

**Policy and Resources
Committee
9th August, 2006**

Agenda Item No **4**
Public Report

**Report of the Regional Spatial Strategy Ad-Hoc Inquiry
Team**

Item for Recommendation: To consider the report of the Inquiry Team into proposals for East Dorset contained within the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

Contributors: Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Anthony Braine, Committee Officer

Financial Implications: None

Council Priorities: [CUL1](#) [CUL3](#) [ENV3](#) [H&H2](#)

Recommendations: It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Committee accept the report of the Inquiry Team and that it be considered as part of the Committee's response to full Council on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

1. Applicable Lead Member Area(s)

1.1 Environment.

2. Crime and Disorder – Section 17 Implications

2.1 There are no Crime and Disorder implications associated with this report.

3. Introduction

3.1 At its meeting on the 7th June, 2006 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to appoint an Inquiry Team to look at the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

3.2 The Inquiry Team comprised Councillors Mrs P. A. Reynolds (Team Leader), R. E. Daw, R. C. Dudman, S. C. Hearn, Mrs B. T. Manuel and D. Morgan.

3.3 The Panel has now completed its inquiry and the report is attached as Appendix 1 for consideration.

3.4 Members are advised that, on being referred to the Committee, the report from the Panel is within the public domain and once accepted by the Committee, becomes a report of the Committee for onward transmission to Full Council.

4. Appendices

4.1 Appendix 1 - Report of the Inquiry Panel

5. Background Papers

5.1 Published works

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report of the Inquiry Team into the Regional Spatial Strategy

1. Executive Summary

The Team were appointed to look at the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West 2006 - 2026 and to give its report on the proposed development in the three identified sites (areas of search) for housing within the East Dorset District.

This report is based on three weeks of intense inquiry where many of the principal stakeholders, both for and against the RSS, were asked to give a presentation and answer questions. This was an extremely short timescale which introduced constraints, not least of which was unavailability of potential witnesses due to holidays.

Representatives from Housing, Business, Transport, Environmental Groups and local residents contributed to the report and site visits were included.

Documented evidence and written contributions have also been taken into account.

Team Members

Councillor Mrs P. A. Reynolds (Team Leader)
Councillor R. E. Daw
Councillor R. C. Dudman
Councillor S. C. Hearn
Councillor Mrs B. T. Manuel
Councillor D. Morgan

2. Background

On the 7th June, 2006 the East Dorset District Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to appoint an Inquiry Team to look at the draft Regional Spatial Strategy. It was important to ensure that as wide a range of views as possible was heard, ranging from local campaign groups who were opposed to the strategy to representatives of landowners and developers.

The RSS, created by the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA), sets the strategic planning framework for the Local Development Framework (LDF) of both Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council (EDDC). The LDF is a key document in determining the future shape of our District and provides essential guidance for District Planners when discussing planning applications. The draft RSS has identified the need for some 270 dwellings per annum in East Dorset making a total of 5400 by 2016 Of these 5,200 would be within the South East Dorset Spatial Strategy Area, of which 2,400

would be on urban extension sites. After this time the opportunity for bringing forward major greenfield sites will be limited, and so annual completions will rely more heavily upon windfall sites.

The principle issues to consider would include the implications of the proposed housing densities within the Strategy, the views of local people, infrastructure problems, resultant travel to work routes as a result of proposed developments, potential alternative sites for development, environmental impact and English Nature issues.

The provision of affordable housing, the impact the proposed restricted growth of housing development would have on the local economy, and the weight of any argument against the proposals were other issues that would be considered. It was recognised that the range of views sought would need to be balanced and a range of evidence would need to be considered. Strong technical arguments would be needed if any proposal in the strategy was opposed.

Whilst the strength of local feeling against further development was recognised, it was also acknowledged that there were strong economic reasons for some development in certain areas. Decline of custom for local traders and fall in school attendance figures were given as two examples.

There was a view that clarification should be given on the definition of affordable housing. In order that this would be achieved, the impact of such proposals on developers and the effectiveness of attracting young families would need to be considered.

3. Interviews with Interested Parties

Keep Wimborne Green – Mrs S. Bourton and Mr P. Barnes

The principle concern for Keep Wimborne Green (KWG) was the likelihood of any proposed development of green belt land, especially as they were of the view that all land around Wimborne satisfied green belt criteria. Whilst KWG understood the need for affordable housing, provided it was allocated to local people, they considered the projected number of homes to be too high. Their research had shown that limited public services, restrictions on travel to work times on public transport, insufficient job market and decline in birth rates would all reduce the demand for affordable housing.

KWG highlighted major issues which were not featured in the RSS. This included water supply, sanitation and transport issues, which included access to central Poole and Bournemouth for work where there was already insufficient public transport and congested roads. The Group considered any further development as unsustainable without adequate infrastructure. Coupled with this was doubt as to whether or not there was sufficient land available for industrial use to generate the jobs to support the projected housing.

KWG believed that the majority of people who would qualify for affordable housing would be reliant on public transport due to reduced car ownership. There would be therefore a need to site housing developments closer to areas of industrial concentration.

Keep West Parley Green – Mr R. Heaslip and Mr P. Timberlake

Keep West Parley Green (KWPG) concentrated on two issues. The first was specific problems within West Parley and the impact of proposed development and the second was their response to the RSS.

KWPG believed that any proposed development within West Parley would encroach on the green belt, increase urban sprawl and would turn West Parley into a suburb of north Bournemouth. There would also be an inevitable increase in traffic, yet current levels

were already excessive. Along with infrastructure problems, West Parley was also surrounded by a number of heritage sites.

With regard to the RSS, KWPG considered it a weak document with too many inconsistencies. They were alarmed at the attitude of the RSS towards the green belt and believed that Buchanan's review did not support a revision of the green belt for the purpose of development.

KWPG drew Members' attention to a recently published Inspector's report on the East of England's RSS. In this, the Inspector recommended that detailed guidance on locations be removed from the RSS. Such guidance should be given through separate Local Development Plans.

KWPG also viewed the RSS very weak on any infrastructure proposals and too reliant on sources of unspecific funding from developers. They were concerned that housing would be developed in stages without similar development of infrastructure. They believed the problem would be further exacerbated by the projected increase in airport traffic. Passenger numbers were expected to rise from current levels of 1 million a year to 3 million a year by 2016.

A recent survey of West Parley homes by the Group on the RSS revealed that traffic problems and the further impact of any new housing was highlighted as the major issue concerning residents.

Keep Corfe Mullen Green – Mr B. Lane

Corfe Mullen Parish Council - Mr P. Haward

Keep Corfe Mullen Green (KCMG) summarised their concerns over the RSS as two key areas; environment and sustainability.

Transport was seen as a major issue, which included bus services. The Group explained that Corfe Mullen provided little employment so most residents had to travel to neighbouring areas and beyond for work. With travel problems as severe as they are, any further development in Corfe Mullen would only increase these problems.

The Parish Council recently completed their Parish Plan report. This was based on survey responses from 40% of Corfe Mullen households and the report was made available to Members. KCMG underlined that 91% of respondents were opposed to further development within Corfe Mullen and 88% regarded the preservation of the countryside around the village as very important.

KCMG had also commissioned a report from the Sherborne-based firm of chartered landscape architects, the Landscape Practice. They concluded that it was unjust to omit the area of Waterloo Valley bordered by Pardy's Hill and Hayward's Lane from the Area of Great Landscape Value definition given to other areas of Corfe Mullen and that it would be a mistake to build on this land.

English Nature – Mr A. Nicholson

English Nature's view on any extension of housing development would be based on projected impact on heathland. Whilst heathland would not be removed, increased population density would cause harm. Examples were given of the impact of dog walking, cat predation and heathland fires. As the whole of the South East Dorset conurbation was within 5km of heathland, any development would have an impact and that included urban extensions.

To mitigate any impact, ideas that included green infrastructure would be fully tested. This would allow English Nature to produce a full report on the full impact of housing

development. Mr Nicholson pointed out that previous applications for planning permission for development in these sensitive areas had already been refused.

Mr Nicholson commented that regardless of development, measures would still be needed to safeguard areas of heathland. English Nature's preferred solution is to find alternative sites for recreational use, rather than impose restrictions as there are benefits to public use of heathland.

In response to concerns over finding suitable funding so that green infrastructure could be implemented, Mr Nicholson acknowledged that there would be funding issues but stressed the importance to English Nature of green infrastructure. Likely sources of funding could include a roof tax and contributions from developers. Another source would be contributions from developers of windfall. An example of windfall development was given as someone who had developed their back garden to build a block of flats, i.e. a development outside of those that had been projected. These are more likely to happen in urban infill areas.

Officers informed Members that there would also be some cross-border agreements as East Dorset heathland areas are used by people travelling from outside of the District. Members' attention was drawn to policy SR26 on page 82 of the RSS. A sub-regional plan was likely to be imposed by the SWRA to enable cross-border agreements.

Mr Nicholson then gave his view on English Nature's likely position on the three areas identified for future development:

1. West Parley

The original location south of Parley Cross was reasonably enough removed from Parley Common to be a workable site, but only if green infrastructure were provided. Mr Nicholson believed there was scope in this area for a substantial country park that would satisfy English Nature. The Team learnt that the average person walked their dog for 2.4kms. A park to allow this would need to be provided within walking distance of any new development. Other areas of Parley were restricted by their proximity to the golf course, the common and the lakes in the former gravel pits at Longham.

2. Corfe Mullen

The Orchid Field area of Pardy's Hill, whilst not as sensitive as heathland, was still a sensitive site. There was also insufficient scope for the provision of green infrastructure and this would be complicated to resolve. Mr Nicholson pointed out that English Nature had insufficient information on what would be a suitable level of development in this area.

Any proposed development in the Waterloo Valley area would be opposed by English Nature due to the proximity to Upton Heath and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's). The area known as the North Slope had less conservation issues than Pardy's Hill and could be used to reduce pressure on any development of Pardy's Hill, dependent on the number of houses proposed. Mr Nicholson acknowledged that any development of Joiners Copse would remove an established deer habitat. However, English Nature cannot make a conservation argument out of deer as they are not rare enough.

The Team learnt that Corfe Mullen households are more likely to use the car than public transport, hence the recent cutbacks in bus services, making an average 6-8 car journeys a day per household. Whilst Mr Nicholson acknowledged that due to local congestion, any increase in traffic would be likely to affect country lanes, English Nature would find it difficult to use this in their arguments.

3. Wimborne

Mr Nicholson acknowledged concerns over potential green belt development, including the area of Burts Hill. He also recognised that if the Cuthbury Allotments were developed, alternative allotment sites would need to be provided. However, there was the scope for green infrastructure provision, particularly to the north of Wimborne, should any development be proposed.

Mr J. Earley (Chairman, East Dorset Housing Association (EDHA) and Mr K. Mallett, Head of Legal Services, East Dorset District Council)

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) had allocated a provision of 7,500 homes for affordable housing within the south west region. EDHA considered this a low figure. However, there was a further problem in provision. An actual figure of 3,500 homes for affordable housing delivered in recent years meant there was a big backlog in supply. In East Dorset, the housing needs strategy for 2005-2009 set a target of 40 homes for affordable housing per annum. Last year, only 7 homes were delivered. There were also 1500 households on the housing register waiting list.

East Dorset historically has a low provision of affordable housing. With 85% of dwellings owner occupied, East Dorset is below the national average for affordable housing.

EDHA did not see the answer always coming from developers. All too often, plans for infill development are for 14 or fewer homes. This would bring the development below the threshold where affordable housing would need to be provided. However, there would be a report to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee on the RSS requesting a reduction in the 14 household threshold to help combat this.

There had also been no real advantage in being local and on the housing register as Government guidelines had placed the emphasis on circumstances rather than local connection. However, with the introduction of a choice-based letting scheme in East Dorset, emphasis would shift to a local connection.

Constraints on housing provision were many. Government funding had been on the decline since World War 2 and although there was an increase last year, funding available would need to increase by a multiple of four to meet demand. Policy demand, rising prices and market demands did not help. For example, shared equity schemes could be one solution but were not that popular amongst tenants.

EDHA believed that planning exemption in rural areas would allow more sites to be identified. Whilst recognising that green belt development would be problematic, not least of which would be the danger of creating an isolated community, EDHA believed the three areas for development identified in the RSS all had potential for affordable housing.

It was revealed that there would be a Dorset-wide housing needs survey conducted during spring 2007. This would help shape future planning decisions.

Mr I. Cambrook, General Manager of Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole Economic Partnership

Attention was drawn to a publication of the Partnership called "Raising the Game". This is the first economic strategy for the county and covered the period 2005-2016. It addressed local, regional and national issues that included infrastructure, affordable housing, skills and workforce, competitiveness, and partnership working. The strategy focused on sustainable economic development that struck a balance between housing

provision and employment opportunity. With full employment a reality in East Dorset, extra homes were needed to sustain the future economy as businesses would re-locate elsewhere if jobs could not be filled. The building of affordable homes had been constrained by finance in the past and not land availability. Being responsive to market changes was also important. Jobs lost in recent years to developing markets were starting to return. Whilst it was important to respond to this, servicing the needs of more traditional jobs, including care and tourism, would need to continue.

There was a need for land with modern facilities for businesses to grow and develop. The East Dorset Trade Park was cited as a good example of where businesses were allowed to develop. Other sites were needed and the proposed Airport expansion was seen as a key site.

Government strategy was to base commercial development around the conurbations. Whilst the Partnership recognised the conurbations as important for economic growth, it was felt that this approach was too simplistic. The Partnership believed that the RSS was wrong in ignoring the part many market towns in Dorset could play, and need to play, in economic development.

Mr J. Beckett, President of the Wimborne Chamber of Trade

The view of the Chamber of Trade was that the more people brought in to Wimborne, the better it would be for local trade and the future of the town. The proposed Waitrose development was seen as key to this. With rent and rates going up in the town, traders needed more customers and a development such as Waitrose could bring in more people.

Allied to this was enabling people to come into the town. Parking was seen as a problem, not the availability of it, but the fact that it was not free. Buses were another issue and should any new housing development take place in Wimborne that was not within walking distance, bus routes into town were vital.

Mr C. Francombe, Transport Policy Manager, Borough of Poole

Mr Francombe informed the Team that transport requirements was not a deciding factor that determined a suitable site for development within the RSS. However, for local residents, it was a deciding factor. It was quite likely that the highway authorities for Dorset (Dorset County Council, the Boroughs of Bournemouth and Poole, and the Highways Agency) would prepare a list of essential transport requirements that would need to be met before any development on any site could be considered.

It was recognised that the current transport system would not cope with the proposed development outlined in the RSS. Although infill development could be given the go ahead despite transport objections, the highway authorities would make transport improvements a pre-requisite within urban extension proposals.

Planning authorities would also need to be more specific about public transport requirements within new, large developments. This could include contributions from developers. This could be specified within the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF should also specify transport pre-requisites for any development.

Building homes near to employment sites would not necessarily help the problem as an individual's economic progress is based on changing jobs. Car sharing would help though. It was revealed that if everyone who worked in Bournemouth and Poole car-shared one day a week, it would be the equivalent of £200m worth of junction improvements.

Mr S. Dring (Cluttons), Ms L. Lambert (Lambert Planning) and Mr P. McKann (Banner Homes)

Development plans were shown of two sites close to Parley Cross owned by the Lambert and Sibun families. The development was for 900 homes at 30 homes a hectare. The density would be more concentrated towards the centre of the development which would make the perimeter of the development less obtrusive. The development included land for public space, currently owned by the Rossiter family, which would be an alternative to nearby heathland. There would be a cycle path through to the airport and improved access to public rights of way. The site was outside of the 400m zone from nearby heathland and only a small portion was in the airport noise buffer zone. Negotiations were also underway with Knightstone Housing Association to provide affordable housing. The proposal also featured a gyratory for Parley Cross which developers regarded as a key component.

Developers recognised the extent of contributions they needed to make to requirements that included green infrastructure, highway improvements, affordable housing and building material specifications. These are constraints that developers are used to and would be reflected within the sale price of the land, therefore making the development economically viable. These requirements would be part of the LDF and would feature in Section 106 Agreements, therefore ensuring that they would be incorporated.

Councillor S. G. Flower, East Dorset District Council Lead Member for the Environment

Councillor Flower acknowledged that projected development figures in the RSS were in line with previous predictions but was aware that there was a growing opinion that these figures may be on the low side. However, there was a need to protect the current living environment.

Whilst Councillor Flower recognised the need to encourage more development of affordable housing, care should be taken in reducing thresholds so that there was not a huge disparity with neighbouring authorities. But this would not solve the problem overnight. There was also a need to introduce policy to enable control over the development of smaller sites. Where there was a proposal for two, 4 bedroom houses, planning could determine that the site instead be utilised for four, 2 bedroom houses for example. The LDF was also another vehicle that could be used to reinforce such aspirations.

Whilst it was recognised that Dorset, and East Dorset in particular, was a very popular area of the country to move to, any future development should be restricted to existing urban areas.

Mr A. Patrick (Pro-Vision) and Mr C. Palmer (Harry J. Palmer Holdings)

Mr Patrick distributed a document to the Team that summarised their development proposals for Wimborne and Corfe Mullen along with briefing notes, summarised their representations to the SWRA on the draft RSS and also included a copy of a letter to all the Region's MPs and Councillors.

Their development proposals for north west Corfe Mullen was based on 400-700 new homes by 2016. It would include a mix of social housing for key workers and shared ownership and there would be developer contributions to increase school capacity. The Pardy's Hill/Blandford Road junction would be bypassed and a small employment park, separate to the housing area, could be created.

Plans for Wimborne/Colehill would provide in excess of 500 homes. Again, extra school capacity would be funded from developer contributions and traffic congestions would be minimised if the site's proximity is close to the town centre and bus routes. The actual sites would be determined through the LDF.

Whilst green infrastructure provision had been catered for in their Corfe Mullen plans, there were none so far for Wimborne. However, discussions were taking place on this and such provision within Wimborne was likely.

4. Documentary Evidence - to be kept on file in the Members' Room

- Maps showing each area of search
- Written submissions from the Keep West Parley Green Group
- Written submissions from the Keep Wimborne Green Group
- Corfe Mullen Parish Plan
- Rigorous test information for each area of search
- National Housing Federation housing crisis evidence report
- Detail on proposed West Parley developed submitted by Cluttons
- Information on proposed Wimborne and Corfe Mullen development submitted by Pro-Vision
- "Raising the Game" report of the Bournemouth Dorset and Poole Economic Partnership
- Minutes of Team meetings held on 7th, 13th, 19th and 27th July, 2006

5. Other Documentary Evidence Considered That Has Been Made Previously Available to Members

- Draft Regional Spatial Strategy, Implementation Strategy and Strategic Sustainability Assessment - South West Regional Assembly, June 2006
- South East Dorset Strategy – Dorset County Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and Borough of Poole, November 2005
- Buchanan's Strategic Green Belt Review – South West Regional Assembly

6. Summary

The South West has a wealth of attributes which make it a popular and attractive place to live, work, visit and retire. Producing a strategic plan for the region is a challenge given its geographic size, diversity and very special environment. Within East Dorset District, a total of 5,400 new dwellings were identified, of which 2,400 were proposed on urban extension sites in the south of the District, with some 20 hectares of employment land west of Ferndown.

The areas identified were north west of the main urban area at Corfe Mullen, north and west of Wimborne Minster and east and south east of Ferndown.

These three sites identified by the RSS produced very strong opposition from residents.

Corfe Mullen: There is a great reluctance for green belt development and the views were expressed that the site identified was too remote and there was insufficient infrastructure to support the amount of homes indicated. Transport issues also highlighted a very steep hill to access the very few shops. It was difficult to walk from this site to the main road and unless transport was addressed, the use of the car was inevitable. It was close to the Orchid field and green infrastructure would be necessary to protect this area. There was also the great value of the landscape of the Waterloo Valley which would be lost.

Wimborne: The views expressed regarding Wimborne's development were that it could work within Wimborne but not in big 'clumps'. There was a feeling from contributors that the density and final location should be decided locally through the LDF. The Cuthbury

Allotments could work, as could other brown field sites that may become available within the town, but there would be great resistance to the loss of the allotments and once again, strong opposition to Burt's Hill and any loss of green belt land.

The Wimborne Chamber of Trade were keen to see the expansion of Wimborne as they felt the shops in Wimborne were sadly reducing to more charity shops and estate agents. They would like to see more customers coming through their doors and a variety of shops opening to suit all needs. The two sites close to the centre would be within walking distance which would further enhance their businesses.

West Parley: There is potential for some development but not a huge amount. A gyratory at Parley Cross would be a pre-requisite for any development. The team felt a lack of infrastructure was a problem. They were not opposed to some green belt development but not in the numbers proposed, especially with potential airport development at the moment. Current levels of 1m passengers per year predicted to grow to 3m by 2016 and 4m by 2030.

The green belt between Bournemouth and Parley must be protected at all costs, although the promise of green infrastructure was discussed it was felt this may be only a small amount.

6. Conclusion

There is a difficult balance to be struck between the value of any housing gained and the cost to the environment. The scale of developments seems to be the biggest concern to Members. There was also a general acceptance to some managed development of existing green belt. It was accepted that a major benefit was the potential to provide affordable housing.

But overall, the general consensus was:

- No further development in Corfe Mullen.
- A small amount of development in West Parley, subject to the provision of the gyratory at Parley Cross.
- Moderate development at Wimborne.