

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 13

Somerton

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Question 13.1

Is the vision 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 the implications of growth on matters such as schools, Health facilities, biodiversity, infrastructure, out-commuting and open space been adequately assessed?

- 1.1 The Council's Settlement Role and Function Study (CD 35, paragraphs 6.20-6.21) identifies Somerton 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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 Somerton. 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.
- 1.4 Policy SS5 of the Proposed Submission South Somerset Local Plan (PSSSLP) as amended (CD 3b, M74) supports the development of 374 dwellings in Somerton across the plan period, of which 286 are already committed leaving a residual requirement of 88 dwellings without consent. The level of housing growth proposed for Somerton 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.

- 1.5 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
- 1.6 Report 12 from Workshop 1 of the Local Development Framework Project Management Board meetings (CD 115) recommended scaling down the proposed level of housing within Somerton to 400 dwellings (from the 500 dwellings identified in the Preferred Options Core Strategy) as there was significant public concern about the impact this would have had upon the town in terms of traffic impact, infrastructure constraints, and historic character. In addition to which the Settlement Role and Function study identified a projected reduction in household size in Somerton causing the town's population to reduce by around 350 people in 20 years if no additional housing development was permitted in the town which would negatively impact upon the continued provision of shops and other community facilities.
- 1.7 The Policy SS5 figure of 400 dwellings was subsequently reduced to 374 dwellings (CD 3b, M74) in light of representations made on the PSSSLP and the content contained in Business Requirement Employment Survey information and ONS population projections through discussions in the Local Development Framework Project Management Board meetings 21-23 (CD 117 & CD 118).
- 1.8 The quantum of employment land provision made within Somerton 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.

- 1.9 For Somerton a requirement of 2.77 ha was identified in the Stage 3 ELR (CD 50i, page 26) to support self-contained population growth and create a more sustainable settlement. This consisted of an existing gross supply of 1.91 ha which has all been built, leaving a residual requirement of around 1 ha of employment land.
- 1.10 It is acknowledged that this differs from the 3 ha of employment land identified for Somerton in the PSSSLP (CD 3b, M34). The justification and reasoning for this is that the Local Development Framework Project Management Board Workshop 2 (CD 115, Employment Land Report page 10) identified that in Somerton there was not a strategic employment land allocation but land was required in the settlement to generate jobs and kick start development. In order to identify land requirements for 'B' uses in Somerton a minimum site size was identified in consultation with the Council's Economic Development Officers to provide scope for development to kick start employment growth, with the minimum site size considered to be 3 ha.
- 1.11 Whilst there is no quantitative need for additional land in Somerton, in order to provide choice and self-containment, provision has been made for additional land based upon the recommendations of the Council Economic Development Team and the findings of Local Development Framework Project Management Board Workshop 2 (CD 115, Employment Land Report page 10). Provision of a larger employment land requirement provides scope for additional employment opportunities to be provided in order to reduce the level of out-commuting from the settlement and aims to ensure that the housing and economic potential of Somerton are appropriately balanced.
- 1.12 The Council's 2009 Retail Study Update [CD 53] identified that the ability to increase the amount of comparison retail floorspace in Somerton is constrained by its size, natural catchment area and level of commercial market interest. The study does not undertake full quantitative need analysis the future retail capacity for convenience and comparison retailing in Somerton due to the following reasons:
 - The lower level of expenditure flowing to Somerton
 - The settlements low shopping market share for comparison goods shopping
 - The difficulty in establishing appropriate benchmark turnover levels for the purposes of capacity forecasting.
- 1.13 The report found that there analysis of the expenditure flowing to Somerton and its overall trading performance indicated that there was no significant overtrading or congestion issues and whilst there would be future expenditure growth it was likely to be comparatively low (when compared with other towns) and the 'needs' for Somerton would likely be based upon qualitative factors.

- 1.14 Somerton is orientated towards a top-up food shopping function and whilst it would be beneficial to increase the level of retention of main/bulk-food shopping trips, the natural catchment and expenditure capacity of the settlement limits the potential for large scale additional provision and there are concerns about the impact on existing provision. The general strategic approach recommended for Somerton through the Retail Study Update [CD 53] is to acknowledge the aspiration to retain shopping trips within the settlement and support proposals which increase retention via the promotion of realistic proposal in the town centre.
- 1.15 The PSSSLP reflects the findings of the retail study and sets out that Somerton has a delicate balance of shops, including a small supermarket, and is therefore considered vulnerable to potential out-of-centre retail development. The plan PSSSLP therefore requires a local retail impact assessment for retail proposals greater than a threshold of 250 sqm for Somerton given the scale and nature of the town.
- 1.16 Assessments of the environmental, social and economic implications of the scale of growth proposed were undertaken through formal Sustainability Appraisal. For Somerton the Sustainability Appraisal (CD 16, paragraphs 5.4.27-5.4.28) identified that areas to the north and east of the town were ruled out for flood risk and historic environment issues respectively. There is evidence of site deliverability in the Strategic Housing land Availability Assessment to the west and northwest, and a relatively unconstrained area to the south of the town. Three potential broad locations for growth emerged and were subjected to Sustainability Appraisal:
- Option 1: South
 - Option 2: West
 - Option 3: North West
- 1.17 Option 1 was ruled out due to its negative environmental effects upon environmental objectives, particularly the historic environment, and poor quality road access. Option 2 was favoured due to its reduced environmental impact, potential to use/enhance the existing bus service on Langport Road and clear evidence of deliverability in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.
- 1.18 The Sustainability Appraisal (CD 16, paragraph 6.4.9) identified that growth will bring several social and economic benefits to the town, although measures are recommended to ensure the effects are mitigated e.g. investigating the potential impact on the historic environment, and ensuing no adverse effects; appropriate landscaping to reduce landscape impact; contributing to enhancing the facilities/provision of the bus route on Langport Road. 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 EQ3: Historic Environment – New development proposals will be expected to safeguard or where appropriate enhance the significance, character setting and local distinctiveness of heritage assets.

- 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 will be considered against conserving and enhancing the landscape character of the area.
 - Policy EQ4: Biodiversity – Proposals will be considered against protecting the biodiversity value of land and buildings and minimising fragmentation of habitats.
 - Policy EQ5: Green Infrastructure – Ensures that development provides open spaces and green corridor links between new and existing green spaces.
- 1.19 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 Somerton. For the purposes of clarity, critical infrastructure is defined as infrastructure that without which development cannot commence.
- 1.20 In Somerton 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. Six of the seven necessary infrastructure items relate to the provision of open space and/or leisure facilities (CD 36, Appendix 1) which are 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.
- 1.21 A need for replacement facilities for Somerton Surgery has been identified through the Report on Infrastructure Planning (CD 36, Appendix 1) in order to provide additional capacity to mitigate the impacts of the proposed level of growth with the Primary Care Trust identified as the funding source for this facility through their involvement in the development of the report.
- 1.22 The Report on Infrastructure Planning was developed in consultation with a range of infrastructure service providers and other stakeholders. Somerset County Council did not identify any issues relating to school capacity arising from growth in Somerton, consequently the Report on Infrastructure Planning does not set out any requirement for infrastructure funding towards education in Somerton.
- 1.23 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.

- 1.24 The Council considers that the vision for growth and change in Somerton is appropriate and justified. It is commensurate with the towns standing in the settlement hierarchy and the level of growth and change proposed over the plan period is sufficient to maintain the towns function, sustaining and enhancing its role, at a level that is appropriate to its size, accessibility, character and physical identity. The local community has helped to shape the level of growth and change proposed through early engagement through the cluster workshops.
- 1.25 The economic, social and environmental impacts of the proposed level of growth and change have been assessed through Sustainability Appraisal with issues identified able to be addressed through the application of policies within the Submission Draft Local Plan.
- 1.26 The implications of growth upon infrastructure have been considered through the Council's Report on Infrastructure which assessed spare capacity and the likely requirements arising from new development proposed in Somerton. There are no critical infrastructure requirements identified for Somerton and those identified as necessary are largely considered to be deliverable through the application of PSSSLP Policy SS6 through the application process. Where this is not considered likely the Primary Care Trust has been identified as the funding source for replacement facilities for Somerton Surgery through consultation in developing the report.
- 1.27 The level of employment growth proposed makes allowance for additional land to be made available to provide scope for development to kick start employment growth, enabling the creation of new employment opportunities within the town, reducing out-commuting and increasing the town's level of self-containment.
- 1.28 Overall the scale of growth proposed is considered to be appropriate to the scale of the settlement within the settlement hierarchy, the ability to extend the range of services to better meet the needs of the settlement and immediate surrounds, and the ability to meet identified needs.