

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 10

Wincanton

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Question 10.1

Is the policy for employment growth and change in this area appropriate and justified, including in relation to national guidance and local needs, and in terms of economic, social and environmental impact?

- 1.1 The Council's Settlement Role and Function Study [CD 35, paragraphs 6.20-6.21] identifies Wincanton as a settlement with a strong employment role with an existing concentration of businesses.
- 1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development which for plan-making means positively seeking opportunities to meet the development needs of the district, with the Local Plan meeting objectively assessed needs with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change.
- 1.3 The quantum of employment land provision made within Wincanton has been derived through a three stage Employment Land Review (ELR) process. The first stage identified an overall gross and net supply at April 2010 with the second stage then looking to rationalise the employment land provision provided for in Policy HMA13 of the Proposed Modifications to the Regional Spatial Strategy and apply that rationale to local conditions to create a robust picture of future land requirements. Stage two also identified that the employment land allocations in the Core Strategy would not be sufficient to meet the districts employment land requirements over the plan period and that there was a need/demand for approximately 104 ha of employment land to 2026. The third stage brought together the conclusions of the previous two stages and refined a final requirement of 107.43 ha, taking into account future housing growth and qualitative factors such as geography, type of employment land available and required in each settlement and the views of the Town and Parish Councils.
- 1.4 For Wincanton a requirement of 7.29 ha was identified in the Stage 3 ELR [CD50i, page 30] to support self-contained population growth and create a more sustainable settlement. This consisted of an existing gross supply of 5.91 ha, leaving a residual requirement of 1.5 ha (rounded up from 1.48 ha).
- 1.5 It is acknowledged that this differs from the 8.61 ha of employment land identified for Wincanton in the Proposed Submission South Somerset Local Plan (PSSSLP) as amended [CD 3b, M34]. The justification and reasoning for this is that the Local Development Framework Project Management Board (LDF PMB) Workshop 2 [CD 115, Employment Land Report page 10] identified that in Wincanton there was not a strategic employment land allocation and there was significant local concern over the balance of jobs and homes in the settlement as Wincanton has received a substantial number of housing commitments.
- 1.6 The town is well located on the A303 to the South East and in order to make it attractive to developers and to kick start employment development, a strategic site of 5 ha was considered appropriate for the settlement. The LDF PMB considered that

with a strategic employment land allocation Wincanton had the potential to generate many jobs in the settlement and its future growth could be greater than past performance.

- 1.7 Appendix 7 of the Employment Land Report [CD 115] identifies that Wincanton requires 2.5 ha of employment land to cater for the 375 jobs that will be created in 'B' use activities to 2028. It was argued through the consultation process (particularly the cluster workshops) that Wincanton had seen significant losses of employment land to residential development compared with other settlements in the hierarchy and the supply figures quoted in the ELR [CD50i, page 30] were therefore incorrect as the 2 ha of vacant employment land calculated as part of the supply was not truly available for employment use, and 1 ha of 'B' use employment land has been lost from the New Barns Farm Key Site to which the ELR has attributed 2.2 ha of employment land supply.
- 1.8 The Council accepted that there was justification for decreasing the assumed employment supply provision in Wincanton by approximately 3 ha (1 ha for New Barns Farm and 2 ha for vacant land) giving a total supply of 2.5 ha.
- 1.9 Whilst there is limited quantitative argument for employment land in the town, from a qualitative perspective there was significant local concern that there is a lack of balance between jobs and homes in Wincanton. The settlement had received a significant number of housing commitments but, unlike other Primary Market Towns, it did not have a strategic employment allocation.
- 1.10 Whilst Wincanton has existing commitments of 3.61 ha, the PSSSLP as amended [CD 3a, M34] makes provision for a minimum of an additional 5 ha to be provided as it is considered that this will make the town more attractive to potential developers, providing the opportunity for a range and choice of sites to help support a more balanced and self-contained settlement.
- 1.11 The PSSSLP as amended [CD 3b, M64] looks to deliver more sustainable and self-contained communities through balancing the projected environmental performance with housing needs. Figure 5: Balancing Jobs and Homes illustrates the balance between the percentage of new jobs and the percentage of new homes in market towns as 31.5% and 32% respectively, demonstrating a balanced approach to growth. Given Wincanton's significant levels of residential commitments, the larger employment land requirement make provision for a more appropriate balance between jobs and homes.
- 1.12 Assessments of the environmental, social and economic implications of the scale of growth proposed were undertaken through formal Sustainability Appraisal. For Wincanton, the Sustainability Appraisal [CD 16, paragraphs 5.4.25-5.4.26] did not consider areas of high landscape value and flood risk. It used information from the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to indicate the potential delivery of land for development. In terms of employment, the ability to access the strategic route network was considered necessary in locating strategic employment land. Four potential options were considered in the potential growth of Wincanton:
 - Option 1: West/North West

- Option 2: South West (employment only¹)
 - Option 3: South East
 - Option 4: East
- 1.13 Option 1 was considered to have the most positive effects overall as it is well related to schools, shops, sport facilities and would be most likely to result in minimised journeys by car. Option 2 would result in a more dispersed loss of greenfield land by providing employment use only, and creating the appropriate infrastructure to allow safe access across the A303 was considered to be costly. Developing south of the A303 (Options 2 and 3) could, in the longer term, result in a settlement divided by the national strategic road network and given that there were more suitable options north of the A303 capable of accommodating development, it was considered that it was not necessary to breach this boundary. Option 4 was considered less favourable in landscape and townscape terms and more divorced from existing facilities than Option 1. Overall Option 1 was considered to perform best in sustainability terms.
- 1.14 The Sustainability Appraisal [CD 16, paragraph 6.4.5] identified that the reduced size of the direction of growth (to accommodate 5 ha of 'B' use employment land) reflects the change in the overall strategic approach to the delivery of growth at Wincanton due to the relatively high amount of existing housing commitments in the town. Housing provision was reduced whilst employment land was increased in order to ensure a better overall balance of homes and jobs is provided in the town. At the preferred options stage, Option 1 'West/North West' performed best in the Sustainability Appraisal however given the impact on the landscape, topography and vehicular access in the northern section of this option, the south west of Preferred Option 1 provided the most sustainable area to be taken forward. A key benefit of this was considered to be its good access to the strategic road network.
- 1.15 The Sustainability Appraisal [CD 16, paragraph 6.4.6] found that the provision of extra employment land will make Wincanton more attractive to potential developers, providing the opportunity to have a range and choice of sites and help support a more balanced, self-contained settlement. Negative environmental effects are identified with the potential for impacts arising from increased noise and light pollution within a foraging area for bats. In terms of the issues identified the PSSSLP makes provision to address these through the Development Management process through the implementation of the following policies:
- Policy TA5: Transport Impact of New Development – New development will be required to address its own transport implications and be designed to maximise the potential for sustainable transport.
 - Policy EQ2: General Development - Proposals should protect the residential amenity of neighbouring properties and must not risk the integrity of nationally or locally designated wildlife.
 - Policy EQ4: Biodiversity – Proposals will be considered against protecting the biodiversity value of land and buildings and minimising fragmentation of habitats. Where there is the presence of protected and priority species design should be informed by a survey and impact assessment.

¹ Area for employment only suggested in early engagement with the Town Council.

- Policy EQ7: Pollution Control – Development resulting in light and/or noise pollution or harm to amenity, health or safety will only be permitted if the adverse effects can be mitigated to acceptable levels.
- 1.16 The Council's 2009 Retail Study Update [CD 53, page 99] identified that there was not a qualitative deficiency in convenience retail provision but a need to ensure that quantitative expenditure was directed towards the town centre given a bias towards out-of-centre locations.
- 1.17 It found that on the basis of a comparison with company benchmark turnover levels and assuming re-occupation of the former Cooper foodstore by Co-op, 'surplus' capacity could be 1,000 sqm net of additional convenience goods floorspace by 2014, rising to 1,577 sqm net by 2026. However, caution was urged as there was no certainty over the new destination for the expenditure previously directed to the Cooper store and there was a concern that further expenditure would be directed to out of centre stores in Wincanton. Therefore consideration needed to be given to the ability to replace the former Cooper store and direct further expenditure to the town centre.
- 1.18 The potential for qualitative and quantitative improvements to the level and type of comparison retail provision within Wincanton (740 sqm net by 2026 – assuming a constant market share), was identified although given the role of the centre, its catchment area and the level of retailer requirements, such improvements were considered likely to be modest in nature. The key focus for improving retail provision and the attractiveness of the Town Centre was recommended to be the former Cooper foodstore unit and surrounding Carrington Way area.
- 1.19 This was updated in the Retail Study Update 2010 [CD 54] which was based upon the draft Core Strategy district wide population growth and housing development distribution. The report found that there was capacity for an increase of 1,043 sqm net retail floorspace for convenience retail floorspace by 2014, rising to 1,613 by 2026. For comparison retail, capacity for 138 sqm net additional floorspace by 2014, rising to 710 sqm net by 2026 was identified
- 1.20 Further updates to this information were undertaken through the 2012 Retail Floorspace Capacity Study – 2nd Update [CD 51]. This was undertaken firstly because an updated strategy for residential development across the district had been prepared which, together with updated population growth forecasts, had an impact upon the need for additional retail floorspace across the district and secondly because since the previous assessments updated forecasts for retail expenditure growth and spending on online shopping had been released. This report found that Wincanton had the potential for 1,003 sqm net (equivalent to £12.3 m expenditure) convenience retail floorspace capacity by 2017, rising to 1,314 sqm net (equivalent to £16.4m expenditure) by 2028. For comparison retail the report identified that there was capacity for 156 sqm net (equivalent to £0.6 m expenditure) by 2017, rising to 687 sqm net (equivalent to £3.3 m expenditure) by 2028.
- 1.21 The PSSSLP reflects the findings of the retail assessments and sets out that Wincanton has future comparison retail capacity of 156 sqm net by 2017 rising to 687 sqm net by 2028, with a future convenience retail capacity of 1,003 sqm net by 2017,

rising to 1,314 sqm net by 2028. Emphasis is also placed upon directing retail growth towards the town centre.

- 1.22 The Council's Report on Infrastructure Planning [CD 36] distinguishes between infrastructure that is required to cover existing deficiencies, that which is related to new development and that which responds to the areas aspirations. It breaks infrastructure into three distinct groups, physical, social and green infrastructure and takes each area in turn, examining the infrastructure items within each area. The study identified the level of capacity that each of the infrastructure types has to meet current and future needs and identifies that there are no critical infrastructure requirements for Wincanton. For the purposes of clarity, critical infrastructure is defined as infrastructure that without which development cannot commence.
- 1.23 In Wincanton there were no 'critical infrastructure issues identified but there was a selection of 'necessary' infrastructure requirements identified, which is defined as infrastructure necessary to support new development, but the precise timing and phasing is less critical and development can commence ahead of its provision. In total fourteen pieces of necessary infrastructure were identified, the majority of which relate to the provision of open space and/or leisure facilities [CD 36, Appendix 1] which are primarily anticipated to be provided through the planning application process. Policy SS6 of the PSSSLP makes provision for the Council to secure the provision of (or financial contributions towards) a range of physical, social and green infrastructure which the Council considers necessary to enable development to proceed with this anticipated to be secured through Planning Obligations and/or CIL.
- 1.24 The findings of the Report on Infrastructure Planning [CD16] were reported to the Local Development Framework Project Management Board at Workshop 11 [CD 116] on the 18th January 2012 and endorsed.
- 1.25 The Council considers that the policy for employment growth and change in Wincanton is appropriate and justified. It is appropriate for the towns standing in the settlement hierarchy and draws upon a local desire to provide a better balance between employment and housing provision as a result of the significant loss of employment land to residential development. The local community has helped to shape the level of employment growth and change proposed through early engagement through the cluster workshops.
- 1.26 Given the existing commitments of 698 dwellings in the settlement, the provision of an additional 5 ha of employment land will help to create a more balanced and self-contained community, reducing the need for out-commuting.
- 1.27 The economic, social and environmental impacts of the proposed level of employment growth and change have been assessed through Sustainability Appraisal with the issues identified through this sufficiently able to be addressed through the application of policies within the Submission Draft Local Plan.
- 1.28 The implications of growth upon infrastructure have been considered through the Council's Report on Infrastructure [CD 16, Appendix 1] and there are not considered

to be any critical or necessary infrastructure requirements for the delivery of employment growth in Wincanton.

- 1.29 Overall the policy for employment growth and change in Wincanton is considered to be appropriate to the scale of the settlement within the settlement hierarchy and based upon an identified local desire to provide a better balance between jobs and homes in the town to reduce out-commuting and increase self-containment.

Question 10.2

Is the residual housing requirement of only 5 dwellings sufficient to meet the needs of the town up to 2028? Should more weight have been given to the provision of additional housing in order to sustain the community over the longer-term? How will the town's affordable housing needs be met?

- 2.1 The Council's Settlement Role and Function Study [CD 35, paragraphs 6.20-6.21] identifies Wincanton as a settlement with a strong employment, retail and community role. It has an existing concentration of business and a good variety of shopping and community services that meet the needs of the settlement and the surrounding area.
- 2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development which is the golden thread running through the plan-making process. For plan-making this means positively seeking opportunities to meet the development needs of the district, and the Local Plan meeting objectively assessed needs with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change.
- 2.3 Policy SS5 of the PSSSLP as amended [CD 3b, M74] supports the development of 703 dwellings across the plan period, of which 698 are already committed leaving a residual requirement of 5 dwellings without consent. The level of housing growth for Wincanton has been derived from the Housing Requirement for South Somerset and Yeovil [CD 30] report which developed an overall housing provision requirement for the district. Modifications and updates were subsequently undertaken by the Council including:
- BRES data (2010 and 2011 data) updated on two occasions (taking the base data for the economic calculation forward to 2011 and replacing the assumption adopted by Bakers to derive a 2010 base date)
 - Two updates to population projections (from which household requirements were derived) to reflect 2010 based Population Projections and ONS Population Projections to 2021 (and extended to 2028) to reflect early consideration of the 2011 census.
- 2.4 The distribution of the overall housing provision requirement for the district amongst the identified Strategically Significant Town, Primary Market Towns, Local Market Towns and Rural Centres was determined using the following assessment criteria:

- Sustainability of distribution options
 - Balance of jobs with homes
 - Settlement hierarchy
 - Land availability (demonstrated by Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment); and
 - Local (settlement based) factors including:
 - Economic performance of settlements
 - Size and self-containment
 - Existing saved Local Plan proposals
 - Indicative growth appropriate for settlement types
 - Need to assimilate past growth
 - Environmental/archaeological and flooding constraints
 - Policy aspirations for Rural Settlements
 - Existing commitments; and
 - Market delivery as exemplified by the housing trajectory
- 2.5 Report 10 from Workshop 1 of the Local Development Framework Project Management Board meetings [CD 115] recommended a total housing requirement for Wincanton of 703 dwellings and notes local concerns regarding the scale of growth proposed in the town give the high level of existing commitments compared to other Market Towns in the district. In addition to which it considers that such an approach will reflect the scale of the settlement and allow for the assimilation of growth in the recent past and present and allow for a more permissive approach to employment provision reflecting the considerable loss of employment land in the past.
- 2.8 The issues and options consultation recognised that there has been a strong growth in housing in Wincanton which would need to be better balanced by more employment and jobs and there was a strong desire from the Town and Parish Council to see the requisite amount of employment land to be delivered in line with the housing growth that the settlement had experienced.
- 2.9 The cluster workshops undertaken between November 2009 and March 2010 [CD 131, paragraph 3.9-3.11] allowed for early and meaningful engagement and collaboration with the local community, as encouraged by paragraph 155 of the NPPF, and was an important consideration in determining the appropriate levels of growth for Wincanton. The cluster workshops involved the Parish and Town Council, together with a range of stakeholders suggested by the Parish and Town Council. This enabled the identification of the context for and implications of decisions, the local community to develop their vision for the town based on the Sustainable Community Strategy [CD 32] and growth needs, as well as enabling the early involvement of local Councillors in the decision making process.
- 2.10 The residual housing requirement for Wincanton reflects the overall strategic approach to the delivery of growth in the settlement due to the relatively high level of existing housing commitments within the settlement. Housing provision is therefore at little more than existing commitments whilst employment land has been increased in

order to ensure a better overall balance of jobs and homes in town which was a key issue arising from the cluster workshops.

- 2.11 The Housing Trajectory set out in the PSSSLP as amended [CD 3b, M75] projects that given the significant front loading of housing delivery in the early years of the Plan, a period of assimilation with lower development levels is considered a likely response as there has been a history of lower than expected market delivery in the town.
- 2.12 In terms of the affordable housing needs of the town the Council considers that these will be met (as far as has been viable to provide for) through the existing commitments issued in Wincanton with the key site making provision for the delivery of affordable housing, although it is noted that the Deansley Way site does not make provision for any affordable housing to be provided.
- 2.13 The Council considers that the residual housing requirement of 5 dwellings is sufficient to meet the needs of the town up to 2028 given the existing high level of commitments and history of measured construction rates. The housing trajectory illustrates that the high level of existing commitments are capable of providing an appropriate level of housing growth to sustain the community over the longer term. The small residual housing requirement and the strategic employment provision also enables the settlement to retain its role and function in the settlement hierarchy.