

Castle Cary and Ansford Neighbourhood Plan

Supplementary response of the NP Working Group to questions raised by the examiner in the annex to her letter dated 15 February 2019

Following our initial response dated 1 March 2019, we have received copies of the full consultation response made by Somerset County Council together with additional information in the form of two feasibility studies relating to the scope for enlargement of the Primary School on or near its present site. In the light of this new information we are making further efforts to engage with representatives of the education authority with a view to making progress in a collaborative way.

In the meantime, in the interests of maintaining the momentum of the Examination process, and in light of this new information, we have reviewed our response to the examiner's Question 6. In the interests of clarity, we therefore withdraw our previous response to this question in its entirety, and submit our revised response as follows:

Q6

1. We think it a little premature, or somewhat overstating their case, for the County Council to say that a primary school site has been selected and planning permission granted: the planning permission referenced is an outline permission with all matters except means of access reserved for subsequent approval, and the description of development approved is: "... up to 165 houses, up to 2 Ha of Employment Land, a Road Linking Torbay Road with Station Road, a safeguarded Site for a New Primary School and Green Infrastructure...". Permission was granted on 21 June 2016 and although this is accompanied by an illustrative layout plan, to date no application for approval of reserved matters or for discharge of the many conditions has been submitted. In other words the current planning position is that there is a permission for housing and other forms of development which allows for the inclusion of a site for a new primary school, but this does not specify the location, size or any other characteristic of the school.
2. We fully recognise that the County Council has the important duty and responsibility for ensuring that education places are available in the right locations and at the right time. However the authority appears to be taking this responsibility in isolation and has not provided the community, local partners or NP councils with information which confirms that it has properly considered its responsibilities and duties in respect of the role of the school in the community and the impact of relocating the school to a location which appears to have a poor relationship with the town centre and other local facilities. For example the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 makes clear that public authorities should use their purchasing power to enhance public value. The DCLG/ Centre for Local Economic Strategies/ Association of Town and City Management paper "Developing Resilient Town Centres" (2016) identifies the role of the public economy as one of ten key factors in resilience of town centres. The removal from town centres of schools, shops and GP surgeries to edge of town locations is now well understood to be a factor

in town centre decline (National Review of Town Centres, 2013, Scottish National Government).

3. It seems to us that the only reason for the County Council's suggested siting off Station Road is that the County Council happened at the time to own that piece of land. This does not mean that this is a good or the best place to put a primary school - the siting of which is important and should not depend on chance ownership of land. Our current understanding is that the County Council has agreed to sell its land in this area, to the owner or developer of the adjoining larger site; although the terms of the sale have not been made public, it appears to us that this opens up the possibility of locating a new school on land within the Torbay Road site which is better related to the town centre. Given that the only planning permission is in outline with all matters reserved for subsequent approval, there remains an opportunity for the NP to have influence on the layout and location of uses within the site and their relationship with the town centre.
4. Whilst the evidence from feasibility studies suggests that there will be considerable difficulties in providing the potentially necessary school facilities within or adjacent to the present primary school land, we have yet to see that all the relevant options for school location have been fully explored. We believe that the Neighbourhood Plan should express the views of the local community on such an important issue and given the strength of local feeling on this topic, this is what NP currently does. For us to do otherwise at this stage would be seen as a betrayal by our residents. If we are to accept the view of the Education Authority we need them to fully engage with us in further discussion and consultation.
5. In the circumstances we have approached SCC in the interests of obtaining a fuller understanding of their position and we very much hope that they will be willing to do so in a transparent and collaborative way.
6. We invite the examiner to consider whether this topic also would be better resolved at a hearing. Meanwhile we comment on the SCC's concerns and offer modifications to the NP as follows:
 - 6.1. **NP page 11 para 3.1h**: since this falls within the chapter dealing with local issues rather than policies, we propose that this para be modified to read
h. the primary school is closely linked to the town centre but is nearing its maximum capacity; the extent of new housing development expected during the period of this plan indicates a need for expanded primary school provision in the town.
 - 6.2. **NP page 20 Table 5.1**: SCC has suggested that this is "too out of date to be relevant"; the table is clearly marked as recording the position at April 2017 and while we are aware that more recent figures are becoming available on a regular basis, these do not alter the overall message of the data or the conclusions which we draw. Consequently we do not propose to update the table. This is consistent with our approach to other data in the NP. We had to stop modifications to the NP at the point at which we submitted it.

- 6.3. **NP page 37 para 10.2:** SCC objects to this on the basis that it is out of date and point out that future developments may be subject to different requirements for educational provision. That is a fair point but the SCC appear to have misunderstood the purpose of this para, which is solely devoted to setting out the contributions (for education and various other types of local infrastructure) which have been agreed as a result of approved developments and their associated planning obligations. Consequently we do not propose any modification to this para. We thank the SCC for providing up-to-date figures for future developments but do not feel that they need to be recorded in the NP.
- 6.4. **NP page 38 para 10.4:** in response to the SCC comment, *delete the last part of the first sentence*, from a **guideline formula** to **houses built** and insert:
the current formula used by Somerset County Council indicates a need to provide for 32 additional primary school pupils for every 100 new dwellings.
- 6.5. **NP page 38 para 10.5:** *delete the current paragraph* and insert:
The NP councils see the close association of the existing primary school with the commercial and cultural activities taking place in the town centre as important to the community, in particular to local traders who benefit from footfall through the shopping streets at the beginning and end of the school day, and to schoolchildren themselves who can observe and participate in local community functions beyond the school environment such as museum, library, market, moat garden, church and so on, giving them a real sense of their cultural heritage. For this reason, the preferred approach of the NP councils is to see the primary school continue to be well related to the town centre and if at all possible to be expanded on or adjacent to its existing site. However, SCC feasibility studies have suggested that such an expansion would not be a fully satisfactory way of providing primary education for the number of pupils expected by the end of the plan period in 2028. Consequently, we wish to see all other options for location or relocation of the town's primary school fully explored in a way which ensures that close association with the town centre is a significant criterion. Policy INF1 seeks to apply this in a form which allows the local community to examine proposals which come forward through the planning process, but the NP councils will seek a collaborative approach to investigating options prior to the formal planning stage.
- 6.6. **NP page 39 para 10.8:** *delete the third sentence*. Insert a new sentence at the end of this para as follows:
Our preferred option is for a site to be found within the Torbay Road development area, as indicated on the policies map. Alternatively, in the event of the existing primary school being vacated, consideration should be given to use of all or part of the buildings for youth and community facilities.
- 6.7. **NP page 40 para 10.10:** *delete the last sentence* and replace with the following:
Local Plan policy LMT1 allows for the provision of education within the Direction of Growth; for the reasons set out above, our policy INF1 seeks to ensure that any

new or expanded school maintains the important relationship with the town centre.

6.8. **NP page 41 Policy INF1:** modify the policy to read:

The NP councils will seek to ensure that future expansion or relocation of Castle Cary Community Primary School maintains a close relationship with the town centre.

6.9. **NP page 41 Policy INF2:** *delete the last nine words*, ie. end the policy after **Torbay Road development site**.

7. The examiner's original question suggests that we might also consider an amendment to Policy DP1; we do not see this suggested in the SCC response and therefore ask for clarification.

CC&ANP Working Group
21 March 2019