

INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION

RESUMED HEARING SESSIONS JUNE 2014

ISSUE 1:

Duty to Co-operate, Public Consultation and the Council's Overall Strategy (including PMM1)

Tuesday 10 June 2014
10:00am

Submission Made on All Questions on behalf of

Wessex Farms Trust (WFT)
ID Reference 4320449

by

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Questions

1.1 **Has the Duty to Co-operate been complied with regarding the formulation of the Main Modifications?**

1.1.1 WFT has no comment to make on this matter at present.

1.2 **Have the Main Modifications been subject to appropriate consultation in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement? (see also question 2.1 below)**

1.2.1 The Council has undertaken a significant level of public consultation throughout the preparation of the South Somerset Local Plan (SSLP). The Proposed Main Modifications were subject to a six week consultation period between November 2013 and January 2014. This appears to be an appropriate level of consultation which accords with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and which reflects practice elsewhere. The SSLP is legally compliant and sound on this basis.

1.3 **In broad terms, are the Main Modifications based on a sound process of sustainability appraisal and testing of alternatives?**

1.3.1 See combined response to 1.3 and 1.4 below.

1.4 **Is there clear evidence demonstrating how and why the preferred strategy (as encapsulated in the Main Modifications) was selected? Does it represent the most appropriate strategy in the circumstances?**

1.4.1 This response addresses the questions posed under both 1.3 and 1.4.

1.4.2 It is clear that the Council has carried out substantial work in connection with its strategy. This work is presented as evidence to support the plan and the proposals it makes – and at this stage focuses on its decision to promote two urban extensions to serve Yeovil instead of one (larger extension) to the south of the town.

1.4.3 Our work demonstrates that substantial growth is sustainable to the south of the town. It also shows that growth of a larger scale than that now proposed can be delivered and is acceptable. For obvious reasons, we cannot comment so confidently on the overall acceptability of the additional growth proposed in the northern urban extension.

1.4.4 As a result we cannot say if the strategy is right. We can, however, say that the level and general depth of work presented by the Council and its consultants, means that the strategy is based on a sound process. As a result, our disagreement on this matter is not a reason for the SSLP to fail the test of soundness.

1.4.5 We can also say that, because of the reductions in growth at Yeovil, the District's agreed principal location for growth, the level of housing now proposed is an **absolute minimum**. Our position remains that Yeovil can and should take a higher proportion of South Somerset's growth but, to follow the approach identified above, at this stage of the plan process (and given conclusions already made on this matter) it does not threaten the soundness of the plan.

1.4.6 We also note that the Council refers to its housing figure for Yeovil (in policy YV1) as an "**at least**" figure. We trust that the Council will honour the clear commitment that these words contain.

1.4.7 This is very important because of the increasing need to deliver more homes – particularly in identified and designated growth centres like Yeovil. This need is real and pressing and a key responsibility of this local plan and all those involved in it is to accelerate the development of new homes for an expanding population. If it fails to do this – either because it promotes the wrong growth or because it is declared unsound – that need will get worse and could have significant implications for the prosperity and well being of those living in South Somerset.

1.5 In the year since the first hearing sessions commenced, have there been any significant changes to the evidence base or to the legislative framework, particularly in terms of housing and employment needs, which should be reflected in the Local Plan? Is there a five year supply of housing sites (with appropriate buffer) and is the housing trajectory sound?

1.5.1 As mentioned above, there is a clear and pressing need for housing growth nationally and locally. It is clear from very recent statements and publicity that this cannot be ignored either for social or economic reasons. The planning system has a clear duty in this respect and – even where growth is locally unpopular – where needs exist and can be accommodated - new development must be delivered. Meeting this need has equal weight to any claim for restraint, and increased weight where evidence has been gathered and assessed to demonstrate where that growth is acceptable and deliverable. .

1.5.2 In short, the town planning system must work positively to support the delivery of much needed housing. Through positive forward planning, land owners and developers should be encouraged by the planning process - especially in significant locations like Yeovil. In this context the trajectory needs to make provision for swift delivery of growth throughout the town in each of the broad categories of development it includes. The urban extension south of Yeovil can assist with an early pulse of activity and this should be reflected in the trajectory.

1.6 Is the Council's removal of the reference to the provision of 935 dwellings after the end of the Plan period (Policies YV1 and YV2) appropriate?

1.6.1 It is disappointing that the Council has removed reference to the 935 dwellings to be delivered after the plan period (i.e. post 2028). That date appears to be a long way off but will approach rapidly and it would be reasonable to look beyond the plan period for housing growth and delivery. However, the plan is not unsound for this reason.