

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 11

Ansford/Castle Cary

April 2013

Issue 11: Ansford/Castle Cary

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Issue 11: Ansford/Castle Cary

Question 11.1

Is the policy for 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? Have all reasonable alternative sites been assessed and has appropriate consideration been given to issues of agricultural land value, topography/landscape, biodiversity and highway impact?

Sustainable development

- 1.1 Due to its strong employment, retail and community role Ansford/Castle Cary is identified as a Market Town in the South Somerset Settlement Role and Function Study Final Report 2009 [CD 34, para 6.20]. The Local Plan recognises that the potential for growth in the settlement is more limited than some other larger Market Towns it is therefore identified as a Local Market Town in Policy SS1: Settlement Strategy [CD 3, paras 4.25 - 4.26 and 4.29].
- 1.2 Proposed Submission South Somerset Local Plan (2012) (PSSSLP) Policy SS5: Delivering New Housing Growth provides for 374 dwellings within the plan period 2006-2028, 156 are already committed and an additional 218 are required [CD 3b, M74]. Given the lack of available land in the urban area this additional growth is likely to be on greenfield land. Policy SS3: Delivering New Employment Land provides for 13.19 ha of employment land, 10.19 ha of which is already committed with 3.00 ha of additional land being required [CD 3b, M34]. In terms of the distribution of growth the approach across the district has been to balance jobs and housing growth, with an underlying view that similarity between a settlement's job growth and housing growth share should assist self-containment and support local job provision [CD 14, para 6.9].
- 1.3 PSSLP policies SS1, SS3 and SS5 have all been subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA); given that the settlement hierarchy policy has directly informed Policy SS5, Policies SS1 and SS5 are appraised together. The balanced approach to the distribution of development has many advantages over a more dispersed approach by ensuring better access to jobs, shops, and facilities and services. This should help reduce the need to travel in the district. The focus on Yeovil, Market Towns and Rural Centres will allow housing need in the larger settlements to be met, whilst limiting new housing in rural settlements where there is generally poor access to jobs, services etc. The landscape and townscape of rural settlements should be better protected than with a more dispersed approach [CD 16c, Appendix 7 p.1-4].
- 1.4 With regards to Policy SS3 the SA identifies the importance of having enough employment land available across the main settlements in the District to support job creation and enable residents to access work, which will support the growth of the South Somerset economy. The distribution of employment land allows residents to have the option to work locally, which raises the level of self-containment in settlements, reducing the need to travel and enabling local services and facilities to be supported. The danger of not delivering sufficient land is that it would raise the level of unemployment, or encourage people to travel to work outside the District, and all the resultant negative impacts associated with this [CD 16c, Appendix 7 p.1-4].

- 1.5 Sustainable development is addressed in paragraphs 7-16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) (NPPF). Paragraph 14 specifically addresses the presumption in favour of sustainable development; for plan making this means positively seeking development opportunities to meet needs and having flexibility to adapt to change. PSSSLP Policy LMT1: Ansford/Castle Cary Direction of Growth and Link Road [CD 3, para 6.119] identifies a direction of growth to accommodate housing, employment and education provision north of Torbay Road and East and West of Station Road. This growth will help to meet the economic and social needs of the settlement. The NPPF is supportive of and promotes such mixed use development in order to promote self-containment [NPPF, paras 17, 37 and 38].
- 1.6 Whilst some concern was raised at the Draft Local Plan Stage [CD1] regarding the requirement for additional employment land. Ward Members had formally requested in July 2010 that Castle Cary should be allocated an additional 3ha employment land. They argued that the existing employment allocation at Torbay Road had been developed at a lower density than had previously been expected and to make up for this lack of additional job formation for the town a further allocation was felt necessary. Policy Officers proposed an additional 3ha of employment land would be commensurate with the scale of the town [CD 115, PMB Workshop 1, 26 May 2011]. The PSSSLP highlights that Ansford/Castle Cary is vulnerable to potential out of centre retail development as it does not possess an anchor store in the Town Centre where there are numerous small retailers. To address this it is considered appropriate to have a retail threshold of 250 sq metres above which any retail proposals would be required to provide an impact assessment [CD 3, para 6.115].
- 1.7 It is considered that the level of growth proposed for Ansford/Castle Cary is appropriate and justified being commensurate with its role and function as a Local Market Town and will contribute towards meeting the social, economic and environmental needs of the settlement over the plan period.

Options for growth

- 1.8 Sustainability Appraisal of Castle Cary/Ansford identified three areas as potential locations for strategic growth and these were presented in the draft Local Plan [CD1]. Option 1 is located to the north of Torbay Road, and east and west of Station Road; Option 2 is located to the north of Ansford Hill and Ansford School; and Option 3 is located to the south of Ansford School & Solomans Lane. Option 1 is the Councils proposed direction of growth [CD 3, para 6.119]. The SA report outlines the reasons for selecting the growth options at the market towns in [CD 16 a paras 5.4.19 – 5.4.30]. Each of the three options for growth were considered in detail through the Sustainability Appraisal process and on balance Option 1 was considered the most sustainable as it is well related to existing employment opportunities, the town centre, schools and will have the least impact on the peripheral landscape [CD 16c, Appendix 6A, p27-34]. Option 1 has the additional benefit of providing the opportunity to provide a link road between Torbay road and Station Road to provide improved access to the existing employment land and integration with the rest of the town.
- 1.9 The reasons for not having a multi-site approach in Market Towns are explained in: Initial Issues of Concern to the Inspector: Council's response (Question 6, paras 6.1 - 6.5) they include the aspiration to create sustainable communities, meaning that the "directions of growth" were intended to provide for all greenfield development at the market towns, thereby best achieving the economies of scale associated with concentrating development. Paragraph 157 of the NPPF makes it clear in that Local Plans should "indicate broad locations for strategic development on a key diagram and land use designations on a proposals map" and "allocate sites to promote

development and flexible use of land, bringing forward new land where necessary, and provide detail on form, scale, access and quantum of development where appropriate". The Council consider the former to be the prime function of the South Somerset Local Plan whilst the latter to be the function of the site allocations development plan document identified in the Local Development Scheme [CD 27].

Agricultural land value

1.10 In terms of agricultural land value the NPPF (para 112) expects local planning authorities to take into account the economic benefits of the "best and most versatile agricultural land"¹ and where they are proposing "significant" development look to locate it on areas of poorer quality land. It is accepted that the direction of growth for Castle Cary/Ansford as shown on Inset Map 1 of the PSSSLP [CD 3] includes agricultural land within this category; however the settlement is very constrained from this perspective being surrounded by high quality agricultural land much of which is grade 1. This is recognised in the Sustainability Appraisal [CD 16c, Appendix 6A, p27-34]. It was therefore not possible to identify alternatives that avoided best and most versatile land. Appendix 11.1A demonstrates the extent of this constraint.

Topography/landscape impact

1.11 The Sustainability Appraisal Report identifies that landscape constraints were considered to discount growth options in the south of the town which explains why the three growth options are all to the north [CD 16a, para 5.4.29]. The evidence for this arose from the Castle Cary Peripheral Landscape Study [CD 68b] which identifies that the land to the east and wrapping around to the south has a low capacity to accommodate built development. This was therefore taken into account as part of the constraints mapping exercise when considering the options for growth. Although it is greenfield land Option 1 is identified as being mainly located in areas as having a largely moderate to high capacity to accommodate built development. The provision of open space would be required in accordance with the policies set out in the Local Plan and high quality design would minimise any adverse impact on townscape. Option 2 however is identified as having a largely low to moderate capacity to accommodate built development and Option 3 a largely moderate to high capacity to accommodate built development [CD 16c, Appendix 6A, p27-34].

Biodiversity impact

1.12 From a biodiversity perspective all three of the growth options for Ansford/Castle Cary score negatively on objective 14 "Conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity" the Sustainability Appraisal identifies that there are two colonies of serotine bats in Castle Cary one located in South Street and the other in Ansford Hill, their presence has also been recorded in South Cary Lane consequently growth in the settlement is likely to have an impact on their feeding grounds to the south, east and north of the town. Whilst this has been recognised as a constraint it is considered that the impacts of development can be mitigated. [CD 16c, Appendix 6A, p. 27-34].

Highway impact

1.13 The close proximity of the proposed Direction of Growth (DOG) [CD 3, para 6.119] to the town centre, schools and the train station offers a relatively good level of accessibility. A link road is recommended as a mitigation measure to minimise adverse traffic effects in this part of the town this would have the effect of improving access and

¹ Land in grades 1, 2, and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (NPPF, CLG, 2012, Annex 2: Glossary)

egress to new and existing employment land and improved integration with the town centre [CD 3, para 6.119]. The SA recognises that by providing mixed use development in the DOG there will be the opportunity for new residents to live and work in close proximity of each other, although it is accepted that there is no guarantee that new residents will work locally. It also accepts that growth in the northern part of the option may lead to increased traffic along Station Road and strategic routes out of the town [CD 16c, Appendix 6A, p.27-31]. The Highway Authority has not raised concerns regarding the impact of the proposed level of growth at Ansford/Castle Cary. In addition detailed issues relating any potential highway impact will be addressed through the forthcoming Site Allocations DPD expected to be adopted in May 2015 [CD 27] and through the development management process by the application of other Local Plan policies such as TA5: Transport Impact of New Development [CD3, para 10.27]. The proposed provision of the new road is discussed further in response to Question 11.2 below.

- 1.14 It is considered that the policy for growth and change in Ansford/Castle Cary is appropriate and justified, including in relation to national guidance and local needs and in terms of economic, social and environmental impact. All reasonable sites have been assessed and appropriate consideration has been given to issues of agricultural land value, topography /landscape, biodiversity and highway impact.

Question 11.2

Is there sufficient evidence to justify the provision of the new road and additional school capacity? How would any land required for a new primary school be identified?

Provision of a new link road

- 2.1 Historically there has been a desire for some form of link road between Torbay Road and Station Road, Castle Cary this was recognised as far back as the adopted Wincanton Local Plan (1987) (Policy T3 (ii)), see Appendix A11.2A.
- 2.2 The potential for a link road was discussed at PMB in July 2011 where clarification was sought and given that it was not a prerequisite to development, however there was recognition that it was a strong aspiration that members wanted exploring [CD 115, PMB Workshop 4 Notes 5 July 2011].
- 2.3 Correspondence with the promoters of the site confirmed that viability testing had been undertaken and initial findings indicated that the road was viable and required. At that stage Somerset County Council were of the opinion that the road was required; consequently the link road was included in PSSSLP Policy LMT1 [CD 3, para 6.119]. The Infrastructure Plan (2012) endorsed by PMB on 18/01/12 [CD 116, PMB Workshop 11] identifies the road to be critical infrastructure at an estimated cost of £855,000. Funding is indicated to come from private sources [CD 36, Appendix, Ref 22].
- 2.4 However, the position changed following consultation on the PSSLP [CD 3] when Somerset County Council (respondee 4103553) asked where the evidence of need was for the link road. South Somerset District Council followed this up and Somerset County Council's position was clarified in an email from Stephen Walford, the then Transport Policy Manager, Economic & Community Infrastructure Commissioning dated 13 November 2012:

The county council recognises that the proposed road may be a desirable link to facilitate proposed development, and furthermore acknowledge that there is significant local community aspiration for such infrastructure. However, at this point the county council cannot confirm its specific need in relation to the development since no formal assessment has been undertaken by either the county or the relevant developers by way of robust evidence. As the link has no strategic importance we would not normally take a view on the requirement or otherwise of this local highway link until we were in receipt of an appropriate Transport Assessment that set out the evidence, whereupon we would make comments and advise on our position in the normal way.

For the purposes of evidencing the local plan, while the county recognises that such a link may be desirable, we are not in a position to be able to confirm that such infrastructure is required.

- 2.5 Following receipt of this statement a minor modification was proposed to the supporting text of the PSSLP [CD 3b, M125] to delete the word “required” (in reference to the link road) and replace it with “expected to be provided” thus reflecting the overall desire to incorporate the link road.

- 2.6 Bell Cornwall on behalf of Donne Holdings have been working with Somerset County Council (SCC) (the partnership) with the intention of submitting a joint planning application for land within the Ansford/Castle Cary DOG [CD3, Inset Map 1]. Between the two, they own the land between Station Road and Torbay Road the site is identified on the plan attached at Appendix A11.2B. Their draft masterplan indicates a link road between Torbay Road and Station Road whilst a Transport Assessment has not yet been undertaken they recognise the qualitative arguments in favour of providing a link between Torbay Road and Station Road. This issue will be addressed in a Statement of Common ground (SCG).

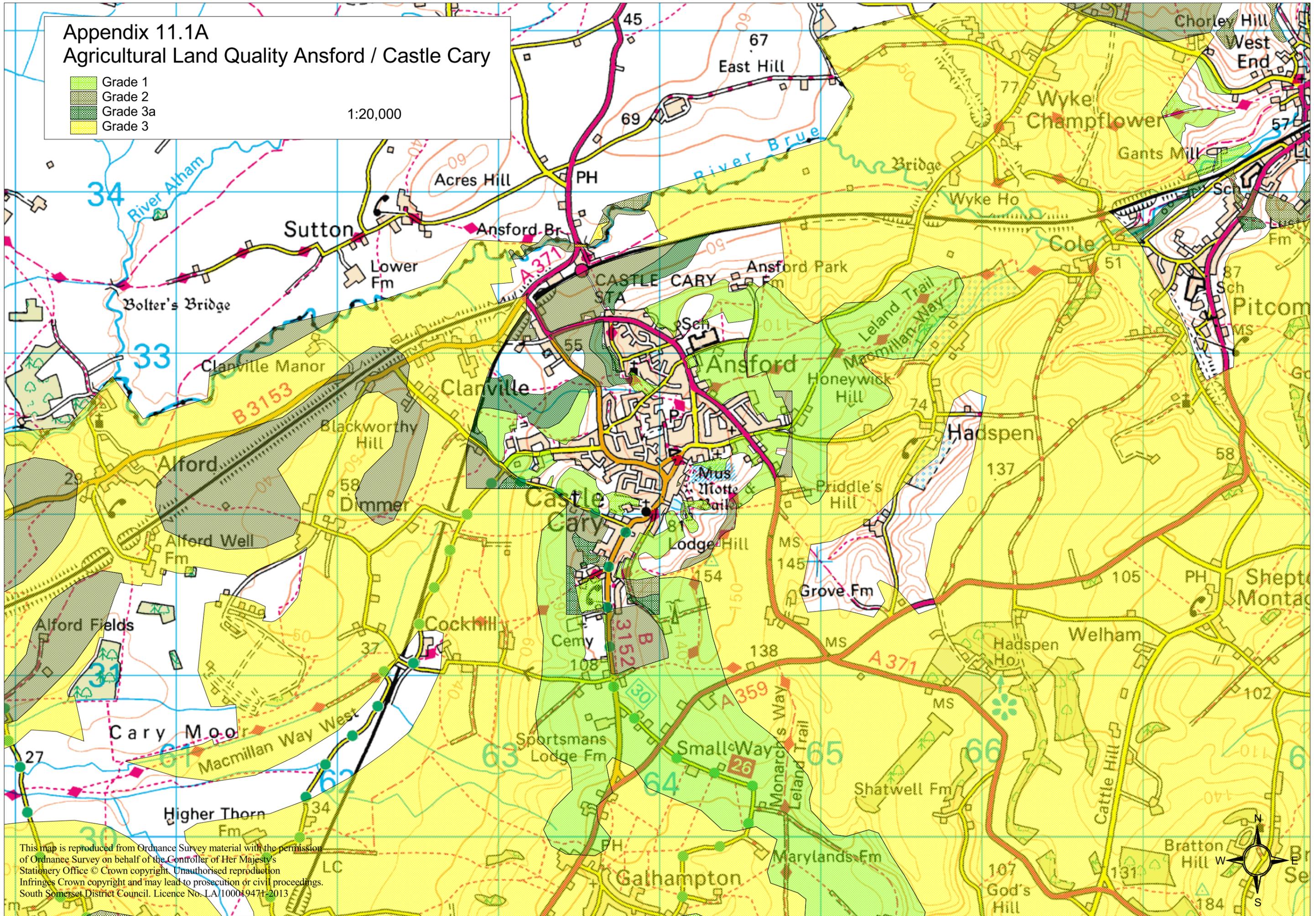
Provision of a new primary school

- 2.7 Paragraph 6.117 of the PSSSLP [CD, 3] identifies that Castle Cary Primary School is estimated to be nearing capacity and there are no opportunities for expansion on site; therefore a new primary school would be required to accommodate the planned growth in the settlement. The new school is likely to be required by 2016 [CD 36, Appendix, Ref 055]. The partnership has confirmed their intention to identify land for a primary school to the south east of the site within the ownership of Somerset County Council. The Infrastructure Plan (2012) identifies the school as being necessary and a funding gap of £5,045,000 is identified [CD 36, Appendix, Ref 055]. This issue will also be addressed in the SCG.

Appendix 11.1A Agricultural Land Quality Ansford / Castle Cary

- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3a
- Grade 3

1:20,000



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Appendix A11.2A

Extracts from the adopted Wincanton Local Plan (1987)

Protected Road Lines

6.34

It is necessary on occasion to protect road lines against development which may prejudice the construction of the eventual road. If this is not done, it may become impossible to provide access and the opportunity to develop certain parcels of land is irrevocably lost.

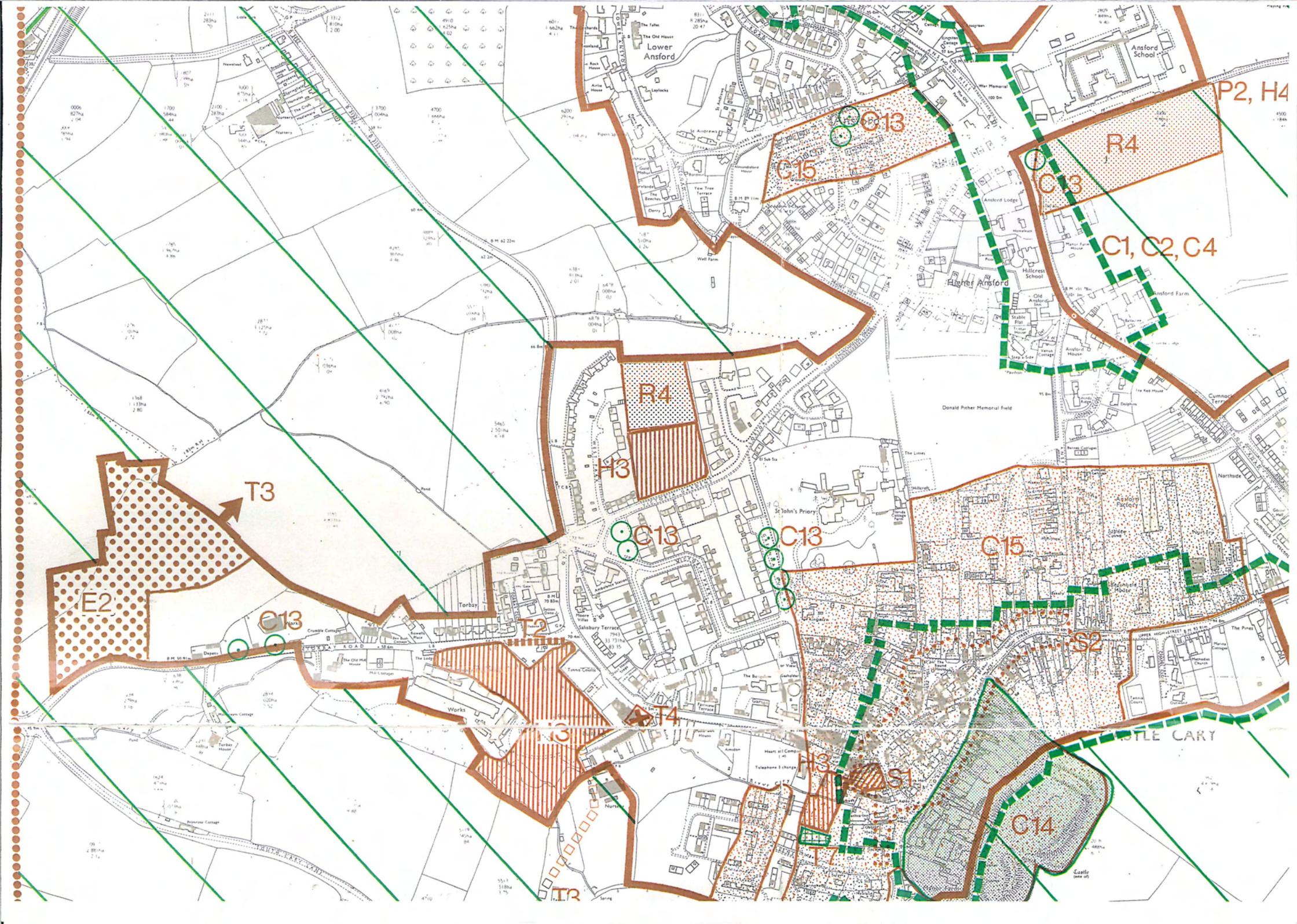
- POLICY T3 (i) PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT ON THE PROTECTED LINE OF AN ACCESS ROAD BETWEEN TORBAY ROAD AND SOUTH STREET, CASTLE CARY WILL NOT BE PERMITTED. The land adjoining this route is not allocated for development in the Plan, but it is considered desirable that the option to develop this land after the end of the Plan period should not be prejudiced. However, this route may prove attractive to through traffic and by reason of this, the Torbay Road/Station Woad junction may be inadequate. If this is the case, then it should be possible to make the road unattractive to through traffic.
- (ii) PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD CONFLICT WITH THE PROVISION OF AN ACCESS POINT FROM THE INDUSTRIAL ALLOCATION AT TORBAY WOAD, CASTLE CARY, WILL NOT BE PERMITTED. The purpose of this policy is to allow the future provision of a link road from Station Road to achieve a more satisfactory access to the industrial site.

Traffic Management

6.35

PROPOSAL T4 IT IS PROPOSED TO INTRODUCE THE FOLLOWING TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT MEASURES:-

- (i) CLOSURE TO VEHICLES OF THE ROAD AT BRIDGEWATER BUILDINGS, CASTLE CARY.
This proposal is required in connection with the proposed residential development of land off Torbay Road (paragraph 3.34 refers). It will provide a safe and convenient pedestrian route to the town centre. Provision will be made within the proposed residential development for vehicular access and car parking for the residents of Bridgewater Buildings.
- (ii) ONE-WAY TRAFFIC ALONG FURGE LANE WESTWARDS FROM JUNCTION WITH HIGH STREET (COTTON CORNER), HENSTRIDGE.
It will be possible to introduce one-way working on completion of the road link from the A357 to Woodhayes which will be provided in conjunction with proposed residential development (Proposal H5, para. 3.41 refers). Vehicles will then be able to avoid emerging on to the A357 road at the extremely substandard junction at Cotton Corner.



Lower Ansford

Ansford School

C13

R4

C13

C1, C2, C4

R4

H3

C13

C13

C15

S2

E2

T3

C13

T2

T4

H3

H3

S1

C14

P2, H4

CASTLE CARY

Scale bar and north arrow