

INTRODUCTION

With the change of title from “Core Strategy” back to “Local Plan” for the Council’s main planning policy document, the Council’s Local Development Framework newsletter, is also being renamed the “West Somerset Local Plan Newsletter” which will continue to bring you news on planning policy matters in the District and in particular, progress on the emerging West Somerset Local Plan.

Once completed, the West Somerset Local Plan will provide the statutory planning policy framework for development management decisions in the part of West Somerset District outside the Exmoor National Park, through to 2032.

If you require this information in another format, please contact the Planning Policy team on 01643 703704 or email us at LDF@westsomerset.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICY UPDATE

The change from LDF back to Local Plan has been made as a result of the proposals of the Localism Act 2011 and the draft National Planning Policy Framework currently being prepared. Production of the West Somerset LDF Core Strategy will now continue under the new title of the “West Somerset Local Plan”.

The change is not solely to the document’s title. The removal of the Regional Spatial Strategy from the planning system means that district councils’ statutory local plans have to do a bigger job than before, justifying the overall strategy for the area rather than implementing a policy in a higher level plan. West Somerset is fortunate in that the policy approach for the area on the basis of which the Core Strategy was being prepared was similar to the strategy of the previous planning documents, the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review, and the West Somerset District Local Plan of 2006.

Just to recap, the policy-making Development Plan Documents (DPDs) in the Council’s programme are:

- **THE WEST SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN:** which will provide the overarching planning policies for the Local Planning Authority area. The Council began the preparation of its LDF Core Strategy in July 2009 with a formal notification of its intent to prepare the document and a request to the community and a wide range of stakeholders for help with creating a list of important issues in West Somerset which the Core Strategy’s policies can help to address.

Since then, a further period of community and stakeholder involvement has taken place in order to test a variety of potential strategy and policy options with a view to tackling the issues previously identified in the first part of the process. The outcome of this work is a draft Local Plan Preferred Strategy, which will be subject to an eight week period of public consultation and engagement commencing in February 2012.

- **THE ADOPTED PROPOSALS MAP:** this will indicate strategic development locations and identify the areas to which particular policies apply.



THE EVIDENCE BASE –

(these items are available to download from www.westsomerset.gov.uk or can be inspected at the Council's offices in Williton)

Work continues to develop the evidence base to support the preparation of the Local Plan. The completed studies to date are as follows:

STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT (SHMA)

- Central government's Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) 'Housing' requires all local authorities to undertake a SHMA to inform their housing policies. West Somerset Council, covers an area where two neighbouring Housing Market Areas (HMAs) overlap. The Council has therefore participated in the joint preparation of two SHMAs, one for the Northern Peninsula, (also including parts of northern Devon and Cornwall), and the other for Taunton and South Somerset. Both of these studies have been completed and provide information to inform development of the Core Strategy.

STRATEGIC FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT

- A Level 1 SFRA (covering the whole District at a general level of information) has been undertaken for the whole of West Somerset District in partnership with the Exmoor National Park Authority in order to provide information about relative flood risk in different parts of the District to inform decisions about the appropriate location of new development.
- A Level 2 SFRA (giving more detail for specific areas) has been prepared in relation to Minehead, Watchet and Williton, areas subject to the greatest development pressure and all affected by serious flood risk issues.

STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SHLAA)

- This assessment identifies sites in the District with housing development potential and tests their availability, suitability and deliverability. An initial call for suggested residential development sites took place in 2009, approximately 85 sites were submitted in a wide variety of locations and assessment is now complete.

The SHLAA is an important background document, but does not itself allocate land, the inclusion of a site within the SHLAA does not imply its acceptability for development. However, once completed, it will help to inform decision making about the location of future development and identification of the supply of land for housing.

The SHLAA will be subject to periodic updating in the future, in the course of which the Council will make further invitations for submission of any additional potential development sites for consideration as part of the development land supply.

EMPLOYMENT LAND REVIEW:

- This provides a review of the existing supply of employment land within the area and assesses how well it is providing for the area's employment needs.

TOWN AND VILLAGE CENTRES STUDY:

- A Town and Village Centres Study has recently been completed, this work, compiled in accordance with the guidance in PPS4 assesses the provision of town centre services and their relationship with the demand for such services.

RENEWABLE ENERGY POTENTIAL STUDY:

- This study outlines the current potential for the use of such technologies within West Somerset.



GYPSEY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENT (GTAA)

- A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment had been prepared in order to inform the required provision for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the South West. A clear understanding of the level of need for additional pitches has been provided by the study (three additional pitches within the Local Plan area).

FURTHER STUDY WORK:

- A recreational facilities study is currently in preparation in accordance with the guidance in PPG17.

NATIONAL POLICY UPDATE

Following the general election in May 2010 the new Government announced significant proposed changes to the statutory planning system, to be delivered through a large scale, multi-purpose act of Parliament called the Localism Bill. The Localism Act 2011 was enacted in November 2011. Most of its provisions remain to be brought into effect, however, In brief, the major planning related changes in the Act include:

- the complete removal of the Regional Spatial Strategies and national / regional housing targets from the planning system;
- the creation of a (much more brief) “National Planning Policy Framework” to replace the existing Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Planning Policy Statements;
- The introduction of optional Neighbourhood Development Plans as a local tier of the statutory development plan, based on parish areas;
- Increased importance for the LDF Core Strategy, (to be known instead as the ‘Local Plan’ now to take on the role of providing strategic planning policy for the area, and which would provide a context for Neighbourhood Development Plans;
- A number of other provisions designed to give local people more power to shape the future of the areas where they live (‘Community Right to Build’, ‘Community Right to Buy’, ‘Neighbourhood Development Orders’ etc.)
- Also the ‘New Homes Bonus’, providing a cash incentive to local authorities which secure the delivery of new houses in their areas which has already been brought into effect.

Draft regulations have been consulted on both for Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan preparation. Also a draft National Planning Policy Framework has been published for consultation, none of these documents have yet been finalised.

ABOLITION OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

The Government’s proposed abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies and national housing targets is to be effected by order of the Secretary of State following public consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the environmental impact of removing them from the system. This process is ongoing. The RSS for the South West had not been finalised at the time of the general election, it remains suspended for the time being until the process mentioned above is complete and opportunities for legal challenge have passed. The evidence base for the RSS will however remain a valuable source of information for the preparation of the Local Plan. Until the removal of RSS is finalised RPG10 remains part of the statutory development plan for the area as the interim RSS.

The main implication of the emerging RSS for West Somerset had been a requirement to provide for 2500 dwellings during the period 2006 to 2026. Although the RSS will not be part of the context for the finalising the West Somerset Local Plan, the evidence of housing needs within the area strongly supports the provision of about that quantum of new housing. This in any case does not represent a significant change in the rate of housebuilding experienced within the area over the last few years.

ADOPTED WEST SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN 2006 - SAVED POLICIES

When the LDF system was introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act in 2004, existing Local Plans were automatically 'saved' for three years from their date of adoption. Our Local Plan was adopted in April 2006 so the Council made an application to the Government Office for the South West (GOSW) to extend certain policies beyond April 2009.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government responded, issuing a Direction saving virtually all of the existing local plan policies for which extension beyond three years had been requested. As of the 17th April 2009, the adopted West Somerset Local Plan policies not included in the schedule to the direction ceased to be part of the statutory development plan.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

PRODUCING THE WEST SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN TO 2032 – HOW TO GET INVOLVED

During the period 2009 to 2011 a great deal of work has been carried out towards the preparation of the West Somerset Core Strategy / Local Plan. A wide range of individuals, community organisations and other stakeholders have participated in compiling a list of the important issues affecting West Somerset, developing options to address them and deciding on the best way forward.

The first stages of the Core Strategy preparation process are very important, the evidence and input made so far has been fed into the preparation of a preferred strategy for the Local Plan which will be subject to a period of public consultation, engagement and discussion commencing in February 2012.

COMING SOON: CONSULTATION ON the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 Preferred Strategy.

KEEPING YOU IN TOUCH

Local Plan newsletters will be made available on the Council's website to keep you up to date with current events. We will also notify those on the consultation list of the various stages in the production of the Council's Local Plan, and in particular when consultations will be taking place.

If you have an e-mail address could you please email your name, organisation (if appropriate), address and email address to LDF@westsomerset.gov.uk we will then be able to keep you informed via e-mail. If you no longer wish to be contacted about West Somerset LDF documents, or if your contact details have changed, please let us know and we will remove you from our circulation list or update your details for you.

If you would like more information about any of the items in this newsletter, you can visit our website at: www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk or contact us at: LDF@westsomerset.gov.uk

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