

LOCAL PLAN INSPECTOR'S PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

We have now received the Planning Inspector's preliminary findings which are attached to this e-mail. In essence, he makes it clear that there is still further work to be done in three specific topic areas before the Local Plan can be found sound and fit for purpose. He gives us three options:

- a. Press on with the Examination on the submitted plan in its current and un-amended form. (In which case the indications at this stage, are that it will be found unsound.)
- b. Withdraw the plan totally and re-start the process.
- c. Request a suspension of the Examination and submit a plan and timetable as to how we believe we can address the various issues.

He has made it very clear that if we wish to take the route of Option c. then he will require a compelling case to be made. The matter has now been considered by the Project Management Board who rejected Option a, were unwilling to go for Option b, unless no alternative existed, and thus are intending to take Option c and make the case for a 6 month suspension of the Examination. This is in line with what has happened elsewhere in the country and we believe that a compelling case can be made. Detailed work is underway to validate that case with the intention of responding to the Inspector by Friday 12th July.

Although the preliminary findings are disappointing, we had already acknowledged and were anticipating some of the outcomes. You will recall that, for instance, in the case of development at Ilminster, this had been highlighted at Full Council, where we gave an assurance that we were happy to accept either location and were very willing to change if recommended to do so by the Inspector. In that case we had already anticipated a minimum period of 3 months for the re-consultation. On the question of the Yeovil Urban Extension, I made it clear at Full Council that, although Project Management Board considered the southern extension to be the best option, should the eventual evidence suggest an alternate location then we would change.

Underpinning our submission and fundamental to the overall Plan the scale and distribution (across the SSDC settlements) of housing growth. I very much welcome the certainty that the report now gives to both the overall numbers of new dwellings to be built across the district in the plan period (2006 - 2028) and to the distribution of that growth, in particular between Yeovil and the market towns. This was a major issue for most of us and did cause divisions at an early stage. I also welcome his assurance that the broad principle of a sustainable urban extension for Yeovil is sound. However, I also accept that the Inspector has found some deficiencies in our submission in three key areas that will involve major modifications and these must be addressed. That is the task that now lies ahead of us.

The first issue is the location of growth in Ilminster. The Council's proposal was for development in the Shudrick Valley area, however it was made clear to objectors that should the Inspector find in favour of the alternate location off Canal Way, then it would have no issue with changing the Plan at that stage. The Inspector has made it clear that he considers Shudrick Valley proposal to be unsound and thus his ruling gives clarity and certainty in changing the growth area to the land off Canal Way and re-consulting on that proposal.

The second issue is the lack of a clear and unambiguous policy for allocating Employment land in the 6 Rural centres, and this must be similarly addressed.

The third and most significant matter is that of the proposal for an urban extension to Yeovil on the southern side of the town on land between the A37 and East Coker. Although making a very clear statement that he agrees with the concept of an Urban Extension for Yeovil (para 69), The Inspector has given a very detailed analysis of the elements of the Sustainability Appraisal where he does not find that the Council's existing submission is sufficiently conclusive to arrive at a definitive outcome . In particular, he considers that more detailed work is needed on all the alternative locations for an Urban Extension before the development of a Yeovil Urban Extension to the south can be properly considered for soundness.

As we all know, the Local Plan is a major document covering the whole of South Somerset and containing a vast range of issues important to all the communities of the District. The Inspector's interim report is welcomed in that it clearly identifies only those three elements of the Plan that give him major cause for concern and where the Council needs to undertake detailed work in the coming months. We are now considering the scope of that additional work needed and the timetable for such work. We believe that the work can be completed within an acceptable period of time thus it is our intention to set out our case to the Inspector requesting a suspension of the examination for 6 months. We are confident that we can address these issues comprehensively within this timescale which will involve public consultation and a Full Council endorsement. .