

North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District HMA Sub-regional Strategy

E1 Executive Summary

- E1.1 This submission by North Dorset District Council (NDDC) addresses three of the matters for discussion raised in relation to the sub-regional strategy for the South Somerset District Housing Market Area (HMA), namely Matters 4/13 a), 4/13 c) and 4/13 d), and relates solely to the implications of the latest (2003) ONS housing projections and how the additional growth might be accommodated.
- E1.2 The recent advice produced by the Somerset Planning Authorities indicates that the market towns of Somerset could have a greater role to play in accommodating the additional growth arising as a result of latest (2003) ONS housing projections.
- E1.3 Recent work by Dorset County Council (DCC) indicates that the market town of Gillingham (in North Dorset District) functions as part of the South Somerset HMA, rather than as part of the Bournemouth and Poole HMA, where the draft RSS places it. The 4(4) Authorities in Dorset also suggest that the significant further expansion of Gillingham could be a key element of their preferred approach to accommodating growth arising from these projections.
- E1.4 NDDC would support the opportunity to examine the option of significant future expansion at Gillingham, provided that this option was considered as part of a partial review of RSS. NDDC would oppose significant expansion at Gillingham without a partial review, which is considered to be essential.
- E1.5 In its submission on the Bournemouth & Poole HMA (Matter 4/7), NDDC (respondent ref: 3008) sought to increase the annual average dwelling requirement for the District from 255 net dwellings per annum (dpa) to about 310 net dpa in the light of the advice from the 4(4) Authorities in Dorset. This proposed increase, both for the first 10 years of RSS and post-2016, reflects Scenario 1 (pro-rata scenario) examined in the advice.
- E1.6 Although the draft RSS defines Gillingham as being located within the Bournemouth and Poole HMA, the town lies well outside the South East Dorset 'heathland zone' and is sufficiently far enough away from any internationally important nature conservation sites for development not to have a significant adverse effect on them.

North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District HMA Sub-regional Strategy

1 Scope of Submission

- 1.1 This submission by North Dorset District Council (NDDC) addresses three of the matters for discussion raised in relation to the sub-regional strategy for the South Somerset District HMA.
- 1.2 *“In setting out policies and proposals for the HMA sub-region, does the draft RSS adequately deal with the following questions:*
- a) *Is the draft RSS sufficiently clear about the spatial outcomes it is seeking in Yeovil in terms of its present and future regional and sub-regional roles and its relationship with the other parts of the HMA? ...*
 - c) *Has sufficient consideration been given to the distribution of development within the HMA and to the relationship with development at Sherborne?*
 - d) *Have environmental limits arising from matters such as flood risk and the protection of environmental assets been adequately taken into account?”*
- 1.3 NDDC’s submission is solely related to the implications of the latest (2003) ONS housing projections and how the additional growth might be accommodated.

2 Main Points – Matters 4/13 a) and 4/13 c)

- 2.1 The recent advice produced by the Somerset Planning Authorities¹ indicates that the market towns of Somerset could have a greater role to play in accommodating the additional growth arising as a result of latest (2003) ONS housing projections.
- 2.2 Recent work by Dorset County Council (DCC)² indicates that the market town of Gillingham (in North Dorset District) functions as part of the South Somerset HMA, rather than as part of the Bournemouth and Poole HMA, where the draft RSS places it. The 4(4) Authorities in Dorset also suggest that the significant further expansion of Gillingham could be a key element of their preferred approach to accommodating growth arising from the latest ONS projections.³
- 2.3 NDDC would support the opportunity to examine the option of significant future expansion at Gillingham, provided that this option was considered

¹ Implications of ONS Household Projections for Somerset, Baker Associates on behalf of Somerset County Council and the Somerset Local Planning Authorities (January 2007)

² Draft Interim Report on the Population, Housing and Economic characteristics of the Poole / Bournemouth, Dorchester / Weymouth and North West Dorset Housing Market Areas, Dorset County Council (November 2006)

³ Implications of the 2003 Revised Household Projections – Section 4(4) advice – Bournemouth Borough Council, Borough of Poole and Dorset County Council (December 2006)

North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District HMA Sub-regional Strategy

as part of a partial review of RSS.⁴ NDDC would oppose significant expansion at Gillingham without a partial review, which is considered to be essential.

- 2.4 In its submission on the Bournemouth & Poole HMA (Matter 4/7), NDDC (ref: 3008) sought to increase the annual average net dwelling requirement for the District from 255 net dwellings per annum (dpa) to about 310 net dpa in the light of the advice from the 4(4) Authorities in Dorset. This proposed increase, both for the first 10 years of RSS and post-2016, reflects Scenario 1 (pro-rata scenario) examined in the advice.

3 Main Point – Matter 4/13 d)

- 3.1 Although the draft RSS defines Gillingham as being located within the Bournemouth and Poole HMA, the town lies well outside the South East Dorset ‘heathland zone’ and is sufficiently far enough away from any internationally important nature conservation sites for development not to have a significant adverse effect on them.

4 Matters 4/13 a) and 4/13 c)

Somerset Authorities’ Advice

- 4.1 Baker Associates were commissioned by Somerset County Council to undertake a technical assessment to support the Somerset Authorities in providing formal advice to the South West Regional Assembly. This advice was produced in January 2007.

- 4.2 The study recognises that the SSCTs in Somerset have the greatest opportunities for employment and the greatest levels of accessibility to services but they also have limitations on their capacity to accommodate additional growth. Given the constraints on SSCTs and the scale of development required to deliver the draft RSS housing allocations, the study anticipates that market towns (RSS Development Policy B settlements) should have a greater role to play in accommodating the additional growth arising as a result of the ONS household projections.

The Definition and True Extent of the South Somerset HMA

- 4.3 As far as Table 4.1 of draft RSS is concerned, the boundary of the South Somerset HMA is co-incident with South Somerset District. However, the text of the draft RSS suggests that the HMA is more extensive. Paragraph 4.2.66 (page 79) states “*Yeovil is close to Sherborne, and there is a strong interaction between the two places across the administrative boundary*”

⁴ As recommended in Agenda Item 6, North Dorset District Council Cabinet (1st March 2006), which considered the Section 4(4) Authorities advice

North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District HMA Sub-regional Strategy

and, when producing their LDDs, South Somerset and North Dorset Councils should work closely together.”

- 4.4 Map 4.2 of the draft RSS (page 102), taken from a study undertaken by DTZ Piedad, shows North Dorset District as being partly within four overlapping HMAs. These are Bournemouth & Poole, Dorchester & Weymouth, Salisbury and South Somerset. However, further work undertaken by Dorset County Council (DCC)⁵ suggests that the main HMAs covering the District are Bournemouth & Poole (the “Bournemouth / Poole periphery”) and South Somerset (the “Yeovil periphery”), as shown on the map in Appendix A.
- 4.5 DCC’s work also suggests that the northern part of the County, including Sherborne (in West Dorset) and Gillingham and Shaftesbury (in North Dorset), functions as part of the South Somerset HMA. However, it is clear from the paragraph 4.2.66 of the draft RSS that the potential for these areas to contribute to meeting housing needs in this HMA has not been properly examined.

The Advice of the Section 4(4) authorities in Dorset

- 4.6 The spatial strategy of the draft RSS implies that the bulk of any additional development in Dorset resulting from the latest ONS projections should be directed to the main towns in the County, in particular the Bournemouth / Poole conurbation. However, the conurbation is highly environmentally constrained and it would be difficult to significantly increase the proposed level of housing development there without having a major impact on the environment (particularly heathlands).
- 4.7 The ‘preferred approach’ of the Section 4(4) authorities in Dorset (including the possible option of expanding Gillingham) is a response to this situation. Whilst this approach would enable a higher overall level of provision to be made within the County, the more detailed work on HMA boundaries shows that further expansion at Gillingham would not contribute to meeting the needs of the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation.
- 4.8 Because Gillingham is technically in the Bournemouth and Poole HMA in Dorset, but functionally in an HMA in another County (i.e. Somerset), its potential role in meeting housing needs has only been examined from a Dorset perspective. It has not been examined in the context of South Somerset and it has not been possible to examine other potential options in this HMA through the Section 4(4) advice process. A partial review of draft RSS, which is recommended by the 4(4) Authorities in Dorset is

⁵ Draft Interim Report on the Population, Housing and Economic characteristics of the Poole / Bournemouth, Dorchester / Weymouth and North West Dorset Housing Market Areas, Dorset County Council (November 2006)

North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District HMA Sub-regional Strategy

- therefore essential in order to enable issues such as this to be examined properly.
- 4.9 Section 6 of the advice of the Section 4(4) authorities in Dorset identifies that in general terms Gillingham is largely unconstrained and therefore could be a good location for further expansion. However, this broad overview needs to be supported by more detailed technical work at the local level to enable a realistic assessment of the potential for expansion to be made. Such an assessment should also examine the needs for infrastructure and community facilities associated with further development and how this could be accommodated and funded.
- 4.10 In addition to the planning issues, there is also the issue of consultation with local community groups and residents. The current draft RSS suggests a lower level of development for North Dorset as a whole, including Gillingham. The request to consider the implications of the new household projections came very late in the process and the Section 4(4) Authorities in Dorset only had a very limited time to put these proposals together. Consequently, there has been very little opportunity to engage local people in consultation. A partial review of RSS is essential if a proper dialogue with the local community is to be established.
- 4.11 NDDC recognizes that the further expansion of Gillingham could be a positive opportunity for the District. However, the implications of this possible approach need to be properly examined before a decision is made on the way forward. The Council therefore supports the opportunity to examine the option of significantly expanding Gillingham, but considers it essential that this is made conditional upon a partial review of RSS, for the reasons set out above.
- Council Consideration of the Issue and Conclusion***
- 4.12 The advice of the 4(4) Authorities in Dorset and its implications were discussed at NDDC's Planning Policy Panel (the Panel) on 12th February 2007. This is a non-decision making forum for discussion. All members of the Council were invited to this Panel, as were representatives from Gillingham Town Council. The meeting was attended by representatives from both the Town Council and the town's Local Community Partnership (The Three Rivers Partnership).
- 4.13 The discussion at the Panel helped to inform the report to the Council's Cabinet on 7th March 2007, where it was resolved that NDDC would support the opportunity to examine the option of significant future expansion at Gillingham, provided that this option was considered as part of a partial review of the RSS.

North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District HMA Sub-regional Strategy

- 4.14 The Cabinet also supported the suggestion of the 4(4) Authorities in Dorset for a partial review of RSS, which is considered to be essential in order to:
- undertake sufficient consultation with community groups and local residents;
 - carry out the necessary technical work to identify potentially suitable sites for development and infrastructure requirements at Gillingham;
 - identify potential funding for the necessary infrastructure; and
 - enable other options for growth in the South Somerset Housing Market Area to be examined.
- 4.15 The Cabinet also agreed that the Council would oppose a proposal for the significant future expansion of Gillingham being included in the RSS without a partial review. In the event that no partial review was undertaken, the Council would support Scenario 1 in the Dorset 4(4) Authorities advice (the pro-rata scenario), which would increase the average annual housing provision figure for North Dorset for the period 2006 to 2026 to about 310 dpa. This position is discussed in more detail in relation to the Council's submission (ref: 3008) on Matter 4/7 – The Bournemouth and Poole Sub-regional Strategy.

5 Matter 4/13 d)

Introduction

- 5.1 Although the draft RSS defines Gillingham as being located within the Bournemouth and Poole HMA, the town lies well outside the South East Dorset 'heathland zone' and is sufficiently far enough away from any internationally important nature conservation sites for development not to have a significant adverse effect on them.

Draft Screening Opinion Document

- 5.2 The European Commission has produced advice on how to undertake an appropriate assessment of plans and projects that could potentially affect Natura 2000 sites.⁶ NDDC has produced a draft screening opinion document (see Appendix B) in accordance with the guidance. The Council has sought a screening opinion from Natural England on the appropriate assessment of its forthcoming Local Development Documents (LDDs), as set out in the Council's revised Local Development Scheme (LDS).⁷ At the time of writing (mid-March 2007) Natural England's responses to the consultation were awaited.

⁶ Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites. Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC – European Commission (November 2001)

⁷ North Dorset District Council has revised its Local Development Scheme (LDS), following consultation with the Government Office for the South West. The revised LDS came into effect on 1st March 2007

**North Dorset District Council, (421), Matter 4/13: South Somerset District
HMA Sub-regional Strategy**

- 5.3 The conclusions of the draft screening assessment are that *“there are not likely to be any significant effects on the European Sites as a result of the land-use plans listed above (i.e. the LDDs identified in the Council’s revised LDS). Therefore, there is no requirement for Appropriate Assessment to be carried out on any of the land-use / spatial plans that the Council has set out to produce and adopt.”*
- 5.4 It is hoped that by the time Matter 4/13 is discussed at the EiP, that Natural England will have responded to the consultation and that a finalised screening opinion will be available.

Conclusion

- 5.5 The Council’s conclusion is that a higher level of housing growth could be accommodated at Gillingham without any adverse impacts on internationally important nature conservation sites.