

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 15

Transport

April 2013

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Issue 15 Transport

Question 15.1

What are the Transport implications of the locational strategy for housing and employment? Will the strategy facilitate the use of sustainable modes of transport?

- 1.1 The settlement strategy consists of a hierarchy of settlements and the distribution of development growth within the hierarchy. It is by the settlement strategy that the overall identified Vision for the district and the strategic objectives are to be achieved. The vision includes reference in section 3 of the PSSSLP [CD3 3.4] to the District
“Being a far more sustainable place with more self sufficient towns with much better public transport links within and between them” and to
“ have greater access to open space and leisure opportunities and to facilities services and jobs without reliance on the car”
The strategic objectives include
2. A healthy enhancing environment promoting walking, cycling and non car based transport and access to leisure opportunities
4. An integrated sustainable transport system developed both within and between towns especially to and from Yeovil whilst promoting enhanced delivery of services direct to rural areas through information and computer technologies.
- 1.2 The PSSSLP itself in the supporting text in the settlement strategy clearly indicates Yeovil’s settlement status is informed by the ability to cater for the need to travel by better and more reliable transport. In para 4.9 (and 4.19) of the PSSSLP the potential for sustainable transport is a criteria applied to identify market and rural centres and this was part of the assessment undertaken by consultants in the settlement role and function study [CD34] to propose those settlements appropriate for designation as market town or rural centre. In para 4.10 the aspiration that growth should make settlements more self contained was stated. The PSSSLP itself in the supporting text in the settlement strategy clearly indicates that Yeovil’s settlement status is informed by the ability to cater for the need to travel by better and more reliable transport.
- 1.3 The transport implications of the distribution of growth through the settlement hierarchy are presented in the Sustainability Appraisal Core Document 16a – d. In particular they are explored in relation to the two key SA objectives and appraisal questions against which all matters subject to SA have been tested against. In particular these are SA objective 1 “Improve access to essential services and facilities” and 8 “reduce the effect of traffic on the environment”.

The transport implications of the locational strategy chosen and indeed for locational strategies not chosen particularly present themselves in the SAs of options presented at Issues and Options stage (section 5.3 and appendix 3 of the Sustainability Appraisal report) and the options considered at “Draft Core Strategy preferred Options stage (section 5.4 and appendices 4, 5 and 6). These options are the

- Broad spatial approach to growth outside Yeovil
- Location for an urban extension at Yeovil and
- Spatial approach to growth around the district’s market towns.

The scores and commentaries provided for each of these particular appraisals against SA objective 1 and 8 clearly present the access and transport implications of the chosen locational strategy and the alternatives considered.

- 1.4 The specific establishment of an urban extension for Yeovil and its location to the south and west was because it “is more accessible and gives better opportunities for sustainable transport” (para 5.32 of PSSSLP)

And the SA of options for the Urban extension location and the single option against multi site option presents clear evidence as to how transport matters informed the decision for an urban extension as a key part of the settlement strategy. The traffic modelling work explained in brief in paras 5.35 to 5.37 of the PSSSLP and set out in detail in Core Documents [CD3] presents a case for the urban extension in terms of promotion of sustainable travel.

- 1.5 The strategy will facilitate the use of sustainable modes of travel given the focus of development on Yeovil and Chard and given “the greater potential for sustainable travel opportunities at Yeovil and Chard, as these settlements offer the best opportunity to access jobs, services and facilities in close proximity, and the policy (TA3) proposes improvements to public transport provision in the settlements” [CD 16 a para 6.7.3)

The focus of development in the market towns and rural centres and the balancing of job and housing provision undertaken and explained in paras 4.86 – 4.101 in the PSSSLP (and as modified by the proposed modification number 64 -70 in Core Document 3b point to a self contained approach to development assists the achievement of travel by non car modes.

- 1.6 The merits of the sustainable urban extension in delivering sustainable travel are best summarised in para 6.3.6 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report [CD16a]

Question 15.2

Are the requirements of policy TA1 fully justified and are they too onerous and inflexible?

- 2.1 The concept is to enable real choice in travel options or reducing the need to travel without being costly or difficult to implement.
The requirements reflect:

- a. The obligation within the NPPF to promote sustainable transport
 - b. Somerset County Council's adopted Future Transport Plan (2011-2026) [CD 22]
 - c. The Core Strategy Issues and Options [CD2 chapter 7]
- These policies were also considered at the Area Committees (February – March 2012), PMB on 27th March [Workshop 13: Review of Area Committee consideration] and subsequently by Full Council on 23rd April 2012 (Appendix A part 5).

The measures in TA1 are at the lower end of the scale and can be implemented throughout the district as demonstrated for each option below.

2.2 Information Pack

Details of the information required is listed in the Proposed Submission Local Plan [CD3, para 10.8a]. In addition to the County Council's guidance the District will be providing off-the-shelf data for each of the district's development areas that provide the information required. For smaller sites this will include cycle and walking maps, bus timetables, information on cycle facilities, car share and details of transport related websites etc. An on-line version will also be produced. For larger developments more bespoke packs can be designed based on the above. The aim is to sew the seed for the travel alternatives and provide easy access to further information.

2.3 Electric Charging Points

16 amp IP67 'Euro' standard sockets are not significantly different in cost to standard external 13 amp sockets (>£20). These sockets are the same as used by caravan owners as hook-ups and have the added benefit that these sockets can also be used for other purposes such as the safe operation of garden machinery etc. Costs of installation at new build are negligible. The NPPF (para. 35 page 10) indicates that we should incorporate facilities for charging plug-in.

2.4 Green Travel Vouchers

The agreed amount for the vouchers [CD3 para. 10.8c] would be down to negotiation. Actual payment would be on take up i.e. after the individual has purchased and so funds would be available to the developer. A typical agreement (based on information provided by SCC) would be for householders/employees to be reimbursed financially for 50% of their expenditure up to a maximum reimbursed value of:

- £100.00 per employee/dwelling for 1 bedroom dwelling
- £150 per dwelling 2 bedroom dwelling
- £200 per dwelling 3 bedroom dwelling
- £250 per dwelling 4 or more bedroom dwelling

2.5 Travel Plans

TA 4 sets out thresholds for when Travel Plans and what type of travel plan would be expected. The policy is in accord with NPPF para. 36.

2.6 Public Transport

The extent of implementation will be dependent of the scale of the development and the impact that that development would have on the existing public transport network. Therefore taking viability into account and achieving flexibility.

Question 15.3

Have transport needs been properly identified and have those needs been adequately addressed? Why are the requirements of policy TA3 not applicable elsewhere in the District?

- 3.1 The Parish Plans [CD76 – CD93] identify transport and accessibility as a significant issue throughout the district. These needs are similarly reflected in the Core Strategy Issues and Options [CD2 chapter 7], which illustrates the desire and need for a broad range of sustainable transport options to be introduced. More recently the South Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau report (Jan 2013) underpins these needs [CD139].
- 3.2 Similarly support for the development of an integrated, low carbon transport infrastructure emerged from the Sustainable Community Strategy Shaping South Somerset: A Strategy for Sustainable Communities (2008-2026) [CD32 Strategic Priority 13]. In respect of Yeovil the University of the West of England's Study "Active and low carbon travel a transport vision for Yeovil" [CD56] evolved from a stakeholder workshop that identified barriers and potential solutions.
- 3.3 The strategies contained in the County Council's Somerset Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 [CD28] and the policies within their Future Transport Plan 2011-2026 [CD22 Schedule of Policies] have informed how these needs can be addressed.
- 3.4 Different policies and measures [NPPF para. 29] are appropriate for different communities. The policies in TA3 are more stringent than those in TA1 reflecting the hierarchical approach whereby the larger settlements of Chard and Yeovil with their more urban nature and closer proximity of services are better able to deliver more sustainable transport choices. Their greater population also means there is the necessary critical mass to deliver those policies and measures to a greater degree.

Question 15.4

Are the requirements of policy TA4 justified and is it too prescriptive?

- 4.1 Travel Plans are a requirement of NPPF para. 36. Policy TA4 reflects the County Council's guidance on travel planning [CD19] adopted in November

2011 with the intention that the text within this document could be used by Local Planning Authorities as the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document. This guidance, with minor changes to suit local circumstances has been adopted by Sedgemoor District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document (Jan 2013). In South Somerset we have included within the main document of the Proposed Submission Local Plan [CD3, paras 10.14 – 10.21] primarily because our findings indicated concerns in respect of the number of employees, parking management and ESCROW accounts [CD10.17 3]. These are all addressed in Proposed Submission Local Plan [CD3, para 10.17]. Policy TA4 is therefore slightly less prescriptive than that adopted by Sedgemoor DC or envisaged in other Districts throughout Somerset.

Question 15.5

Have the consequences of the various transportation requirements in policies TA1 to TA4 been assessed in terms of their implications for the viability of development schemes?

- 5.1 There is a general assumption in the policies that sustainable transport options can if properly implemented improve the viability of developments. The SSDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Evidence Base (January 2012) [CD 35 paras. 3.35-3.38] illustrates that while the introduction of CIL has seen changes to the way that S106 will operate, there will still be a need to negotiate appropriate developer contributions to mitigate the impacts of development and ensure it is acceptable, subject to the obligations being necessary, direct and fair. Section 106 agreements will therefore exist alongside CIL as the principle way of achieving the on-site requirements directly resulting from a proposed development.
- 5.2 The costs implicit in policies TA1 Low Carbon Travel and TA3 Transport Impact of New Development have been taken into account in the assumptions within the CIL Evidence Base [CD35] for the level of CIL provision, including the continuing requirement for S.106 agreements, as well as by including appropriate levels of non-developable areas within the viability models.
- 5.3 In respect of TA1, as indicated in response to Q15.2 the cost implications for measures i) to vi) inclusive are low cost and easy to implement. Measure vii) is commensurate with the scale of the development and the level of implementation will be determined through Policy SS6 [CD3, Policy SS6 page 58].
- 5.4 The delivery of any rail facility in Policy TA2 will be dependent on a robust business case being proven [CD3, para 10.10].

- 5.5 As indicated in response to Q15.4 when assessing the implications of Travel Plans our policy TA4 is slightly less prescriptive than that either adopted or envisaged elsewhere in Somerset.

Question 15.6

Reference has been made to the re-opening of a railway station at Chard, on the Waterloo to Exeter line. Bearing in mind the significant growth proposed in the town and the Council's commitment to sustainable travel, why has this opportunity not been pursued by the Council?

- 6.1 The prerequisites for the Council's support for any potential rail facility (passenger or freight) are set out in [CD3, para 10.10]. In respect of Chard Junction no business case has been presented and in assessing Chard Junction the Council has consulted with Network Rail, and both passenger and freight operators.
- 6.2 In terms of passenger, whilst the current franchisee South West Trains (SWT) indicate that they would "assist" they caveat quite strongly that they "*will need to be convinced that a re-opened Chard Junction station will attract additional business rather than extrapolate passengers from either Crewkerne or Axminster.*" Chard Junction is 3.5 miles from Chard, whereas Axminster and Crewkerne stations are 7 miles and 9 miles from the town centre respectively. Whilst that would enable a reduction in car mileage any re-opened station at Chard Junction would still entail the majority of users accessing by car and significant extraction from the existing stations is likely. Other comments included concerns that the end-to-end journey time from Exeter to Waterloo would increase should additional stops be provided.
- 6.3 Chard Junction and the area around it is categorised as being in Flood Zone 3b i.e. 'the functional floodplain'. That potentially limits its development to water-compatible uses, and essential transport infrastructure, which has to cross the area at risk and essential utility infrastructure which has to be located in a flood risk area for operational reasons.
- 6.4 We would interpret that to mean that the railway itself would be essential transport infrastructure, although any station at that location would not, as operationally it could be situated elsewhere. This is borne out by SWT who have also indicated that locating it on the single track section would be the best in terms of providing a station economically and accessibility wise.
- 6.5 Additionally the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment indicates that there have been flooding incidents in the past in this area, most recently in November 2012 as the photograph below illustrates.



Daily Mail 11/11/12

- 6.6 Following a recent planning application for a concrete batching and mixing plant on the North side of Junction (Considered and approved by Area West Committee Dec 2012 [following an earlier application withdrawn in March 2012]) there was a call for the "protection of land at Chard Junction for future rail use". It was not specific either in terms of that use or in terms of precise area. However in response to our enquires in respect of the earlier application from the freight perspective Network rail commented "I see no reason to protect the area you are concerned with for future freight use, any such use would need to bear the not insubstantial cost of installing a new connection to the network (ballpark £2-4m). Investment of that magnitude would be indicative of a level of traffic activity above and beyond the capacity capability of the line".
- 6.7 On the South (Exeter bound) side the current track layout is still compatible with a potential freight operation, although this land is owned and operated by Dairy Crest Ltd and there is some doubt that either the length of track or the number of HGVs required to access the site would be conducive to a modern rail freight operation. Similarly the factory significantly restricts the potential for passenger access.
- 6.8 CD3 para 6.31 refers to the County Council's decision not to purchase the land from the British Rail Board (Residuary) (BRBR) Ltd in February 2010, in which the County Council state that "*Whilst the re-opening of a rail station at this location is a stated long-term aspiration of the Council in its current Local Transport Plan, at present there is no agreed business case demonstrating*

that the re-opening of the station would be a viable proposition; there is no funding allocated for development or construction of such a scheme; and no obvious prospect of such funding being allocated in the foreseeable future as it would be likely to cost several million pounds."

6.9 At Area West (AW) Committee on 21st March 2012 a motion was submitted by Cllr Turpin requesting that the District Executive includes the protection of Chard Junction in its Core Strategy. The AW committee resolved to "To retain the recommendation to remove the protection for rail freight and to propose a motion to full Council to request that South Somerset District Council actively seek a business partner to develop a business case to promote a passenger facility on the stretch of line around Chard Junction".

Full Council subsequently considered the matter on 17th May 2012 and resolved to:

1. insert a new policy in the South Somerset Local Plan - To encourage, promote and protect the development of land for both passenger rail facilities and rail freight hubs where there is robust evidence in support of developing infrastructure to widen transport choice.

The relevant evidence would be:

- A business case (to meet network rail criteria)
- An active promoter
- Evidence of financial wherewithal and a reasonable prospect of infrastructure implementation in the foreseeable future.

2. At this time do not seek to protect specific land for freight or passenger use owing to a lack of evidence and potential blight

6.10 The District Council's decision in light of the above findings does not preclude its future rail use should a business case prove viability at some time in the future. However in the absence of such a business case it was not felt that SSDC had the evidence to include the reopening of Chard Junction as a specific policy. The Council is the wrong body to make such a business case, for which there are 3 prime deliverers:

1. Network Rail
2. SCC (Transport Authority)
3. Current or future operators

None have shown intent and indeed have discouraged it.