

## **NORTH SOMERSET CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION HEARINGS:**

### **POSITION STATEMENT ON THE DESIGNATION OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS**

1. Burrington is a small rural parish. It includes 5 settlements: Burrington, Bourne, Rickford and parts of Upper and Lower Langford, with a total population of about 500.<sup>1</sup> The Parish Council's representation generally supported the Core Strategy's distinction between 'service villages', 'infill villages' and 'smaller settlements', but expressed some reservations about the effectiveness of the Core Strategy's approach to planning in rural areas and whether aspirations expressed in Vision 6 and Vision 7 are realistic and achievable through Policies CS32 and CS33.
2. The Parish Council is not seeking a change in the designation of any of the 5 settlements that are wholly or partly within the Parish. Its concerns are partly about whether Policy CS32 can possibly achieve the vision of service villages as *'thriving rural communities'* that are *'a focal point for local housing needs, services and community facilities'* and *'will become more self-contained in terms of providing jobs and serving the local and surrounding community for all their day-to-day needs.'*
3. In relation to Policy CS33, the emphasis is on protecting the character of settlements and preventing 'unsustainable development', which is defined in paragraph 4.93 as dispersed development. Exceptions include re-use of existing buildings and new dwellings for 'essential rural workers', which is a concept that needs definition in the context of a modern rural economy. It is not clear if it the Core Strategy simply applying the definition of PPS 7, Annex A.
4. Protecting the character of settlements requires attention to the characteristics of individual sites and the kinds of development that may be appropriate as well as ideas about the size and role of settlements. There appears to be a danger that policies can override principles of site planning.
5. The North Somerset Replacement Local Plan includes Policy H/7 (v) which is amplified in a Supplementary Planning Document. It allows new housing developments in villages only if they do not serve 'urban housing needs' or add to out-commuting.<sup>2</sup> This policy has been upheld by Planning Inspectors at appeal and has undoubtedly succeeded in controlling new house building in North Somerset's villages, but it has a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Details on [www.burrington-pc.org.uk](http://www.burrington-pc.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> The policy is reproduced in Appendix 1

consequences that may not have been intended, which the Core Strategy should seek to avoid. Policy H/7 does not appear to be superseded by the Core Strategy and will presumably remain in force until it is replaced by a Site Allocations or Development Management DPD, although the Government's approach in the NPPF appears to discourage multiple development plan documents.

6. The only residential planning applications that have been seen by Burrington Parish Council in recent years are for large extensions to large houses. The only significant new residential developments in the surrounding area have been Sandford Station Retirement Village (108 flats, 30 general nursing beds and 73 beds for specialist dementia care) and the Blue Cedar development in Wrington (11 homes restricted to persons over 65 years). Whilst these developments are very worthwhile, they do not address the general housing needs of North Somerset villages. The Core Strategy needs to encourage more diversity of housing provision in rural settlements.
7. The Core Strategy's vision and approach does not reflect the realities of rural life in North Somerset in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Few people are engaged in traditional rural activities and the rural economy now relies on modern forms of food production and economic relationships with nearby urban areas. In surrounding parishes, the major employers include Yeo Valley with 550 jobs at Lag Farm Blagdon, Monaghan Mushrooms with 400 jobs at Lower Langford and other important food producers such as Alvis Brothers at Lye Cross Farm Redhill, Thatchers' Cider at Sandford and Butcombe Brewery at Wrington. Nearby there are also nearly 3,000 jobs at Bristol Airport.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the idea of rural self-containment is highly questionable and the idea of 'essential rural workers' is also problematic.
8. The nature of the modern rural economy includes servicing by substantial volumes of large goods vehicles, as well as car journeys to work in rural industries or the surrounding urban areas. There is therefore a need to pay attention to the transport needs of rural settlements, including traffic management and road maintenance to reflect the increasing demands placed on rural roads, including (for example) local roads and lanes in Burrington Parish that are used as short-cuts to Bristol Airport. These needs are not fully reflected in the transport priorities of Policy CS10.
9. A pre-occupation with attempts to reduce commuting has sometimes produced unfortunate results. An example within Burrington Parish is a recent development in Leg

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<sup>3</sup> Job numbers from the West of England Partnership's Key Statistics:  
<http://www.westofengland.org/media/80749/ks%20april%202011.pdf>

Lane, Rickford. (Photographs are included in Appendix 2.) This development promised a live-work combination of house and studio workspace and was therefore held to comply with Local Plan Policy H/7 (v). Consideration of what development (if any) would be appropriate for the site appears to have taken second place to the policy with a resulting development that towers above the village inn and neighbouring housing to dominate what was formerly an attractive village street.

10. This example demonstrates the danger of planning policy considerations (in this case the provision of work space) taking precedence over site planning considerations and the views (outlooks as well as opinions) of local residents. Burrington Parish Council therefore calls for the Core Strategy to place more emphasis than the Replacement Local Plan on site planning considerations in deciding what development is appropriate in rural settlements. The Government's localism agenda also implies a greater regard for the views of local residents on what is appropriate locally.
11. Burrington Parish Council has noted the Council's Schedule of Proposed Changes to the Publication Version of the CS, published in July 2011. The proposed relaxations of CS17 by PC 24 and PC 25 and of CS 33 by PC 45 are reasonable but could go further. The significance of settlement boundaries and other planning designations should be balanced against the disadvantages of separating affordable housing from the main body of rural settlements. Proposed Change PC 43a and 43b are supported for similar reasons. However, it is not clear whether PC 44 and PC 46 are proposing different approaches to settlement boundaries for community facilities and housing – or why.
12. Further changes in rural settlement policies may be appropriate in the light of the NPPF and Localism Bill. If there is to be more scope for local discretion to identify development opportunities (although not to control development) it may be appropriate to provide some encouragement for neighbourhood planning in the settlement policies. It would also be desirable to explain how the Site Allocations Document will apply to rural settlements and how it will relate to neighbourhood planning.

BPC/RD/11.11.01

## APPENDIX 1: REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN POLICY H/7

### **Policy H/7 – Residential development within settlement boundaries**

Within settlement boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, residential development, including the construction of new or replacement dwellings, the sub-division or extension of existing dwellings or their curtilages, and the conversion of existing buildings to residential use, will be permitted, provided that the proposals:

- i. would not generate demand for local services on a scale that cannot be met without prejudice to other policies and proposals of the Plan;
- ii. respect the massing, scale, proportions, materials and overall design and character of the existing property (if any) and the character of the surrounding area;
- iii. would not prejudice the amenities of adjoining occupiers;
- iv. would not prejudice the retention of adequate private amenity space, and include adequate private amenity space for any new separately occupied dwelling; and
- v. would not lead to urban housing needs being met in locations outside the four main towns where employment opportunities are more limited and which would add to or contribute to creating a dormitory settlement with high levels of out-commuting.

**APPENDIX 2: VIEWS OF LEG LANE, RICKFORD**

