

Introduction

- 3.01** Fundamental to the strategy of the Local Plan is the overall development strategy: how and where new development is accommodated in Sedgemoor. Government guidance and the Structure Plan give important direction.
- 3.02** The aim of the Structure Plan's strategy consistent with government guidance is to conserve the environment of the County and achieve broader sustainability objectives, such as reducing the need to travel, by focusing development on the larger settlements. In addition, in terms of the distribution of development, the strategy aims to achieve a close relationship between areas of economic expansion and the allocation of housing.
- 3.03** The Structure Plan states that new development should be focussed on the towns, where provision for such development should be made in accordance with their role and function, individual characteristics and constraints.

Key Objective

To deliver a focussed approach to locating new development, which:

- concentrates new development in the Towns;
 - maximises the use of brownfield land and existing buildings and minimises the use of greenfield sites;
 - creates opportunities to use and develop sustainable forms of transport, particularly walking, cycling and public transport;
 - does not cause material harm to the environmental characteristics of those Towns;
 - does not overload the capacity of the facilities and services of those Towns; and
 - does not prejudice the vitality of other settlements and rural areas to provide for a range of development opportunities to meet the defined needs of those who live and work there.
- 3.04** Government guidance and the Structure Plan states that priority should be given to the re-use of previously developed land. The Government

is committed to increasing the proportion of development achieved on previously developed land. Government guidance and the Structure Plan give emphasis to the encouragement of appropriate mixed-use development.

Towns

- 3.05** The Structure Plan identifies Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge as towns.
- 3.06** These two towns will function as locations for residential use, employment and shopping, cultural, community and education services within Sedgemoor. They are the settlements with the most accessibility by means other than the car and the most facilities.
- 3.07** Bridgwater is the County's third largest Town, which in terms of population is twice the size of Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge. It offers the best facilities, the most employment and the greatest accessibility by public transport.
- 3.08** The Town of Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge is an important centre for housing, transport, shopping, employment and tourism. After Bridgwater it is the settlement with the greatest access to services, jobs and public transport.
- 3.09** The Structure Plan does not distinguish between Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge in terms of appropriate locations for development.
- 3.10** Given the relative accessibility to jobs, services and public transport, it is appropriate that Bridgwater is the principal focus of development over the period 1991–2011.

Rural Centres and Villages

- 3.11** In addition to towns, the Structure Plan defines two further categories of settlements: Rural Centres and Villages. Rural Centres act as focal points for local employment and shopping, social and community activity in their areas. Villages provide limited local services. The Structure Plan does not identify which settlements are Rural Centres or Villages, and these are to be defined in the Local Plan. They have been defined after carefully considering facilities and accessibility.

- 3.12** The Structure Plan states that development in Rural Centres and Villages should be such as will sustain and enhance their role and be commensurate with their size and accessibility, and appropriate to their character and physical identity. There is no distinction drawn between Rural Centres and Villages in terms of the scale or type of development appropriate, so long as it is compatible with the size and scale of the settlement.
- 3.13** In so far as development is required in addition to that which can be accommodated at the Towns, development will be focussed at Rural Centres or Villages which have the greatest range of facilities and are the most accessible by means other than the car.
- 3.14** Whilst a settlement may be appropriate for development in terms of facilities and accessibility, an acceptable site may not be possible in terms of the character of the settlement, its surrounding countryside and other material considerations.

POLICY STR1

Cheddar, Nether Stowey, North Petherton and Wedmore are defined as Rural Centres.

Ashcott, Axbridge, Badgworth, Bawdrip, Berrow, Biddisham Blackford, Brean, Brent Knoll, Burtle, Cannington, Catcott, Chapel Allerton, Chedzoy, Chilton Polden, Chilton Trinity, Combwich, Cossington, Cross, East Brent, East Huntspill, East Lyng, Edington, Fiddington, Goathurst, Lymppsham, Mark, Mark Causeway, Middlezoy, Moorland, Moorlinch, North Newton, Othery, Pawlett, Puriton, Rooksbridge, Shapwick, Shipham, Spaxton/Four Forks, Stawell, Stockland Bristol, Stone Allerton, Theale, Thurloxton, Weare, Wembdon, West Huntspill, Westonzoyland and Woolavington are defined as Villages.

- 3.15** Rural Centres because of the range of facilities they offer and their location serve as centres for their surrounding rural areas. Cheddar has a good range of facilities and is a local employment centre. North Petherton has a good range of services. Nether Stowey and Wedmore are both smaller with less facilities, but because they are in relatively inaccessible parts of the district they are important local centres.
- 3.16** The character of the settlements classified as Villages varies significantly. They include the historic town of Axbridge. Some have a range of

basic facilities as good as the more isolated Rural Centres. The majority have very modest facilities, poor accessibility by public transport and limited employment.

- 3.17** Of all the Rural Centres and Villages, Cheddar offers the best opportunity to reduce the need to travel and therefore meet the objectives of the Local Plan. It is the largest settlement after Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge. More significantly, it has the best range of local services and facilities and the best balance of jobs to people.
- 3.18** In other settlements small-scale development, which can be accommodated within established settlement boundaries consistent with general settlement policies, will be appropriate to sustain and enhance their role. In addition there may be justification for local needs housing and small-scale employment development.

POLICY STR2

Development in Rural Centres and Villages should be such as will sustain and enhance their role and will be commensurate with their size and accessibility, and appropriate to their character and physical identity.

Outside Settlements

- 3.19** Outside the defined boundaries of settlements, i.e. Towns, Villages and Rural Centres, government policy and the Structure Plan state that development shall be strictly controlled. The general tenor of national countryside policy is that development should benefit the economy and maintain or enhance the environment. Agricultural and forestry developments will generally be appropriate in the countryside along with certain other developments, such as conversion of rural buildings for employment use and some affordable housing schemes. These and other exceptions to the normal strict control are set out in specific policies.
- 3.20** The development boundaries of settlements (ie. Towns, Rural Centres and Villages) defined in this Plan are shown on the Proposals Map. Within them, development may be permissible subject to the policies in the Plan. Outside them, countryside policies will generally apply. These development boundaries are policy boundaries, not physical boundaries, although in many places they follow clearly defined property boundaries or other physical features on the ground.

POLICY STR3

The countryside will be protected for its own sake. Outside defined development boundaries, new housebuilding and other new development will be strictly controlled. Development will not be permitted unless it accords with other policies in this Plan which provide, exceptionally, for development in the countryside. In general, all such development will benefit economic activity, will maintain or enhance the environment, and will not increase the need to travel.

Brownfield Strategy

3.21 The Government is committed to increasing the proportion of development on previously developed sites or otherwise underused land within urban areas, so called brownfield sites. This should directly contribute to:

- a) regenerating urban areas;
- b) clearing up and re-using derelict, disused and underused sites;
- c) avoiding unnecessary loss of the countryside;
- d) reducing the need to travel; and
- e) countering long-standing trends of decentralisation.

3.22 Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (2000) (PPG3) defines previously developed land as that which is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings), and associated fixed surface infrastructure. For the purposes of this Plan, brownfield development is defined in the same way. This is subject to:

- a) restricting the development or re-use of sites beyond the defined boundaries of Towns, Rural Centres and Villages other than that for which a countryside location is essential;
- b) protecting open space, playing fields and green spaces within Towns, Rural Centres and Villages.

3.23 The Council aims to maximise the amount of development on previously developed land in Towns, Rural Centres and Villages. Brownfield

sites in the countryside, outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages, offer the opportunity for development without the loss of previously undeveloped land. However, this must be balanced with other environmental impacts, including traffic generation and increased car dependency. These sites are unlikely to be appropriate for development other than for which a countryside location is essential. The re-use of existing buildings can make an important contribution to minimising the need for new development and maximising the use of existing resources. This includes the re-use of buildings in the countryside. It is very important not to lose important areas of open land within urban areas. They are important to the character of towns and villages and the well-being of residents.

3.24 Bridgwater because of its changing employment profile and changes in the role of the Town Centre, has had and continues to have significant redevelopment opportunities. A large number of brownfield sites have already come forward for development.

3.25 Highbridge has significant potential for the re-use of previously developed land. As with Bridgwater, this has the potential to aid the regeneration of run down areas, particularly the Town Centre.

3.26 The Council has undertaken a detailed assessment of brownfield capacity at Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge. It provides the basis for the brownfield sites identified for development in this Plan.

3.27 The importance of realism in the assessment of brownfield development potential is recognised. There are a number of reasons why brownfield sites may be difficult to bring forward including divided ownership and site preparation costs, which may include contamination issues.

3.28 Progress in the achievement of brownfield development is to be monitored, so that the achievement of the Plan target for the development of housing on previously developed sites or conversions can be assessed. Consistent under-achievement of that figure over several years would threaten overall housing provision.

3.29 The Council will phase the provision of development on greenfield sites, which might otherwise be developed too quickly. The Council will also resist additional greenfield sites when brownfield sites remain undeveloped. If greenfield

sites are permitted in addition to that which the Plan allocates, this is likely to reduce the achievement of brownfield sites and re-use. The development of brownfield sites and re-use is likely to be more expensive and/or more complicated than greenfield sites.

Sequential Strategy for Locating Development

3.30 To achieve the objectives of the Local Plan consistently with the Structure Plan strategy, the Plan has a “sequential” approach to accommodating new development. This combines the priority for the re-use of previously developed sites and the importance of focusing development on the settlements with the most facilities and the greatest public transport accessibility:

3.31 All allocated housing sites in the Plan have been chosen by reference to the following criteria from para. 31 of PPG 3 Housing (2000):

- the availability of previously developed sites; location and accessibility;
- the capacity of existing and potential infrastructure;
- the ability to build communities;
- and any physical and environmental constraints on development.

POLICY STR4

The overall policy on development distribution for the period 1991-2011 is to identify land and sites on the basis of the following priorities:

1 Firstly on brownfield land or sites which offer the opportunity for redevelopment or re-use, the development of which would contribute towards regeneration, viability and vitality, and which are within or close to existing or proposed public transport corridors in this order:

- a) within Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge**
- b) within Rural Centres and Villages;**
- c) in the countryside, re-using existing buildings, or for development where a countryside location is essential.**

2 Secondly on greenfield sites, only if it is demonstrated that sufficient brownfield sites or re-use opportunities are unavailable. It shall be in this order:

- a) at Bridgwater;**
- b) at Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge;**
- c) at Cheddar; and**
- d) at Rural Centres and Villages which have the greatest range of facilities and are the most accessible by means other than the car.**

Mixed-Use Development

3.32 Government policy emphasises the importance attached to promoting mixed-use development. Mixed-use development can occur at many different levels: within a settlement as a whole; within groups of streets; on a site; and within individual buildings. The interpretation of mixed-uses is a matter for the local context.

3.33 Benefits arise from the potential increase in activity throughout the day from a range of uses compared to a single use, and from the reduction in the need to travel for a range of facilities. Problems can arise by the introduction of incompatible activities, or poorly considered overall design. In assessing brownfield sites, conversion opportunities and greenfield sites the Council will encourage the bringing together of complementary and compatible uses.

POLICY STR6

Proposals resulting in mixed-use development will be encouraged provided that only uses which would be compatible with each other and the surrounding area are included and the scheme is designed as a united whole. Proposals for mixed-use schemes will be particularly encouraged in Town Centres and in other areas which are highly accessible by means of transport other than the private car.

Planning Obligations

3.34 Planning obligations are an important tool which allows developments to overcome otherwise decisive obstacles. There is government guidance on what can reasonably be secured (Circular 1/97). The Council will seek planning

obligations to secure benefits directly related to the proposed development, reasonably related to it in scale and kind and necessary for it to proceed. The Plan sets out in the detailed proposals for development on brownfield and greenfield sites and in topic specific policies, matters on which planning obligations will be sought.