109. Issues and Options Report: Report on the Core Strategy Consultation Responses received (Agenda Item 9)

At the commencement of discussion of this item, members of the public present were invited to address the committee on the Issues and Options report.

Mr S Bowler addressed the Committee and questioned the size of development proposed for the town of Ilminster. He said that one part of the Core Strategy document showed Ilminster listed as a Policy B settlement and at another point it was listed as Policy C. He also questioned the need for 19,700 new homes in the area, saying that the document failed to give reasons for the numbers proposed and he said that no serious attempt had been made to deal with food shortages if too much farm land was taken for housing.

Mrs M O'Neill noted that the Core Strategy document currently listed the village of East Coker as a Policy C development area and she asked if the District Executive committee agreed with the figures involved and questioned whether they would mount a legal challenge to them.

Mr D Saunders said he owned a small residential park at Combe St Nicholas and he would like to offer a small piece of adjacent land for affordable housing. He said the land was within walking distance to shops and a Post Office although the boundary would be just outside the current development area of the village.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transport thanked Mr Saunders for his offer and asked him to speak separately to Councillor Pallister as the scheme he proposed may be achievable under current policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transport then responded to the other points raised, saying that:-

- Initial workshops had been held with Town and Parish Councils and key stakeholders to discuss the most appropriate policy for each settlement. Formal community consultation would follow in Spring 2010.
- The 19,700 new homes proposed were within the national planning process and it was for SSDC to produce the best plan for the area within this brief.
- The evidence of need for the new homes proposed was partly due to the break up of family relationships and also people moving to the area to retire.
- Whilst there was a national requirement to protect farm land for food production where considerations conflicted the best option for the locality must be negotiated with the local community to see the best way forward.
- SSDC had no plans to mount any legal challenges as the Regional Spatial Strategy document was in draft form only and not worth challenging. The cost of such a challenge would be high and would fall on the tax payers of South Somerset.

The Spatial Policy Manager clarified that the town of Ilminster was listed as a Policy B settlement and it had been an oversight to list it as a Policy C settlement elsewhere.
in the document. He explained that the initial consultation which had taken place and the need to ‘cluster’ villages around the existing market towns for the workshops as officers were not able to visit every Town and Parish Council individually. He said the initial consultation responses would be collated in early 2010 and then further consultation with the public and hard to reach groups would be made. A detailed timetable of the consultation process would be presented to District Executive in February 2010.

In response to questions from Members, the Spatial Policy Manager confirmed that most of the major issues of Town and Parish Councils had been resolved through the initial consultation process and further formal public consultation would follow in 2010.

During discussion, Members noted that this was only the beginning of the consultation process and feedback from Town and Parish Councils attending the cluster workshops had been positive. It was also pointed out that developers would only build houses if they thought that they could sell them so the figure of 19,700 new homes were most likely to be built over a period of years. Members thanked the Spatial Policy Manager and his staff for arranging and attending the workshops and for keeping communities informed.

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive noted the responses received and proposal matters (as set out in Appendix 1 of the Agenda report) and endorsed the programme of work as set out in the appendix, required to develop the draft Core Strategy for consultation.