

## **Swindon Special Local Policy Forum: Meeting 10** **25 November 2008**

**Rural (Green) Group 2 (Keith Braim, Keith Smith, Neil Pullen, Rohan.T, Donald Brunwin, R Briggs)**

**Group Facilitator: Jo McLeod**

### **Rural Issues**

#### **1. Should the Core Strategy identify individual Secondary Rural Settlements or would clusters of settlements be more effective in enabling the availability of rural services such as shops and public transport.**

- Clusters can work well to provide a whole range of services for the local community, but in order to work they will have to be organised appropriately. North Wiltshire operates settlement clusters that work well in terms of service provision.
- Village clusters should be identified in parish plans, including recognising the key issues affecting the settlements/village cluster and how the cluster of villages will work together to provide the services and facilities to meet local need. This parish plans should feed into the Core Strategy. There are 14 parish and only 2 have plans.
- Clusters don't work for some services such as access to local shops as you may as well go to the supermarket in the nearest town than drive to another village, which would have limited choice.
- 'Connecting People, Connecting Places' initiative could be linked into the clustering of settlements in terms of identifying a strategy for appropriate service provision. Planning forums for different villages (or clusters) could be held, where people can raise local issues and discuss how the clustering system could work to provide services and facilities to meet need.

#### **2. Should there be a more flexible approach to employment creation, such as giving priority to small business uses where conversions are proposed – such as redundant farm buildings.**

- The conversion of barns will have to be justified and such buildings should only be re-used for employment generating uses.
- Business surveys should be conducted to identify how individual businesses can connect to the development strategy for Swindon. Highworth does not have a strategy in place to make best use of small business units; a strategy that tackles this should be implemented and be built into/linked with the Swindon Borough Plan.
- Talk to businesses in rural areas to develop a business strategy e.g changing/extending opening hours beyond 5pm so that when people return to the village from their working day, they can still access services. These business strategies could be implemented into the Parish Plans.
- Large employers in some of the villages have produced a transport strategy to ensure their employees can get to work via means other than the private car. This is a strategy that only works for large business as they have the capital to do this.

- There is a problem of out commuting in many of the rural settlements to access employment. In Highworth, 72% of the population commute out of the village to access employment.

### **3. Should thresholds for affordable housing be lower, or more flexible, in villages than in towns, so that more affordable housing can be provided?**

- More affordable housing is required to meet the changing demographics of villages, which are generally experiencing an increase in the elderly population and a decrease in the younger population, particularly young families. The lack of sufficient affordable housing for young families will impact of the demand for services (i.e schools) and affect the function of villages. Affordable housing provision should therefore be more flexible to allow for younger people to stay in the village.
- A more flexible approach to affordable housing should be implemented otherwise developers will propose housing developments just under the threshold (14 units), which results in lack of affordable housing provision in rural areas.
- Suggested that affordable housing threshold in rural areas should be 2 or more units.
- The commuted sum methodology should be instated to ensure that if affordable units can not be provided on site, there are funds to provide elsewhere in the village.
- Housing Needs Surveys have been conducted in villages with a population of less than 3000 people; therefore an evidence base for affordable housing policies in rural areas is available.
- Rural exception schemes have sometimes been refused in villages as the locations have not been deemed as sustainable options for development. Exceptions schemes should be encouraged in rural villages to help provide affordable housing for young people.

### **4. Is it practical for villages or clusters of villages to arrange public transport to suit their needs, such as a community bus or organised car-sharing?**

- Concern over the use of the word 'Rural' and the implications of funding/provision of rural services (e.g buses) with regard to the body that taxes are paid to (Local Authority or County Council) by people in rural areas. There has been a reduction in services to rural villages and this is affecting access to enable access to services, clubs, employment and education.
- Some villages in North Wiltshire operate a mini-bus service where you phone and book a place in advance. The Wiggly bus (Connect2Wiltshire) that has a core route but visits other villages and hamlets on request.
- Community buses can work, but public transport should be provided for people that live in rural settlements through an appropriate public transport strategy that is fully integrated with the broader transport strategy for Swindon.
- Car sharing is difficult unless there are a group of people going to exactly the same place at the same time. It can be restrictive and result in a lack of freedom. Difficulties arise when one person is absent, the other person will not be able to park in the car-sharing parking space if they are travelling alone.
- Other initiatives could be implemented such as the 'Wheels to Work' scheme operated by Community First (Wiltshire), which loans 50cc mopeds for 6 months to access employment or paid vocational courses.

**5. Should rural issues be addressed on a local – i.e Swindon Borough Council – bases, or would they be better addressed across administrative boundaries.**

- Parish plans could be developed to play a key role in addressing local issues through asking the community what services they need and ensuring the future provision of services for rural settlements are appropriate. Parish Plans could address the provision of services across the cluster and the strategy for service provision should feed into the Core Strategy.

**6. What should the balance be between economic and environmental sustainability in rural areas?**

- Of course there should be a balance between economic and environmental sustainability.
- The rural character of the village must be maintained. The need for development (e.g housing) must be weighed-up and considered against the potential impact on the character of the village and it's setting.
- More up-front negotiations should occur with developers to ensure S106 contributions are appropriately related to the development, and provide services/facilities for the village.