

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 2

The Settlement Hierarchy Including Rural Settlements

April 2013

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Issue 2 The Settlement Hierarchy including Rural Settlements

Question 2.1

What evidence led to the inclusion of each of the settlements within each category (Policy SS1)? On what basis has the Council concluded that the use of a sustainability appraisal for the determination of the hierarchy is inappropriate?

- 1.1 The Consultant's report "South Somerset Settlement Role and Function Study" published in April 2009 [CD34] is the prime evidence base and this analysed the following areas in proposing settlements' status within the settlement hierarchy predetermined by the RSS at that time (and subsequently re affirmed by the Council and presented in policy SS1).
 - Employment
 - Housing
 - Retail
 - Community facilities
 - Travel
- 1.2 The report and its implications for settlements' status was a key focus for the "cluster workshops" and this is demonstrated in the Statement of Consultation [CD9] and in particular in appendix 5.
- 1.3 The settlement strategy has been a key issue upon which representations have been received however the strategy and settlements' status within it have remained unaltered with two exceptions. Langport/Huish Episcopi has been upgraded from Rural Centre to Local Market Town in the Proposed Submission Local Plan and Ansford/Castle Cary, Langport/Huish Episcopi and Somerton have been assigned specific Local Market Town Status. These changes were initiated by the LDF PMB at its workshops 1 and 13 respectively and the agenda papers and notes thereto set out the reasons for change in detail [CDs115 and 117].
- 1.4 The determination of the settlement hierarchy by settlement role and function refers to the allocation of settlements within the Council's proposed settlement hierarchy by virtue of their role and function as expounded by the Consultant's report "South Somerset Settlement Role and Function Study" published in April 2009 [CD34]. To this extent the allocation process has been based on the existing character of settlements and is not therefore amenable to meaningful assessment.
- 1.5 The scale of growth occurring within the respective hierarchy tiers has however been subject of specific sustainability appraisal throughout the Local Plan process. In particular at the Issues and Options stage the options of distributing non Yeovil growth to market towns only, to some market towns and rural centres and to all market towns and rural centres was appraised. The Draft Core Strategy stage saw appraisal of dispersed growth in a range of settlements outside Yeovil appraised against a more focussed option with growth focussed on market towns and rural centres and a third option of concentrated growth in market towns. The Proposed

Submission Local Plan settlement strategy policy, and policies SS4 and 5 allotting development provision through the hierarchy were also subject to appraisal. The Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Report of June 2012 [CD 16 a,,b, c and d]] sets this out in general terms and in detail in the relevant appendices to the Report.

Question 2.2

How and when will the identified 'Development Areas' (settlement boundaries) be reviewed?

- 2.1 Policy SS1 of the Local Plan clarifies that rural settlements are considered as part of the countryside to which national countryside policy protection apply (subject to the exceptions identified in Policy SS2). This policy position determines that Development Areas of rural settlements are no longer applicable and are removed once the Local Plan is adopted. The LDF PMB Workshop1 [CD115] considered the matter of Development Areas removal from rural settlements and affirmed this position. Appendix 2 of the Local Plan shows that the Development Areas Policy will no longer be saved as it is to be replaced by policy SS1 and SS2 of the new Local plan. There is no requirement or intention to review these outgoing development areas of rural settlements unless and until a Local plan review were to change this overarching policy position.
- 2.2 The Local Development Scheme 2013 – 2016 presents a programme of Development Plan activity and supplementary planning guidance. This programme does not contain any reference to review of Development Areas. The focus of the Local Development Scheme is on completing the current emerging Local Plan and then on producing Development Plans to assist in implementation of development proposals within the Local Plan alongside needed supplementary planning guidance to inform decisions on applications for development. It will be for the Council's review of the Local Development Scheme to assess when the Development Areas remaining for Yeovil, the Market Towns and Rural Centres are to be reviewed. The report to Full Council suggested that a triennial review period be adopted suggested a 2016 date for consideration of the issue of Development Area boundaries.

Question 2.3

Paragraph 54 of the NPPF suggests that consideration be given to allowing some market housing to facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing. Should this approach be more clearly reflected in the Local Plan?

- 3.1 This approach is clearly reflected in the Proposed Submission Local Plan in policy SS2 and in the supporting text. Indeed paras 54 and 55 of the NPPF are expressly referenced in the supporting text of the Proposed Submission Local Plan. Policy SS2 clearly identifies affordable housing as an exception justifying development in rural settlements. Para 4.47 of the supporting text of the Proposed Submission Local Plan clarifies that mixed housing schemes are supported where they comply generally with the policy.
- 3.2 In considering the NPPF and its implications for the emerging Core Strategy at Full Council on 23rd April 2012 the Council endorsed the comment in relation to NPPF para 54 that

“Approach set out in Policy SS2: Developing in Rural Settlements endorsed. Given that the NNPF allows for market housing with affordable housing it is unlikely that affordable housing only sites will come forward. Given the provisions of SS2 it is not considered necessary or appropriate to re-introduce a rural exceptions policy.”

Question 2.4

How will the needs of other villages in rural areas (i.e. not rural centres) be met? Do any of the other villages (e.g. Templecombe, Forton and Sparkford) satisfy the requirements to be classified as a rural centre?

- 4.1 Policy SS2: Development in Rural Settlements and its supporting text sets out the approach to meeting the needs of other villages [CD3a, para 4.31 – 4.50 and Policy SS2]. This outlines that whilst the scale of development at other villages will be restricted in order to be consistent with the overall strategy and their rural character, some development in order to enhance the sustainability of these settlements is acceptable.
- 4.2 Policy SS2 sets out the three ‘types’ of development that will be appropriate in rural settlements, relating to provision of employment opportunities, community facilities and services, and housing need. This approach allows flexibility to meet locally needed development, consistent with the settlement strategy. Further explanation on this policy approach is contained in a Project Management Board report [CD115, PMB1, ‘Responses to objections to Policy SS2 and consequent recommendation’] that considers issues raised in consultation on CD1.
- 4.3 The scale of employment and housing development that should be delivered at the rural settlements tier in the hierarchy, in order to ensure their needs are met, is set out in Policies SS3 and SS5 i.e. 11.86 ha of employment land and 2,242 dwellings [CD3b, M34 and M74]. The distribution of growth is based upon balancing jobs and homes in order to promote more sustainable and self-contained communities [CD3, para 4.86; CD3b, M64]. In addition, Policy SD1 [CD3] outlines the Council’s overall approach to delivering sustainable development in South Somerset.
- 4.4 The South Somerset Settlement Role and Function study [CD34] was used as the basis for determining the settlement hierarchy, assessing all settlements in the district in terms of employment function, retail and community services role, and self-containment and sustainable travel opportunities. This study identified six rural centres as being focal points in their local area for retail and strategic community facility provision. This approach is explained in the plan [CD3, para 4.13 – 4.27].
- 4.5 In preparing the local plan, the potential of other settlements to be rural centres was considered [CD115, PMB1, ‘Are there any other settlements that should be upgraded to a rural centre?’. However, only the six rural centres originally identified in the Settlement Role and Function study were considered as providing a range of retail or community services to meet the needs of the local area. Regarding the examples given in the question, Templecombe lacks retail provision in particular [CD9b, page 22 of Appendix 8]; Forton lacks health facilities [CD34]; and Sparkford lacks health facilities and only has a private primary school [CD34].

- 4.6 The approach advocated in Policy SS2 allows appropriate locally needed development for those villages that do not satisfy the requirements to be classified as a rural centre.

Question 2.5

Limited employment and residential growth in the rural centres of Bruton, Ilchester, Martock/Bower Hinton, Milborne Port, South Petherton and Stoke sub Hamdon, is supported by the Council but are the levels of proposed growth properly justified and if so is reliance on the Development Management process to secure the implementation of this provision appropriate? What is the role of the Site Allocations DPD in securing delivery of the proposed growth in the rural centres?

- 5.1 The employment and housing growth in the rural centres is explained and justified in the PSSSLP itself in the relevant parts of chapters 4 and 7 [CD3] in relation to rural centres and in the Employment Topic report [CD11] and Housing Topic report respectively [CD14]
- 5.2 The Council indicate in the PSSSLP chapter 7 supporting text relevant to each rural centre that the levels of residual housing requirement can be delivered through the development management process. The employment provision is identified for similar delivery. These statements are at odds in relation to rural centres with the decision made at Full Council on 17th January [CD13] to recommend a change to the PSSSLP to insert a reference to delivering housing through allocations produced as a priority from a site allocations DPD. This is set out in detail in the Draft Submission South Somerset Local Plan List of All Modifications Modification 74 [CD3b].
- 5.3 This matter was discussed by the LDF PMB at its meeting on 4th October [CD 117] which received the planning Inspector's advisory note relating to the emerging Local Plan. Both the note and the Spatial Planning Manager's supporting report highlight the potential issues that on the one hand the residual housing developments are not huge and can reasonably be expected to be addressed by planning applications in the not too distant future whilst on the other hand certainty of provision is a requirement of Local Plans. It is on the latter basis that Modification 74 was endorsed by firstly the LDF PMB and then the Full Council in due course. The Modification is reflected in the Local Development Scheme for 2013 – 2016 [CD 27]. The Modification M74 should be reflected in the supporting text to each rural centre in Chapter 7 at the expense of reference to delivery through the development management process. It is recognised by the Council that whilst seeking to provide the certainty in rural centres required of local plans, that in the event, the current state of play some 7 years into a 22 year Plan and the Council's encouragement of planning applications to deliver a 5 year land supply may mean that much of the local Plan provision will be effectively secured before the Site Allocations DPD can reach adoption
- 5.4 **Minor Modification 2.1** Delete reference to delivery through the development management process section 7 of the PSSSLP and replace with reference to delivery through the site allocation DPD identified in the Local development scheme [CD27]. This was endorsed by PMB on 8th April 2013.

Ref	Page	Policy/ paragraph	Minor Modification
M2.1	127	7.10	Delete “the development management process” and replace with “a site allocations DPD”
	127	7.11	ditto
	130	7.24	ditto
	130	7.29	ditto
	133	7.40	ditto
	135	7.50	ditto
	136	7.52	ditto
	138	7.65	ditto