

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 12

Langport/Huish Episcopi

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Question 12.1

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? What are the implications of growth in terms of highway safety, flood risk and recreational provision?

- 1.1 Evidence indicates that Langport/Huish Episcopi performs a strong employment, retail and community role, particularly with regards to the 'strategic' level of community facilities (e.g. a secondary school), and is therefore considered to be a 'Market Town' [CD34; CD115, PMB1, 'Langport settlement status' report; and CD3, para 4.18 – 20]. The Council consider that it is appropriate to recognise the wide variety of settlements within the Market Town tier, and therefore identifies Langport/Huish Episcopi as a Local Market Town reflecting a more limited potential for growth than some of the larger Market Towns [CD3, para 4.24 – 26].
- 1.2 As an economic-led strategy, the distribution of growth has been based upon balancing the projected economic performance at each settlement with housing need, in order to ensure more sustainable and self-contained communities [CD3, para 4.86; CD14, para 6.9]. This has resulted in the local plan provision for 3.44 ha of 'B use' employment land and 374 dwellings at Langport/Huish Episcopi over the plan period [CD3b, M34 and M74]. The provision of additional employment land is to provide choice and self-containment, with 3 ha considered the minimum viable site size [CD3b, M33].
- 1.3 There are positive social impacts from this strategic approach, as development is encouraged where there is best potential to access services and facilities (e.g. Langport/Huish Episcopi contains a secondary school which is a key strategic facility), and where housing need is greatest. The economic impacts should also be positive, with the focus of development at settlements where existing businesses and workers exist, supporting the economy [CD16a, para 6.2.3]. At the strategic level, environmental impacts are somewhat uncertain until locations for development are identified, but in general there is scope to deliver the proposed development in an environmentally acceptable manner [CD115, PMB1, 'Langport scale of growth' report]. Mitigation measures are recommended to overcome adverse effects, with flood risk being identified as a particular issue at Langport/Huish Episcopi [CD16c, Appendix 7, page 3].
- 1.4 Although development within the existing urban area is encouraged, the scale of development proposed at Langport/Huish Episcopi means that locations are required on the periphery of the town. Therefore, a 'direction of growth' has been indicated in the plan in order to accommodate the proposed level of housing and employment growth, as set out in Policy LMT2 of the local plan [CD3b, M131]. Areas of high flood risk rule out development around much of the town [CD70], and there are also landscape constraints [CD68g]. The 'direction of growth' indicates areas to the north east, east and south east as being considered to be generally acceptable for

development through the Sustainability Appraisal process [CD16a, para 5.5.19 – 22], subject to further analysis through the forthcoming Site Allocations DPD and development management process.

- 1.5 The provision of new development in the direction of growth should mean social and economic benefits through additional jobs, homes (including affordable housing), and supporting local services and facilities. The direction of growth is largely within walking and cycling distance of the town centre and other key services, which should encourage sustainable travel. Some potential negative environmental effects are identified, particularly regarding the historic environment on the south east part of the direction of growth, but mitigation measures should ensure these can be overcome [CD13a, para 6.4.8 and figure 6.3]. In addition, concern regarding the impact of new development on the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area/Ramsar has led to the south east being identified for employment use only, appropriate mitigation being agreed in advance with Natural England, and ensuring development is subject to a project level Habitats Regulations Assessment [CD3a, M131; CD8, Appendix A, para 3.3.14 - 15].
- 1.6 Evidence on the infrastructure requirements of the proposed scale of growth at Langport/Huish Episcopi do not indicate that there any 'show-stoppers' that would inhibit new development [CD36; and CD116, PMB11]. Some infrastructure issues are considered 'necessary' to support new development, relating to the provision of open space and sports facilities [CD36, Appendix 1].
- 1.7 The overall approach for growth at Langport/Huish Episcopi is consistent with the national policy presumption in favour of sustainable development by meeting objectively assessed needs, without causing significant adverse impacts (NPPF, para 14); and the core planning principles (NPPF, para 17). The NPPF supports mixed use development in order to promote self-containment (paras 17, 37 and 38), consistent with proposals for the direction of growth.
- 1.8 The responses to the specific matters referred to in the second part of question 12.1 are set out in the following paragraphs.

Highway safety

- 1.9 Evidence on infrastructure planning does not identify any strategic requirements relating to highways improvements as a result of the proposals at Langport/Huish Episcopi [CD36]. The Site Allocations DPD will consider this issue in further detail in identifying specific sites for development [CD27]. In addition, the local plan requires the transport impacts of new development, including ensuring highway safety, to be adequately addressed [CD3, Policy TA5]. This approach is consistent with national guidance, which makes clear that development should only be prevented on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe (NPPF, para 32).

Flood risk

- 1.10 The local plan recognises that the proximity of Langport/Huish Episcopi to the Somerset Levels and Moors does mean that flood risk is an important issue to

consider at the town [CD3, para 6.123 and 12.17]. Evidence on flood risk has been a key determinant in identifying locations for development through the local plan process [CD70], and areas with a medium or high flood risk (Flood Zone 2 and 3) have not been considered for new development. This has ensured that new development is steered to areas with the lowest probability of flooding, consistent with national guidance (NPPF, para 100 – 101).

- 1.11 Surface water flooding is also an important issue to consider, and the local plan encourages the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems [CD3, para 12.17 and Policy EQ1], as advised by national guidance (NPPF, para 103).
- 1.12 Evidence on infrastructure planning does not identify any strategic requirements for flood risk mitigation as a result of the development proposed at Langport/Huish Episcopi [CD36, para 4.15].

Recreational provision

- 1.13 The local plan makes clear that growth proposed at Langport/Huish Episcopi will require improvements to recreational provision in the town [CD3, para 6.132]. Evidence indicates that a new 3G synthetic turf pitch at Huish Episcopi School, 3 new equipped play areas, an extension to existing community hall provision, and open space are all seen as ‘necessary’ in delivering development over the period 2010 – 2015 [CD36, Appendix 1]. A community swimming pool, a new sports ground with changing facilities, youth facilities and open space are also seen as ‘necessary’ in the period between 2016 – 2020 and beyond [CD36, Appendix 1]. Local plan policies SS6 and HW1 will ensure the delivery of recreation infrastructure in line with the identified needs, along with the forthcoming Site Allocations DPD where appropriate.

Question 12.2

Is sufficient weight attached to providing employment opportunities in Langport/Huish Episcopi?

- 2.1 The local plan has a provision for 3.44 ha of ‘B use’ employment land to be delivered in Langport/Huish Episcopi over the plan period, and at least 284 jobs [CD3b, M34]. This figure consists of 0.44 ha of land that has been delivered in the early years of the plan, and 3 ha of additional employment land provision. Although it is recognised that there is a lack of quantitative need for additional employment land, 3 ha has been identified as a minimum viable site size that will give scope for development to “kick start” employment growth at the town, thus providing choice and aiding self-containment [CD11, para 4.12; CD3b, M33]. The proportion of jobs to be encouraged at Langport/Huish Episcopi is consistent with its past economic performance [CD11, para 3.26].
- 2.2 The forthcoming Site Allocations DPD will seek to allocate sites to meet employment needs at the town [CD27].