

Opening Address for the South Somerset Local Plan Examination 9th June

2014

Mr Hogger, you will not be surprised to know that the issues contained in your preliminary letter of the 3rd July have been the subject of extensive debate in this Chamber over the past year. In this letter, you advised us your concerns with our plan which you have already outlined this morning.

You asked the Council after considering your points *'to give very serious consideration over whether there was an appropriate way forward'*. You asked us to consider withdrawing the plan after warning us that the submission in its current form would be likely be found "unsound". You did also indicate that there was a significant of work to be undertaken if you were minded to consider the alternative of a temporary suspension.

After a full analysis of that additional work and the associated timescales, we submitted a comprehensive schedule of work together with a detailed project plan for your consideration. This principle of applying for a suspension was subsequently endorsed by SSDC Full Council who remain fully committed to delivering a sound local plan as expeditiously as possible.

The scope of our work included in our 89 point project plan included

- A fundamental re-evaluation and 360 degree appraisal and reassessment of reasonable alternatives for the Direction of Growth around Yeovil
- A complete revision of the SA for Ilminster
- Extensive evidence gaining from businesses, agents and desk-top research for assessing employment land needs in the market towns
- A 6 week consultation period of exhibitions, parish council visits, and press briefings. that generated over 1000 responses
- Renewed rounds of cooperation with stakeholders, developers and service providers.

This project plan was driven forward by officers and members from the period of its acceptance by you on the 17th July 2013, to the submission of the Main Modifications on 18th March 2014, on time and with all tasks completed.

The Council was also mindful of your words in your letter of the 17th July when you queried the amount of time we were allocating for some of the tasks bearing in mind *'that a genuine reassessment of the situation will need to be undertaken, rather than providing a more detailed justification for the decisions already taken'* A subsequent adjustment was made to the overall timetable to accommodate this observation.

I trust you will agree that the scope and intensity of the work we have undertaken over the period of suspension have given full regard to the points in your preliminary letter and any of your subsequent comments.

We have paid special attention to the significance of our original SA documentation and your comments regarding the shortcomings of the original technical work. You will see this week and from our evidence that we have devoted significant efforts verifying and reassessing the SA previous work which included commissioning new evidence for landscape as well as reviewing the policies and plans and proposals that underpin the SA.

To assist this process we commissioned independent environmental consultants, Enfusion to lead the process and assist our officers in re-visiting assumptions, compiling new evidence and preparing the revised SA addendum. We have also asked them to compliance check our overall SA process.

During the process, we sought further clarification from you on the issue of Employment land in the market towns and rural centres. Additionally, due to the recent completion of the needs assessment of Gypsy and Traveller provision, we incorporated these requirements into an additional modification.

Members endorsed all the resultant proposed modifications for consultation at Full Council in October 2013, and this was followed by full public consultation between November 2013 and January 2014.

In the next few days you will hear officers present the Council's modifications.

We now believe our plan is sound, compliant with the NPPF and based on evidence, but importantly for this council, based also on aspiration. And it is our aspiration to see this plan take effect now and lead the growth .that is required in South Somerset

During the last six months our permissive approach to development has seen major new applications submitted for our urban extensions in Yeovil, successful housing applications in

Langport, South Petherton and Martock, which has helped us move to our position where we can demonstrate a five-year land supply (including a 20% buffer).

South Somerset is a unique District. It contributes the highest level Gross Value Added of any district in Somerset, it has a larger industrial employment base than Plymouth¹, GVA is projected to grow year-on-year faster than the Regional and National average², we are forecast to reach a total of 88,600 jobs by 2021, and we employ more people in manufacturing than the rest of the county put together.

Our major employer AgustaWestland now has an even more secure future following the diversification announcement into the civilian sector of helicopter production and maintenance. Similarly, the future of RNAS Yeovilton is also assured through the recent announcement that it will be the country's main Army/Navy Helicopter base.

We appreciate that the decisions on the future growth and change in South Somerset will not always be popular. You will hear arguments as to why we should have less housing and employment, and arguments as to why we should have more. But above all this, we recognise that our local people need homes and our businesses need to be supported and encouraged to thrive. The Council's has considered all the latest available data and is content we have concluded on the right level of growth to meet our needs and strike the right balance between being ambitious but realistic.

Mr Hogger, this Council's ambition is for South Somerset to prosper and provide economic and housing growth to meet the needs of the largest district in Somerset. Yeovil's role as a sub-regional centre for services and employment will continue to grow. We see our market towns being self-sustained with a balance of housing and jobs. We want our valuable environment protected. We see having new development as the opportunity to create sustainable places to live, connected to existing services and facilities and knitted into existing communities.

In conclusion therefore, it is our firm belief that these modifications to the plan are sound and, taken together with the responses to your specific pre-hearing queries, the augmented

¹ Ekosgen (2010) Yeovil Economic Profile, page 4 and page 20.

² University of Exeter / Somerset County Council (2013) State of the Somerset Economy 2013, page 97 and page 100.

evidence base and the unquestioned components of the original Local Plan submission, constitute a land use strategy that will allow us to deliver these aims and aspirations for the long term benefit of the present and future residents and businesses of South Somerset.

ENDS