

# NEWSLETTER FOR THE NEW WEST SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN\* TO 2032



## A PLAIN ENGLISH GUIDE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE WEST SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN\* PREFERRED STRATEGY 2012 TO 2032

FEBRUARY 2012

\*Formerly known as the West Somerset LDF Core Strategy

### Introduction:

The Local Plan has been through a period where the main issues to be tackled through planning policies have been identified. A number of studies have been carried out to inform the drafting of the policies, including housing; housing markets, employment land, retail, sport & leisure and, renewable energy. Also, several alternative strategy options have been consulted upon.

All this has been put together to make the first draft of the new Local Plan. This is being published for eight weeks consultation early in 2012.

This special edition of the New Local Plan Newsletter sets out to explain briefly what the Local Plan does, and why it is important.

It is very important indeed to remember that the text below is not the plan itself, it only sets out to outline what is in the consultation document. It is *essential* to look at the consultation documents themselves before responding, as this text only gives a simplified view of its content.

### A couple of points which must be emphasised:

- The Local Plan Preferred Strategy is being put out to consultation because we are looking for individuals and organisations' views as to whether the policies will have the effect we are hoping they will have. In order to help people do this, each policy is followed by a statement of:
  - what it is meant to do,
  - what assumptions have been made in drafting the policy and also
  - a justification for it.
- Unlike the old style local plan where people were being invited simply to object to or support its policies, **this is an opportunity to give us your views on whether, in the light of the evidence collected, you think the policies will do what the Council says they will or not, and – most important – WHY.** If you don't think we have got it right, then please suggest how we should change the policies to make them work better. We are aiming to make West Somerset a better place to live, work and play, so it is very important that the policies are as effective as we can make them between us.

### **What is the Local Plan and why should you be interested in it?**

- The Local Plan to 2032 is a very important document for everyone who lives in the parts of West Somerset which are not in the Exmoor National Park: This includes Minehead, Watchet, Williton and spreading as far as places such as Stogursey, Crowcombe, Clatworthy and Brushford.
- Its policies will be used to judge whether planning applications for development within this area should be allowed or not over the next 20 years
- This is the opportunity to make new planning policies which will serve our communities well by managing and enabling the sort of development which they need to thrive, but also to protect the things that we value about the area
- The Local Plan also tells us where the larger developments taking place over the 20 years will be built
- The Local Plan aims to be positive about **encouraging new development of the right kind in the right locations.**

### **The main job of the Local Plan is to set out:**

- How much housing and other new development should be built within the area during the twenty year period to 2032,
- where it should be built,
- when it should be built, and;
- how it should be delivered.

**This leaflet explains in outline how the plan will do this.**

### **Sustainable development**

- The Local Plan aims to support and / or improve the services provided in our towns and larger villages by making sure that most of the new development takes place at the largest settlements.
- The need to provide for some development for the villages in the area is also recognised, and the policies provide for that too.
- The important thing is to make sure that the right amount of well designed development is allowed so that the character of each place is strengthened rather than damaged (Policy SD1)

### How will the Local Plan do this?

- The Local Plan proposes different policies for three different types of place:
  - The three main settlements of Minehead Watchet and Williton will have development limit boundaries around their built up areas. Some major new development will be planned for in areas which expand these boundaries beyond the existing built up area. [Policies SC1, SC5, MD1, WA1 & WI1]
  - The remaining villages will not have these development limits. Instead some, limited development may be permitted within and around a village provided that;
    - it meets a clearly identified local need,
    - it contributes to the wider sustainability of the area, and,
    - it satisfies a number of other criteria in the policy.

The scale of any such development taking place will be limited by a maximum percentage increase in the number of dwellings in the village over the plan period. [Policies SC1, SC5 & SV1]

NB: *This does **not** mean that development will automatically be allowed in all villages regardless of size or local facilities.*

- Outside these settlements, in the open countryside development will be strictly limited to that which must be sited there for operational reasons and there is a proven need identified for it, such as an agricultural workers dwelling. [Policy OC1]
- This approach involves assessing development proposals on an individual basis in terms of the benefit they would bring. Proposals that deliver both residential and economic development, helping to balance travelling patterns, are likely to satisfy the policy better than purely residential schemes. [Policies SC2 & SC6]

**It should be borne in mind that one of the main aims of the Local Plan is to encourage appropriate amounts of new development in locations where it will help to deliver sustainable development .**

### How much development?

- About 65 dwellings per year at Minehead [Policies SC2 & MD1]
  - About 30 dwellings per year at Watchet and Williton (combined), and, [Policies SC2, WA2 & WI2]
  - About 30 dwellings per year across the remaining villages in the area. [Policies SC2 & SV1]
- Over a 20 year period this adds up to 2,500 dwellings. This is about the same rate of development as West Somerset has seen over the last 20 years. An average of 125 dwellings per year.

So, the amount of development being proposed maintains the level of housing growth we are used to in West Somerset.

The new dwellings will be a mixture of different types and sizes, and there will also be a mix of housing for sale and rent. [Policy SC3]

Affordable housing will also be provided. [Policy SC4]

**One important task of the planning system is to ensure that some additional new housing is provided specifically for rent by those who are unable to afford to purchase property or rent at open market rates. This is because there is a serious shortage within the area of property which many households on low incomes can afford to rent.**

Policy SC4 explains how this housing is to be provided. In summary the approach involves the developer providing a proportion of affordable housing (at a minimum ratio of approximately a third affordable houses to two thirds market houses) on sites above certain size thresholds. The thresholds are:

- In Minehead on sites of 8 or more dwellings
- In Watchet and Williton on sites of 5 or more dwellings and
- **Two alternative thresholds for sites elsewhere within the plan area are offered for consultation, these are either:**
  - elsewhere on sites of 1 or more dwelling, or
  - elsewhere on sites of 3 or more dwellings

The policy requires that the affordable houses must be built to specified standards and be funded by the developer.

At villages where there is no development limit boundary affordable housing may be permitted provided that a number of criteria are satisfied. It must be demonstrated that there is:

- a clear and ongoing need for this type of housing in the settlement, and;
- there must be a clear employment, social and/or long term historic family linkage between the potential occupants and the settlement, and;
- no suitable alternative sites are available (in more sustainable locations), and;
- there is good access to basic essential services and facilities within the settlement/settlement cluster or via access to good public transport connections nearby to neighbouring larger settlements.

The policy also provides for the possibility, where 100% affordable housing schemes are not viable, to allow development with a mix of market housing and affordable housing (the latter to be provided according to the criteria in the policy). The minimum proportion of affordable housing to market housing should be 1 to 3.

Where open-market housing is permitted in order to facilitate the provision of affordable housing, this will be on the basis that

- they will all be integrated on the same site,
- there are community and/or commercial services and facilities within the village or easily accessible in a neighbouring settlement, and,
- that the open-market element will not result in a significant increase in regular unsustainable traffic movements (to more distant settlements). [Policy SC4]

**Minehead Development:**

New development in Minehead should do one or more of the following:

- help it to keep its important service centre and employment role,
- keep its attractiveness to tourists and other visitors,
- help to resolve the flood risk issues affecting the town and pay attention to the area's high quality environment.

The plan also proposes mixed development including about 1000 new dwellings at Minehead within areas;

- to the south of the A39 Hopcott Road,
- to the north east of Seaward Way, and,
- (post 2022 [when the above are approaching completion(?)]), to the west of Dunster Marsh. [Policies SC1, SC2, SC5, SC6, MD1 & MD2]

**Watchet development:**

New development in Watchet should help it to;

- keep its important local service centre and employment role,
- keep its attractiveness to tourists and marina users,
- help to resolve the flood risk issues affecting the town provide some additional allotments for the town, improve local linkages within the town, and,
- pay attention to the area's high quality environment.

The plan also proposes mixed development including about 250 new dwellings within areas to the south and/or east of the town. [Policies SC1, SC2, SC5, SC6, WA1 & WA2]

**Williton development:**

New development in Williton should do one or more of the following:

- help it to keep its important local service centre, administrative and employment role,
- help to resolve the flood risk issues affecting the village, and,
- help to improve the movement of traffic and transport management within the village

The plan also proposes mixed development including about 300 new dwellings within areas to the west, east and/or north of the village. [Policies SC1, SC2, SC5, SC6, WI1 & WI2]

**Development at other villages:**

Development at villages other than Williton should;

- help to maintain or enhance existing levels of service provision there, and,
- also help to create or maintain balanced, sustainable communities.

The policy is aimed particularly at the larger other villages which are relatively well accessed and which have some existing services. A cluster of several smaller villages may be considered as if they were one where there is a close relationship between them in terms of the life of the community. [Policies SC1, SC5 & SV1]

**Development in the open countryside:**

In certain, very limited circumstances, with special justification, residential development can be permitted in the open countryside. [Policy OC1]

**Economy policies:**

The economy policies aim to strengthen and maintain the jobs and businesses which make up the existing economy, whilst encouraging a wider range of jobs and new businesses.

The importance of the tourism agriculture and social care sectors is recognised, and also the small home based businesses which are a strong feature of the West Somerset economy and which provide some of the more highly paid jobs. [Policies EC1, EC2, EC3 & EC10]

The importance of providing super-fast broadband services for the area is also recognised, this will be strongly encouraged by the Council.

The existing major employment sites at Minehead and Williton will be protected. [Policy EC5]

The issues of:

- home-working and work/live units, [Policies EC4 & EC6]
- encouragement of new training and education facilities, are also covered by policies. [Policy EC7]
- Tourism development [Policies EC 8 & EC9]
- Agriculture [Policy EC11]

The building of a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point will have significant impacts locally particularly during the construction period. The Local Plan will help to manage these effects. [Policy EN1]

**Transport policies:**

Whilst recognising that in West Somerset inhabitants and visitors alike are heavily reliant on the private car, the Local Plan will help to ensure that any practical opportunities to improve means of transport other than the private car will be taken. Realistically this is likely to relate most particularly to larger areas of new development, which should be designed to make the most of existing cycle routes, pedestrian routes and footpaths. [Policies TR1 & TR2]

**Community facilities and public health:**

The Local Plan will aim to ensure that community facilities are properly provided for in new development, it will also try to make sure that new development is designed so that walking and cycling are attractive ways of getting about for the occupiers of the new development. Disability access will also be provided for. [Policies CF1 & CF2]

**Low and Zero Carbon development and renewable energy generation:**

The Local Plan includes policies to encourage the development of a low / zero carbon economy. This includes the use of woodfuel heating systems or other low carbon systems in order to reduce reliance on fuel oil, propane gas and electricity for heating and cooking. This can also give rise to new businesses in the local area. [Policies EN1, EN2 & CC1]

**Flood risk management and coastal change:**

The Local Plan includes policies which address these very important issues. The basic approach for development and flood risk management is that development should be designed so as not to suffer from an unacceptable risk of flooding itself, or give rise to an increased risk of flooding elsewhere. The likelihood of rising sea levels due to climate change make coastal change management an essential area of policy which is also included. [Policies CC2, CC3 & CC4]

**Water Management:**

The Local Plan encourages water efficient development both in the detailed design and wider impact of the development. [Policies CC5 & CC6]

**Other environmental policies:**

The Local Plan also has policies to protect the natural and historic environments, landscape character, biodiversity, green infrastructure, the best quality agricultural land, pollution, contaminated land and land instability. [Policies NH1, NH2, NH3, NH4, NH5 & NH6]

**The Local Plan Preferred Strategy will be subject to an eight week period of consultation running from Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March to Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The full documents will be available for inspection at local libraries in the area during their normal opening hours, at the Council's offices in Williton and Minehead and online on the Planning Policy Current Consultation section of the Council's main website [www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk/new-local-plan-consultation](http://www.westsomersetonline.gov.uk/new-local-plan-consultation) where further information is also available concerning planning policy and the local plan evidence base and also on its consultation website: [www.westsomersetsays.com](http://www.westsomersetsays.com).**

**Comments can be submitted online or by post. However, you may also respond via e-mail to [LDF@westsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:LDF@westsomerset.gov.uk) or by post to: The Local Development Framework Team, West Somerset Council, West Somerset House, Killick Way, Williton, Somerset. TA4 4QA.**