

# Village Development

How would we like the Villages' to develop in the future?  
This important area covers both housing and employment.

## Housing

In the questionnaire, there was strong support for affordable housing (72%), with 56% opposing more rental housing, and 58% opposed to further retirement housing provision.

The housing mix of the villages is mainly owner-occupier (81% average across both parishes), with a typical amount of private rented accommodation for South Somerset (10%) and a small proportion of social housing compared with other nearby villages (7% - all figures from South Somerset Parish Profiles).

Developments in the housing market over the past 10 years mean that it has become increasingly difficult for young people to get on the property ladder, especially in rural, relatively low-paid areas such as the Seavingtons. Recent new build homes and agricultural building conversions in the villages have been aimed at the more expensive end of the market, usually attracting buyers from outside the communities. There has been no attempt to force landowners and developers to include new affordable housing in their plans which explains the overwhelming support for affordable housing.

It is recognised that estimating the volume of requirement for affordable housing is a complex task which is outside the scope of this plan. Further there are a number of mechanisms for ensuring that such housing goes to its primary target and for ensuring that, after low-cost provision, it does not become part of the general inflationary housing market; these mechanisms involve such concepts as equity sharing and other more complex arrangements.



The authors of this plan recognise that such provision is, in part, a political issue which may conflict with other planning desires to consolidate and build up local towns such as Ilminster and Chard. However, the Parish Council believes that without affordable housing our communities will very rapidly move much further towards being commuter zones to neighbouring towns or retirement zones.

Accordingly, the Parish Council will push for recognition of the need for

affordable housing provision with the appropriate authorities and for moves to satisfy the requirement.

## Employment

The Seavingtons have for many years increasingly become 'home' to people rather than a centre for employment. However the consultative process has revealed a desire to keep, or even develop, job opportunities in the villages - 60% supported small business units and 51% would like more businesses. This somewhat surprising response means we must look seriously at this issue.

It is clear that the relative closeness of Ilminster, Crewkerne and other towns that already have business units and trading estates means that any new employment opportunities in the Seavingtons must be complementary. Seavington has good road connections, a high quality environment and improving telecommunications, so is ideally placed to provide high-quality units/workshops for small businesses, which can have a positive effect for the 'host' community. Local examples of success in such provision may be found in the workshops/office units at Bowdens Farm at Hambridge or the craft centre in Beaminster.

Rapid rate of change in the agricultural sector means that many redundant agricultural buildings are likely to become available for such employment purposes over the next 10 years. The Parish Council wishes to see any such employment opportunities exploited to the full and intends to support appropriate planning applications.

The positive support from the community for small business units shown in the consultation might be met by understandable 'NIMBY' resistance once suitable sites are identified, but this could be minimised by sensible siting i.e. adjacent to the New Road (old A303). Also, new developments do not happen because some villagers think it's a good idea - a developer would need to be convinced of the business case and a suitable site found. Any new site would of course need planning permission, which could well involve negotiation of a change to the current Local Plan.



Whilst any possible new development remains an aspiration, in the short term, we should ensure that the villages retain the zoned employment land that exists, which includes the Lift West site and the new Loxston site. If in the future there is any change of use application for these sites the Parish Council now has evidence to resist or to demand re-zoning of alternative sites as offsets, supporting high quality units/workshops if proposed.

## Village Design and Planning Statement

The consultative process revealed satisfaction with the existing planning processes, managed by the SSDC. However, there was very strong support for the preparation of a Village Design and Planning Statement (82% of respondents) which, once agreed, would form an established reference for future developments.

Such a Village Design and Planning Statement would reflect residents' aspirations for the future and would need to be negotiated at various levels of Local Government. This statement would be prepared against the background of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) arrangements shortly to be implemented by the District Council. However, once agreed, the statement would provide a background against which developers could make proposals and planning authorities make decisions in accordance with the wishes of the community. Even if higher level agreement cannot be reached, the existence of such a document would greatly strengthen the Parish Council's hand in dealing with piecemeal planning applications.

A broad working group would be needed so that any document is a balanced view, with a draft distributed in the villages for comments and amendments.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
A 1	Push for recognition of the need for affordable housing provision with the appropriate authorities and for moves to satisfy the requirement	Parish Council
A 2	Resist any planning application that attempts to convert existing employment land into residential without re-zoning of alternative sites for appropriate employment	Parish Council
A 3	Support change of use to convert redundant agricultural buildings to appropriate alternative business uses	Parish Council
A 4	Investigate possible sites suitable for small business units and research their viability	PCSG
A 5	Village Design and Planning Statement to be produced and negotiated	PCSG