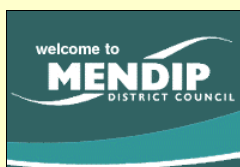
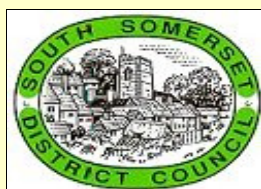




Somerset Strategic Planning Conference

Newsletter May 2008



Notes of the SSPC held on March 11th 2008, Luttrell Room, County Hall

1.0 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew
(SCC) - Guest

- 1.1 Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey welcomed everybody to the Conference. She apologised for the early start due to the Severn Barrage presentation directly afterwards.

David Vaughan (SCC)

Ralph Willoughby-Foster
(TDBC)

Martin Wilsher (WSDC)

Louise Winn (SWRA)

Cllr Christopher Wolverson
(SCC)

Nichola Woodward (SCC)

Cllr Derek Yeomans (ENPA) -
Guest

1.2 Members present:-

Richard Antliff (SCC)

Doug Bamsey (SDC)

Dave Baxter (SSHOG)

Paul Browning (SCC)

Cllr Simon Coles (TDBC)

Rupert Cox (SCCI)

Cllr John Edwards (ENPA)

Patrick Flaherty (SCC)

Andy Foyne (SSDC)

Cllr Anne Fraser (SDC)

Cllr Andrew Gilling (SDC)

Stuart Houlet (SDC)

Peter Lacey (SALC)

Cllr Christine Lawrence
(ENPA) - Guest

John Meeker (MDC)

Mike O'Dowd-Jones (SCC)

Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey
(SCC)

Cllr Peter Seib (SSDC)

Cllr Tony Shire (SCC)

1.3 Apologies received:-

David Clews (SCC)

Simon Eames (MDC)

Cllr Jon Freeman (WSDC)

Philip Higginbottom (SSDC)

Cllr Jefferson Horsley
(TDBC)

Mark Leeman (TDBC)

Ruth McArthur (ENPA)

Chris Mitchell (SWRA)

Cllr David Pipes (MDC)

Tessa Saunders (ENPA)

Cllr Jill Shortland (SCC)

Nick Tait (SDC)

Cllr Roger Webber (ENPA)

Simone Wilding (GOSW)

Cllr Nigel Woollcombe-
Adams (MDC)

2.0 Notes of SSPC on 15th November 2007

2.1 It was noted that in 6.5 the name should read Cull and not Cole as minuted.

3.0 Presentation - Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Examination in Public (EiP) Panel Report - Patrick Flaherty & Paul Browning

3.1 Patrick Flaherty of SCC introduced the topic. He advised that the Panel Report was not binding and was a series of recommendations made by the EiP Panel to the Secretary of State. Once the suggested changes to the draft RSS were published by GOSW at the end of the summer there would be a twelve week consultation period, and this would be the only chance to challenge the proposed changes in Somerset. He acknowledged that there had been a few surprises, not least the level of housing compared with employment opportunities in Yeovil. With regards to proposed changes he said that it was a difficult choice of where to go next in particular regarding the housing proposals: Somerset could either resist the proposals but be more ill prepared if they were imposed, or could accept

and try to plan for possibly overwhelming housing figures. There was the significant question of whether infrastructure could cope with these increases, particularly strategically if the recommendations on the Second Strategic Route were taken up, and to service development in settlements. If appropriate, would it be possible to limit non-economic migration into the West Country? At the present time the thoughts and processes behind the Panel Report were not obvious and one thing to consider was whether Somerset needed to ask for the sources of this information.

3.2 Paul Browning then gave a presentation outlining the main issues connected with the Panel Report. He asked District Officers if they could highlight individual key issues at the end of the presentation. In his presentation Paul looked at the following points:

- The RSS process
- The SW Regional Housing Supply - Affordable Housing
- Housing Figures
- Implications and other issues

- Modification Stage of RSS

3.3 After the presentation there was time for questions. Cllr Christopher Wolverson said that he believed it was vital to get the Regional Assembly to support the re-evaluation of the Second Strategic Route. He asked if there was good evidence to support this. Mike O'Dowd-Jones replied that traffic modelling in Yeovil was underway to give an idea about technical implications of increased housing. The Taunton strategy was already being reviewed to inform the debate.

3.1 Cllr Peter Seib pointed out that places like Liverpool had an excess of Affordable Housing (AH) and so were able to spend all their S106 money on such things as road infrastructure. Patrick Flaherty replied that it was the attractiveness of the South West which was part of the reason why places like Liverpool were 'shrinking'. The level of AH proposed would be of major value for the local population; however, one dilemma was whether we should supply for the demand of those coming into the area from outside.

3.2 At this point the District Councils were asked to put forward their perspective on the Panel Report. John Meeker spoke on behalf of Mendip DC and advised that basically

Mendip were in a position to deal with the figures put forward. Their only concern was whether Bath would be able to provide the numbers of houses that they have been asked to do, and this would have an impact on Mendip if they did not.

3.3 Doug Bamsey spoke on behalf of Sedgemoor DC. He advised that they were also in a position to deal with the figures and were pleased that the Panel had recognised the constraints in Sedgemoor. However, there seemed to be a lack of linkage in the whole strategy and the fact that what happened in Taunton would affect Bridgwater seemed to have been ignored. He added that there needed to be Somerset wide support for the flood defences for Bridgwater as this was not a local problem and these defences would protect a great deal of Somerset as well. He added that tidal flooding defences would not be able to cope within 20 years. He also said that he was worried about AH being provided through economic taxation as he did not believe that this would be achieved and projects such as the Barrage and motorway improvements would absorb most of that money as previously Somerset had tended to lose out on government money for infrastructure. Cllr Peter Seib

responded that he felt that local development funding of these projects would be a huge burden for Sedgemoor.

3.4 Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey requested that a declaration of interests by Members be on the next SSPC agenda.

3.5 Ralph Willoughby-Foster spoke on behalf of Taunton Deane BC and said that there were four concerns as he saw it:

1. delivering the housing
2. sustainability
3. infrastructure
4. Second Strategic Route

On delivering the housing, the Bakers Sub Area Study had pointed out that Taunton would need a dozen sites being developed at the same time in order to deliver the 700 houses per annum recommended in the RSS, this figure had now gone up to 900. The draft RSS had acknowledged the difficulty of this kind of development for Taunton and had therefore given Taunton time to accelerate this development. However, the Panel was now suggesting a flat rate of 900 per annum for Taunton. He advised that Taunton was already under-providing and the five year housing supply would be assessed as lacking as soon as the RSS came into effect, therefore planning may revert to

site selection by appeal and TDBC may be seen as failing in its objectives, thus losing out on government grants.

3.6 On sustainability Ralph Willoughby-Foster said that the assessment of employment growth had been designed to match housing growth to obviate growth in commuting to beyond the sub region. The Panel report was retaining the new jobs figure at the proposed level and yet was vastly increasing the number of houses, which would lead to out-commuting.

3.7 With regard to the third point, on infrastructure, he pointed out that TDBC had emphasised at the EiP that Comeytrowe was not in a public transport corridor and had poor linkage to the roads in the south of the town. The Panel had put forward 3,000 houses in the area for the end of the RSS period, but had also alluded to 6-8,000 more houses in the longer term which was a huge infrastructure challenge, possibly leading to gridlock.

3.8 Finally, the problems of the shelving of the current upgrading proposals of the A303/A358 Second Strategic Route he felt showed lack of foresight. By 2050 both the M5 and railway network were likely to be at regular risk of severe flood and not providing for an alternative route may be

disastrous. He therefore suggested that a letter be sent from SSPC to the Secretary of State putting forward Somerset's point of view. He felt that an opportunity would be lost if the government were not made aware of the depth of feeling about this matter. He added that TDBC wanted to deliver the RSS, but not set themselves up for failure.

3.9 Paul Browning said that there seemed to be blind faith by the Panel that districts could deliver these housing numbers and reiterated the point that the phasing of these developments was crucial to many areas as it had implications for such things as self containment, an ageing population, decreasing economic activity and out-migration of the under 24s. He suggested that a request under the Freedom of Information Act for the Panel's 3.11 notes to understand the rationale behind their decisions may yield more information than writing to the Secretary of State as the latter course may receive little more than an acknowledgement.

3.10 Patrick Flaherty said that a debate on Planning Obligations and S106 was vital as so many things were needing to come out of the same pot and sometimes it could be very hard to understand how these things

could possibly be seen as planning 'gain'; they were merely the provision of basics, not extras. In the case of Comeytrove, the roads would need to go in before the houses and this could not be delivered through Planning Gain. Paul Browning added that even the government did not really appear to have established how it would work as the Community Infrastructure Levy was another attempt at Planning Gain and it was unknown whether the money would be taken at the beginning or the end of a development project. Cllr Peter Seib said that the provision of infrastructure needs in the South West would lead to delay or planning by appeal or even make sites non viable because of the costs of roads and flood defences.

3.11 Andy Foyne spoke on behalf of South Somerset DC. He said that the same four points that TDBC had made applied to South Somerset. He supported writing to the Secretary of State to set the record straight. He believed that the in-migration of retirement age people was the evidence that the Panel used for providing more housing than jobs. He advised that a 6,400 development would require more greenfield development than had been allocated and that the Panel erroneously seemed to

believe that West Dorset and South Somerset were doing a joint Local Development Framework document. Some things were, however, acceptable, like the 43 hectares for employment usage, climate change issues, support for the railway network, an increase of AH to 35% and increases in renewable energy. With regard to Yeovil, at the EiP South Somerset was asked if they could accommodate the DCLG figures which they said they could not due to natural physical constraints, however, the Panel have recommended even higher numbers for Yeovil. The transport strategy information for Yeovil is vital in order to show that the figures cannot be managed with the present insufficient infrastructure and as a means of leveraging extra funds from government in order to fulfil these suggested targets.

3.12 Ralph Willoughby-Foster said that the housing figures for Taunton had been incorrect like those for Yeovil; 4,000 of the 11,000 houses were urban extension dwellings. The Panel had said that the resources for strategic routes should be used for local infrastructure and yet 'strategic' implies their importance and therefore they should still be funded out of the national pot. Cllr Derek Yeomans

said that there had been little discussion of anything other than land and transport and wanted to draw attention to the fact that houses have to be serviced - water, sewerage and waste disposal require provision at great cost, not to mention, the transport costs of all the materials needed to build these houses and the effect on the environment of producing the building materials and transporting them around. Andy Foyne responded that for South Somerset an infrastructure study was being undertaken by consultants which would address these issues directly for that district. It would look at the district's ability to service the houses and what that would cost in real terms.

3.13 Cllr Derek Yeomans then said he wondered who would buy these houses, especially with the cost of new builds at the moment and the impending housing crash. Ralph Willoughby-Foster responded that districts had to provide housing, it was really a case of how to organise and provide it. He felt it was important to remind the Secretary of State that Market Towns are sustainable and can take some of the housing too. Seventy percent of extra housing comes from family break up and this happens where people live, not everybody wants

to move into the larger towns.

3.14 Louise Winn brought Members attention to SWRA Appendix B schedule of research projects which had been attached with the meeting's briefing paper. She said that the outputs from these projects would help to inform the preparation of consultation responses to the Government's Proposed Changes to the RSS. Paul Browning said that he wondered if some Stakeholder Engagement was necessary for the range of projects covered. Louise replied that some work was being done through the Planning Officers Group (POG), but that there were other engagement points such as an Employment Seminar on March 14th.

3.15 Martin Wilsher spoke on behalf of West Somerset. He advised that the problems they had with the Panel Report were similar to the other districts and that as Exmoor covered a large part of their housing area it gave them limited options, on top of which their AH issues were the most problematic in Somerset. Any accommodation of future housing was confined to three possible settlements: Minehead, Watchet and Williton. Minehead already housed one third of the population and the only land available was prone to flooding. Watchet had accessibility

issues, it was close to the A38/A359 and any further development would just encourage commuting to Taunton. Williton had serious flooding issues. Therefore Minehead was the best option and most development would be on small sites. The AH average proportion from housing developments was recommended to be raised to 35% and this had unfortunately created pressure to increase the size of these sites. He saw planning gain as a choice between AH or flood protection, it was not possible to afford both. He supported representation to the Secretary of State as soon as possible.

3.16 Cllr John Edwards spoke on behalf of the Exmoor National Park. He said that the allocation of 20 houses per annum had caused a great deal of debate. There was definitely a desire for more affordable houses as they had a very long waiting list in the Park.

3.17 Rupert Cox said that South Somerset had been the only district positive about the allocation of land for employment use. He felt that generally what had been proposed in this direction for Somerset was good and that the Somerset Chamber of Industry and Commerce (SSCI) was working hard to promote high

quality employment in the county. He said that it was important to have Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil as SSCTs because Somerset did not have a city, and it was sensible to push for development in these places and also the employment land to go with this. Having said that he felt that the point about Market Towns was important and that most people wanted to be able to work close to home. Most commuting was only for short distances and this raised large issues about public transport. The upgrade of the A358/A303 was very important to SCCI and the government's desire to link Stonehenge to this project was wrong from the start. Overall he felt that the RSS had huge potential to get Somerset on the map as a good place to work as well as live. With regard to the ageing population, many people work longer as they live longer so they do contribute to the local economy. As for the loss of under 24s, the University of Somerset would hopefully help to reduce this exodus.

3.18 Peter Lacey said that small communities were under attack through the loss of Post Offices and schools and this made these communities less sustainable. With regard to Market Towns some of them wanted more development and there was a need to acknowledge this desire

and show that it was possible to have it. He was very concerned that there was a great lack of understanding of how far flood water would ingress into Somerset - he said sadly it seemed that a disaster was almost necessary to focus minds!

3.19 Doug Bamsey said that whatever SSPC decided to do it must be comprehensive. There were positive aspects of the Panel report and these needed to be highlighted. He felt that SSPC could say what they wanted but it would not actually change the numbers and that infrastructure was the key issue here. Ralph Willoughby-Foster responded that the annual targets for the SSCTs in the Panel Report had crippled any flexibility in the system as the LDF powers had previously allowed distribution among levels of settlement, but Taunton was not currently able to move some of their figures across to Wellington where it could be better accommodated. Cllr Peter Seib said that proving the colossal cost of following this plan would help to fight it. He said he too was very shocked by the prescriptive nature of the report.

3.20 Cllr John Edwards said that most locals in his area wanted more houses but much of the problem was getting money out of the Housing Corporation. Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew said

that Parish Councils were often supportive of development in principle, but when it was actually proposed they rejected it. Cllr Christine Lawrence said that nobody wanted to see schools closed, but without housing it was not possible to keep them open. She said that in the rural areas second homes caused problems; half of the homes in the 15 villages of her constituency were second homes and she could not see any way of stopping this.

- 3.21 Mike O'Dowd-Jones advised that the SWRA were looking at a scaled down version of the Second Strategic Route and asked Louise Winn what progress had been made. She replied that it had not progressed very far but that they were working with the Highways Agency (HA) on this project.
- 3.22 Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey then asked whether Members were in agreement about writing to the Secretary of State about the Panel Report. She also asked if they wished to lobby on the Second Strategic Route and also make a Freedom of Information request for the Panel notes?
- 3.23 Andy Foyne said that West Dorset and South Somerset were writing jointly to the Secretary of State. Mike O'Dowd-Jones said that if SSPC

decided to ask for the Panel's notes then it needed to be very specific about what it was after. Andy Foyne said that he felt that asking for the notes would give the wrong tone and that writing to the Secretary of State stating concerns was more productive. Doug Bamsey said he agreed, as he was concerned that asking for the notes was provocative and would be met accordingly. It was agreed that Paul Browning's team would draft the initial letter and circulate to district officers for comment prior to sign off. It was also requested that the Second Strategic Route be included. Rupert Cox was keen that a request for greater ability to distribute the numbers be made in the letter, but Doug Bamsey advised to be cautious on this point as it might lead to extra numbers being allocated to the Market Towns as well as the SSCTs. Cllr Peter Seib said that he felt some of the points were political and asked that planners keep the politicians informed. It was agreed that Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey would sign on behalf of all parties.

4.0 Any Other Business

4.1 None

CLOSE.

Next Conference: Tuesday, July 15th, 10am–1pm, Luttrell Room

Somerset County Council

Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey	(SSPC Chairman) - Portfolio Holder: Planning, Transport and Waste
Cllr Alvin Horsfall	Portfolio Holder: Economic Development
Cllr Tony Shire	Portfolio Holder: Highways
Cllr Christopher Wolverson	Representative: Somerset Strategic Partnership
Patrick Flaherty	Head of Physical Regeneration
Paul Browning	Spatial Planning Manager
Richard Antliff	Principal Regional Planner
David Clews	Planning & Development Officer

Exmoor National Park Authority

Cllr John Edwards	Second Deputy Chairman of the Authority
Cllr Roger Webber	Chairman of Planning Committee
Ruth McArthur	Policy & Community Manager
Tessa Saunders	Planning Assistant (Planning & Community)

Mendip District Council

Cllr Nigel Woolcombe-Adams	Senior Portfolio Holder for Planning & Environment
Vacant	Shadow Portfolio Holder for Planning & Environment
Simon Eames	Planning Policy Team Leader
John Meeker	Senior Planning Officer

Sedgemoor District Council

Cllr Anne Fraser	Portfolio Holder - Economic Development and Tourism
Cllr Andrew Gilling	Portfolio Holder - Planning & Transportation
Doug Bamsey	Corporate Director (Regeneration)
Nick Tait	Regeneration Policy Team Leader

South Somerset District Council

Cllr Tim Carroll	Portfolio Holder: Strategy, Policy & Performance & Leader
Cllr Peter Seib	Portfolio Holder: Economy, Planning and Transport
Andrew Foyné	Head of Economic Development and Planning & Transport Service
Philip Higginbottom	Planning Policy Team Leader

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Cllr Simon Coles	Portfolio Holder: Planning Policy & Transportation
Cllr Jefferson Horsley	Portfolio Holder: Economic Development / Property & Tourism
Ralph Willoughby-Foster	Forward Plan & Regeneration Manager
Mark Leeman	Senior Planner

West Somerset District Council

Cllr Michael Downes	Portfolio Holder: Economic Development
Cllr Jon Freeman	(SSPC Vice-Chairman) Portfolio Holder: Environment
Martin Wilsher	Planning and Transport Policy Officer

Government Office for the South West

Mike Walton	Planning & Local Government Programme Officer
-------------	---

South West Regional Development Agency

Carl Budden	Head of Operations -Somerset
-------------	------------------------------

South West Regional Assembly

Louise Winn	Principal Policy Officer (Planning and Partnership)
-------------	---

Somerset Association of Local Councils

Peter Lacey	SALC County Secretary
-------------	-----------------------

Somerset Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ltd

Rupert Cox	Chief Executive
------------	-----------------

Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group

Dave Baxter	Chairman
-------------	----------