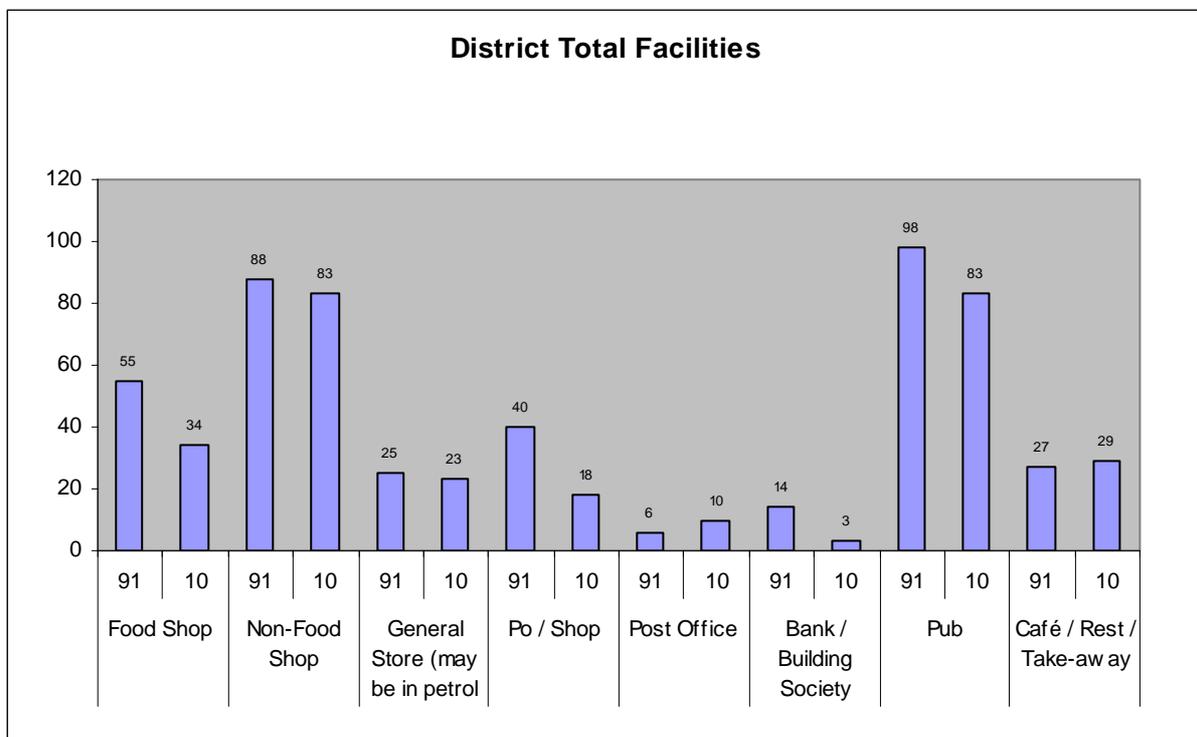
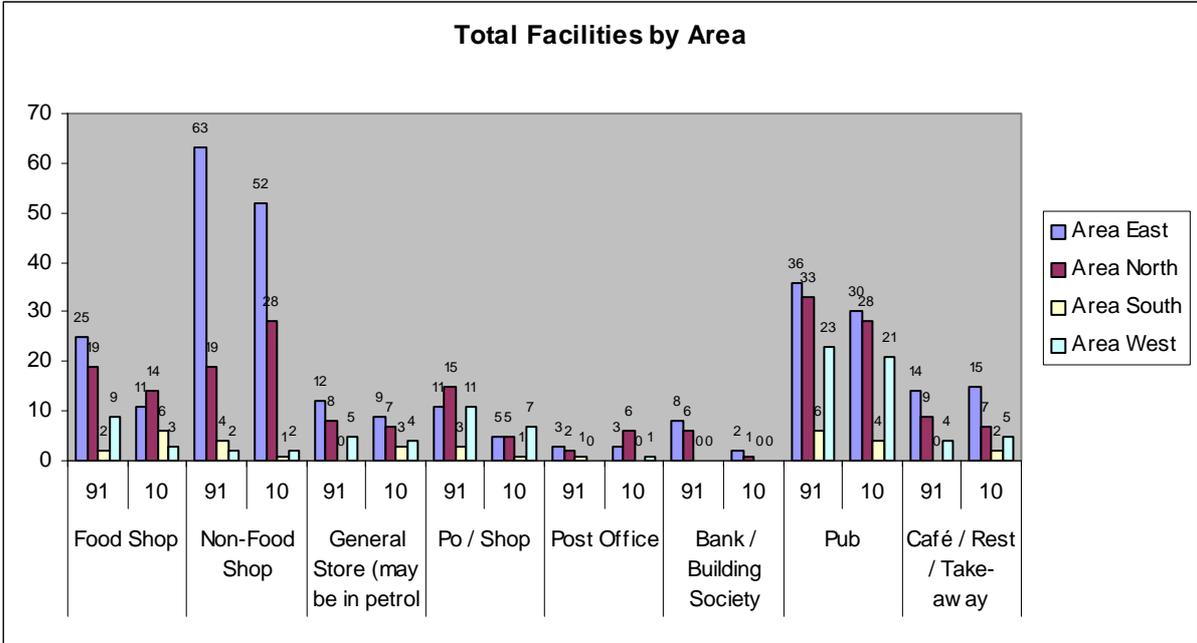


Figure 2 shows the level of facilities in each category for each of the 4 Areas in 1991 and 2010.

Figure 2. Facilities by Area 1991 and 2010



It is interesting to note that Area East shows a generally high level of facilities an explanation for this, at least in part, could be the fact that there are 3 Rural Centres for that area within the survey (Burton, Castle Cary/Ansford and Milborne Port).

As with the data presented in 2000 the figures provide little evidence of a relationship between housing growth and the provision of facilities. This tenuous link can be further exemplified by the contents of the Area East and Area North Tables where parishes with Villages in principle suitable for development (listed under Policy ST2) show greater levels of housing growth together with a greater decline in facilities. Area East shows a 45.2% total loss of facilities and a 23.3% increase in housing growth and Area North shows a 26.8% total loss of facilities and a 13.3% increase of housing growth. The Parishes in Area East with Rural Centres (Policy ST1) show a decline in facilities, which is surprising given that these are locations where one might expect to see growth however facilities have decreased by 37.5%.

It is noteworthy that at a District wide level food shops have declined by 49% although general stores are down by only 8%, this suggests that individual local food shops such as butchers or bakers may have closed but general stores have been less affected by the economic climate and changing shopping patterns.

The findings of this study show that there is little evidence to support the argument that housing growth should be widely spread across the district to aid the retention of facilities such as local shops and pubs. The retention of those facilities is likely to be influenced by factors that are more significant than an increase in housing. These include the ability of shopkeepers to stock a diverse range of goods, landlords being able to cater for the needs of the local community, financial and policy decisions of service providers and the occupiers of

the new homes. The inhabitants are likely to have cars and therefore access to a wide variety of, and often-cheaper goods in the larger towns.

Conclusions

The Draft Core Strategy settlement hierarchy reflects the approach advocated in national planning policy by focussing growth in Yeovil, Market Towns and Rural Centres. Draft Policy SS2 makes provision for mixed-use development in Rural Settlements. There is little evidence in this study to support the notion that significant levels of housing development in Rural Settlements will sustain local facilities. However, it could be argued that Policy SS2 will lead to the provision of a greater mix of housing in Rural Settlements by allowing for both market and affordable housing, including Rural Exception sites, and by providing the opportunity to contribute to or enhance community facilities and services as well as local employment which overall will contribute to aim of creating sustainable communities.