Area West Committee – 18th July 2007

10. Consultation Report for Off-Street Parking Provision for Recent Town Centre Developments (Executive Decision)

Head of Service: *Andy Foyne, Head of Economic Development, Planning & Transport*
Lead Officer: *Jo Manley, Policy Planner & Nigel Collins, Transport Strategy Officer*
Contact Details: *jo.manley@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935 462588), nigel.collins@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935 462591)*

Purpose of the Report

Members are asked to consider the monitoring exercise conducted for off-street parking provision in recent new residential developments in town centre locations in all the District market towns (maps indicating the areas designated as town centre within the Local Plan are attached at pages 18-20) and the impact of this provision on both nearby car parks and on-street parking together with suggestions for the future implementation of Local Plan Policy TP7: Parking Provision in Residential Areas.

Recommendations

(1) Members note the report and endorse its suggestion that car parking and transport issues be considered as part of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) in February/March 2008.

(2) Members endorse the suggestion that until addressed through the Core Strategy officers use this survey work and the inbuilt flexibility in the adopted Local Plan Policy TP7 to negotiate with developers to seek to achieve the maximum parking standards (1 parking space per dwelling) for town centres.

Background

Parking standards for new development were identified in the District Wide Parking Strategy (DWPS) as one of the five main components of parking stock. Public car parks controlled by SSDC and other operators and on-street parking are addressed in the strategy, however, the influence of private non-residential parking and parking standards for new residential developments were only recognised as issues. These can have significant impacts on the parking stock as the former can undermine and distort initiatives to encourage modal shift and the latter can either fuel demand by being too generous or exacerbate pressure on capacity by displacement.

Policy TP7: Parking Provision In Residential Areas, of the adopted South Somerset Local Plan identifies maximum parking standards for new residential developments. It reflects the Government's desire to secure sustainable residential environments and the desire to achieve lower levels of parking than previously achieved.

During the preparation of the DWPS a consultation exercise was undertaken. This highlighted concern that the current implementation of Policy TP7 and the resulting off-street residential parking provision could be influencing the use of nearby car parks to the detriment of their main purpose of providing parking to support the commercial and service provision functions of the town centres. An Action Point was therefore included in the District Wide Parking Strategy: "***Recognise potential for Local Plan Policy TP7 (off street parking provision for new residential developments) to influence use of***

nearby car parks and undertake a monitoring exercise of recent town centre developments as a precursor to a review of the operation of this policy as appropriate. This monitoring exercise is now complete and the report outlines the outcomes of the monitoring and suggestions for the future implementation of Policy TP7.

Parking Provision In Residential Areas

The monitoring exercise which was undertaken in Areas North, East and West as requested by Members in October to December 2006,concentrated on new residential developments located within or adjacent to the defined Town Centre boundary which had been identified as having a low level of off-street parking provision. All residents of such new developments were approached and asked questions regarding their ownership of a private car/s and their parking habits and the parking habits of any visitors to their property. The overall response rate to the survey was 33%, which is considered to be a good return rate for such a survey. See **Appendix 1** (attached between pages 20 and 21) for a summary of the survey work.

A number of trends can be identified from the survey work:

Trend 1: The majority of occupants of the new developments surveyed own either 1 or more cars
57% of respondents owned one car, 20% owned 2 cars and 3% owned 3 cars. Only 20% of respondents didn't own a car.

Trend 2: Allotted parking does not cater for all residents needs
Whilst 59% of respondents parked in allotted parking spaces, 41% did not. Of the 41% of respondents who did not park in the allocated parking spaces 58% parked in a street nearby, 37.5% parked in a public car park and 4.5% parked in a private car park.

When asked if they ever parked in a different location due to capacity issues or restrictions, 33% of respondents said they had never done this, but 12% said they did once a day.

Trend 3: Allotted parking does not cater for all visitor needs
The respondents were asked to comment on the car parking habits of their visitors. Respondents were of the opinion that 25% of their visitors parked in the allotted parking spaces whilst visiting the property, indicating that 75% did not.

The supporting text to Policy TP7 explains that in line with the Government's desire to secure sustainable residential environments it is now desirable to achieve lower levels of parking in association with development than has been achieved in the past, and that significantly lower levels of parking will be allowed for developments in locations such as town centres with good general accessibility, or developments which provide housing for people whose demand for parking is less than family housing.

The Local Plan recognises that in rural areas many people are dependant on the private car for transport and the survey work demonstrates this by indicating that even in developments with zero or low level parking, the majority of residents still own a private car. Therefore the presumption that market town centres are sustainable locations for new housing and encouraging people to live on a development without the use of a private car is clearly challenged by these figures. Further analysis of bus provision for these town centres reveals a limited choice of routes especially in respect of access to employment areas.

The location of the main employment sites tend to be on the peripheries of the market towns and this is also the case with the major employment areas in Chard and Yeovil.

Generally bus route provision to these sites is almost non-existent meaning that even if a bus route is within close proximity of the development it is rarely possible to complete a journey by public transport to the employment site. This is further compounded in the market towns by the fact that the timings are often inappropriate to fit in with modern flexible working practices and shift patterns and also the wide diversity and complexity in travel patterns in terms of where people actually work in relation to their place of residence.

The DWPS recognises that there is little potential for bus route development and smart travel plans outside of Yeovil (Table: Car Parking management Options – Alleviating demand page 8). Whilst route development and enhancements in Yeovil are being pursued with the County Council as an action emanating from the DWPS with the potential to deliver improvements to Yeovil's employment sites, the barrier of connectivity (albeit often perceived) that will occur from bus services feeding into Yeovil from the market towns together with their relative infrequency inevitably means that a car is likely to remain the mode of first choice for residents in these developments.

The survey work demonstrates that there are insufficient parking spaces for residents and that those residents are then parking elsewhere, exacerbating pressure on capacity in nearby streets and public car parks by displacement.

The sustainable residential environments described in Government guidance are more akin to metropolitan environments and do not sit particularly well with the settlement and travel patterns in South Somerset. In the past we have made judgements on the sustainability of our market towns on the basis that we believe them to be accessible by means other than the private car and this has led to open market housing developments with lower levels of parking or zero parking. Car ownership in South Somerset is among the highest in the country and whilst we have sought to encourage more sustainable travel patterns, the survey work demonstrates that we have been unable to encourage people to live without the car, given the rural environment within which they live, and therefore given the resulting demonstrable problems, it is suggested that until addressed through the Core Strategy officers use this survey work and the inbuilt flexibility in the adopted Local Plan Policy TP7 to negotiate with developers to seek to achieve the maximum parking standards (1 parking space per dwelling) for town centres.

It is considered that as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy, Yeovil town centre should be surveyed to establish if similar trends are being experienced and impacting on the town centre's parking provision.

This report seeks to address immediate concerns over Policy TP7 and is a material consideration, which may be used to assist the determination of planning applications, however, the matter should be addressed again during the preparation of the Core Strategy DPD, which will commence shortly.

Financial Implications

None.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

The recommendation to seek to achieve the maximum parking standards for town centres by using this survey work and the inbuilt flexibility in the adopted Local Plan Policy TP7 to negotiate with developers to seek to achieve the maximum parking standards (1 parking space per dwelling) for town centres would offer a reduction in the impact of new residential developments on SSDC's off street car parks and on street displacement and thereby assist in the delivery of this Authority's Corporate Aims & Objectives to:

1. Deliver well managed, cost effective services valued by our customers
2. Increase economic vitality and prosperity
3. Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities

Other Implications

This report will be a material consideration used to determine future planning applications.

Background Papers: *South Somerset Local Plan*
District Wide Parking Strategy