

DAVENTRY SETTLEMENTS AND COUNTRYSIDE LOCAL PLAN

Summary of the response to the Issues Paper

Introduction

This paper summarises the response to the initial consultation exercise undertaken as part of the preparation of the Local Plan. It outlines:

- what consultation was undertaken
- the issues emerging at the meetings with parish council representatives
- the overall response to the Issues Paper.

These key findings were reported to the District Council's Local Plan Steering Group, which met on 19 March 2013.

Background

The first stage in the plan preparation process was to consult the local community on the issues to be considered in the Local Plan and seek views on how they should be addressed.

A discussion paper was prepared to prompt thought and debate. This was entitled 'Daventry Settlements and Countryside Local Plan – A consultation paper on the issues to be considered and the planning context'.

This Issues Paper:

- outlined the national and local planning policy context that constrains what the Local Plan can and cannot do
- explained the coverage and scope of the Local Plan
- introduced Daventry town, the rural settlements and the wider countryside
- identified potential planning issues that perhaps need to be addressed.

The Issues Paper was accompanied by a form to enable respondents to structure their replies.

The six week consultation period ended on Friday 30 November 2012. The deadline for the town and parish councils was extended until Friday 14 December 2012. This was to allow them to make written comments after they had attended one of the briefing sessions for parish council representatives.

Meetings with Town and Parish Councils

There were 4 meetings across the District for town and parish council representatives. These were held at different times of the day and at locations spread across the District. Representatives could attend any of the sessions. The meetings were held at:

- District Council's offices, Daventry on the morning of 22 November 2012
- Village Hall, Watford on the evening of 26 November 2012
- Village Hall, Naseby on the afternoon of 27 November 2012
- Village Hall, Byfield on the evening of 28 November 2012

In total 45 people attended the sessions representing 26 different parishes. Each session was chaired by an elected representative from the District Council's Local Plan Steering Group.

In brief the sessions discussed:

- the wider strategic planning policy context, which restricts what the Local Plan can and cannot do.
- the coverage and scope of the Local Plan
- the potential issues for Daventry town, the rural settlements and the wider countryside.

A note of each meeting was taken and circulated to those that attended. Some of the issues to emerge at these meetings are summarised below.

Daventry Town

There were some concerns about any further proposals for development around the south east of Daventry and the importance of protecting the Ancient Monument.

The bus service to Daventry from the surrounding rural settlements was often criticised. It was felt that this needed to be improved if the development of the town centre was to be successful. However it was also noted that free car parking was a major attraction for the town.

There was some doubt as to whether Daventry could successfully attract high street stores to the town centre. If it did, there was a fear that the town centre could then lose some of its independent shops. It was felt that we ideally needed a mix of high street names and independent traders.

Comments were made about the need for regeneration in Southbrook and why other estates were not listed for such improvements. Other pockets quoted included Headlands.

The point was also made that the town has lost a lot of open space and more use needed to be made of what remained.

The Rural Settlements

The discussion at the four meeting was largely dominated by Policy R1 in the Joint Core Strategy, both in terms of the overall housing requirement it proposed across the rural parts of the District and the establishment of a settlement hierarchy with suggested levels of residential development for each category.

Comments were made about the viability of rural services and facilities, such as schools and post offices. It was felt that this restricted the ability to create sustainable

communities in the future. In particular there were a number of comments about the lack of an adequate bus service.

It was noted that a number of planning applications had recently been granted permission on appeal, largely because of the lack of a five year land supply in the District. As a consequence much of the 1355 dwellings required had now been identified, so further allocations may not be necessary in the Local Plan. However it was stressed that the inspector conducting the forthcoming examination into the Joint Core Strategy may review the 1355 rural allocation and decide to increase this figure.

There was a discussion about neighbourhood plans. Several parishes said that they didn't have the resources to prepare a neighbourhood development plan for their village. However they were interested in the possibility of bringing something forward that could be included as an annex to the Local Plan. There was also a request from some parish councils for a briefing session on neighbourhood planning.

There were comments that infill development was destroying the character of a village, and any new development should be on the periphery. Others felt that development should still be within the existing confines. It was felt that villages had different characteristics and should be treated accordingly. There were requests that the design of new development was of a higher quality to make villages more attractive.

There were several discussions about the need for affordable housing and the level within a new scheme. There were queries around exception sites and how affordable housing could be restricted to local people. Some people questioned whether this figure was appropriate in areas where there were no services and facilities, and a lack of public transport. Similarly there were questions about how the proportion of affordable housing required within a scheme equated with the findings of the housing needs survey undertaken by the District Council.

At each meeting there was a discussion about the need to build specialised market housing in villages. In particular it was stated that the provision of small one and two bedroom properties would allow older people to downsize within their local community and thereby free up family sized homes.

The Wider Countryside

There was concern about the impact of wind turbines across the District and how the Local Plan might address this issue. There was a related discussion about the designation of Special Landscape Areas in the old Local Plan of 1997, and whether this could be retained in the new Local Plan.

Whilst some support for the conversion of redundant buildings, there was concern about any new building.

It was felt that broadband was an important issue in rural settlements to stimulate the local economy, especially for people who wanted to work from home.

Response to the Issues Paper

There were 120 responses to the issues paper. Of these:

- 46% were from parish councils or individual parish councillors
- 18% of the responses were from individuals
- 8% from public sector or statutory consultees
- 8% from the voluntary sector
- 20% came from the private sector

The key points to emerge are summarised below using the same headings and question numbers:

Daventry town

1. In addition to the proposed residential development in the north east of the town as part of the SUE, there were mixed feelings about allocating further residential development in the south east of the town. In particular there were some concerns about the impact on Borough Hill and the scheduled monument and encroachment into surrounding countryside.
2. The vast majority of respondents to this question agreed that Southbrook requires community development and physical environmental improvements. However a number of people pointed out that other neighbourhoods also required regeneration, such as the Headlands and the Grange.
3. Most respondents agreed that existing employment areas do not meet modern standards and need upgrading.
4. It was widely accepted that new employment opportunities need to be created in the town centre, Monksmoor and within the proposed Sustainable Urban Extension in the north east. However several respondents remarked that the SUE should have limited employment provision and the focus should be on the town centre and existing industrial estates such as Drayton Fields.
5. Respondents tended to agree that leisure and tourism facilities should be improved within the town centre. However some felt the town would never be a tourist destination and it should focus on providing local services.
6. A substantial number of the replies agreed that retail provision within the central area needs to be improved. There were some concerns about the current number of charity shops, and a preference for a mix of chain stores and independent traders.
7. The vast majority of respondents to this question agreed that more high quality open spaces should be provided to improve the health and well-being of the local community.

8. Whilst most agreed that the proposed extension to Daventry Country Park should focus on the creation of wildlife habitats some also wanted to see informal recreational facilities.
9. The vast majority of responses agreed that the green spaces in and around the town need to be better linked together to provide a more effective network for recreational, amenity and ecological purposes. There were references to the need to link historical features and to corridors to the surrounding villages.
10. Many also agreed that new tree planting should be undertaken within and around the town, including the provision of a community forest to upgrade the landscape and provide opportunities for recreation and wildlife. There were requests for native species, community orchards and coppiced woodland. Whilst no location(s) were specified, several respondents said the proposal would cause problems for the charitable aims of the Welton Town Lands Trust.
11. Most respondents to this question felt that there should be more naturalistic planting around the town such as the creation of wildflower meadows along road verges to encourage wildlife. However a few had reservations arguing that this would make areas impassable for wheelchairs and prams.
12. The majority agreed that more innovative solutions need to be found to improve the use of public transport, but had differing views on how this could be achieved. There was some cynicism about previous innovative proposals.
13. It was widely agreed that a cycling network should be developed that connects residential areas to the town centre, employment areas and Long Buckby railway station. It was also pointed out that this network needs to link the town with surrounding villages as well e.g. Braunston. It was commented that this idea needs to be properly investigated and promoted.
14. The majority agreed that Long Buckby rail station should be more accessible to the residents of Daventry, but many respondents also pointed out it should be accessible to other villages as well. Several people commented on the need for improved facilities at the station, such as the provision of toilets and an extended car park. The possibility of opening the station at Weedon was also mentioned.
15. The introduction of gateway features and public art along transport corridors and at key strategic points around the town had a mixed response, with most opposed to the idea. Some felt that such features were often expensive, ill-conceived and momentarily fashionable.
16. Similarly there were also mixed views about building on the credentials of the iCon and the proposed EcoPark to create a reputation in the town for environmental innovation. Whilst most were in favour it was suggested that other opportunities were not pursued.

17. Respondents were invited to add any further comments to elaborate on their answers. These views have been incorporated into the above.
18. Respondents were also invited to raise any issues for Daventry town that had been missed. Several people said the canal arm had not been mentioned and raised their opposition to this proposal. Sport England pointed out that the plan needs to be based on an up-to-date evidence base. There were a number of comments about the state of the roads in and around the town. Several people also commented that the emphasis on pedestrianisation was slowing traffic flows e.g. Eastern Way outside iCon. There were also suggestions that educational provision had not been picked up, ranging from the UTC/learning quarter to quality of secondary schools.

The Rural Settlements

19. The vast majority of respondents agreed that villages need to be made more sustainable in the future to maintain their vitality, though a number queried what this meant in practice. Similarly there were a numbers of comments pointing out that every village is different so the issues will vary.
20. The overwhelming majority strongly agreed that existing services and facilities in villages should be protected and enhanced where possible.
21. Most felt that access to services and facilities should be the key consideration when determining a settlement hierarchy. However there were a lot of comments on this particular issue. In addition to access, many respondents pointed out that issues such as the capacity, adequacy and quality of existing services and facilities were just as important. Furthermore it was suggested that there should be a distinction between essential services and those that were less important i.e. factors ought to be weighted. Other factors suggested included environmental considerations, public transport, the availability of development sites and aspirations of the local community. Some respondents suggested that there were dangers for smaller settlements if development was only allowed in villages deemed to be sustainable.
22. The suggestion of a cluster approach that grouped settlements together so they can share services and facilities received a very mixed response. There appeared to be some confusion as to what this meant in practice. It was acknowledged that there could be economies of scale and the approach was proportionate, but access between villages would be crucial. Some respondents also felt it was overly simplistic as the catchment of services and facilities widely differs and villages look to different settlements for different needs.
23. The majority of respondents agreed that shared space in community facilities and buildings should be encouraged to provide various services and facilities.
24. The vast majority of those responding agreed that most new development should be in the villages that have access to the best range of services and facilities, rather than evenly distributed across the district. However some were concerned that it

would steer all new development towards the larger villages and smaller settlements could stagnate accordingly. Some respondents would like to see village confines defined on a map.

25. This statement prompted a great deal of debate. Most respondents strongly agreed that any development should be limited to within the village confines rather than on the periphery of the village, though quite a few took the opposing view. They argued that overdevelopment within confines was destroying the character of the village. Providing it was well designed, they felt that any new development should be on the periphery. Other comments stated that development on the periphery leads to less integration within the local community. There were also comments that every village was different. For instance it was suggested that ribbon development villages be treated differently.
26. The majority agreed that there is still a significant need for more affordable homes in rural settlements, though a number disagreed with this stance. Some felt that affordable housing was inappropriate as there were no local employment opportunities and no public transport. Lower cost market housing was also mentioned.
27. It was widely acknowledged that new housing within rural settlements should be more varied in terms of size and type to meet the particular needs of the local community.
28. The vast majority also agreed that there is still a need to support the local economy and create more jobs within rural settlements.
29. A substantial number strongly agreed that there are particular pockets of local green space within or around some villages that needs additional protection because of its historical, ecological or landscape significance. Some felt these spaces had been lost because of infill development within the village.
30. The majority agreed that it is preferable to address specific issues for a village as an annex to the Local Plan, thereby avoiding the need for a separate Neighbourhood Development Plan. However a significant number took the opposing view. There seemed to be a view that a neighbourhood plan was a more viable proposition for the larger settlements, but the resource required meant that it was an inappropriate approach for smaller settlements.
31. Respondents were invited to add any further comments to elaborate on their answers. These views have been incorporated into the above.
32. Respondents were also invited to raise any issues for rural settlements that had been missed. Several people highlighted the importance of new development respecting the style and character of the settlement. The need to address issues of sewerage and water drainage infrastructure was also raised.

The Wider Countryside

33. Most agreed that jobs and prosperity should be encouraged outside villages in the wider countryside, though a notable number had a different view and wanted further clarification as to what it entailed. It was suggested that rural areas need a vibrant economy but not at the expense of inappropriate development.
34. There were mixed opinions about whether the conversion of existing buildings or provision of new buildings in the wider countryside should be encouraged to support the local economy. The added comments indicated that there was support for the conversion of buildings but opposition to the development of new buildings.
35. The majority agreed that rural tourism and leisure developments should be encouraged in the wider countryside, though a few had reservations.
36. The overwhelming majority agreed that public transport in rural areas needs to be significantly improved.
37. There was strong support for the expansion of electronic communications networks in the countryside, such as telecommunications and high speed broadband.
38. Most agreed that isolated homes in the countryside should only be permitted in special circumstances
39. Many agreed that the public rights of way network needs to be improved, though some raised concerns. Some commented that existing footpaths are underused and said there is little money around to enhance the network.
40. There were mixed views about whether the District should continue to meet some of its energy requirements from renewable and low carbon sources, such as wind turbines. Whilst there was support for renewable sources of energy such as solar power, the vast majority of respondents strongly disagreed with the provision of any further wind turbines.
41. Perhaps surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents disagreed that only landscapes of special value should be protected. There was a feeling that all landscapes have a value and should be protected from inappropriate development.
42. The suggestion that areas of 'tranquillity' should be given protection was widely supported though some expressed reservations. They argued that the countryside is not quiet and had legitimate activities going on.
43. Similarly there was unanimous support to resisting proposals for development that adversely affects important wildlife sites.
44. The vast majority of respondents also wanted to positively encourage the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.

45. If appropriate, respondent were invited to add any further comments to elaborate on their answers. These comments have been incorporated into the above.
46. Respondents raised a number of issues that they felt had not been raised and needed to be addressed in the Local Plan. These included:
- DIRFT
 - Bridleways and hedgerows
 - Traffic calming measures
 - Marinas
 - Food production
 - Sand and gravel
 - Tree planting to compensate for ash die back
 - Rural settlements that face a lack of accessible green space
 - The former radio station site in Rugby District
 - Standard of road surfaces
 - Light pollution
-