

Mr Tom King
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Date: 27th May 2009
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Dear Mr. King

Re: South West Regional Spatial Strategy: Additional Schedule of the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes and Reasons

I am writing in response to your letter of 15th April and consultation on the Secretary of State's addition to her schedule of proposed changes to the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) on behalf of the Council.

Bath & North East Somerset Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the addition. Your letter states that the additional schedule is being published to clarify the Secretary of State's response to Recommendations 4.1.5, 4.1.6, 4.1.7 and 4.1.8 of the Examination in Public (EiP) Panel on the urban extension to Bath. However, it is considered that the additional schedule fails to provide clarity with regard to the area of search for the urban extension.

In accordance with its position at the EiP and representations on the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes published in July last year the Council considers that the area of search should be amended and clarified on key diagram, Inset 1 (West of England) and in the text of the approved RSS. This is necessary in order to conform with national policy set out in PPS11 and to provide a clear and unambiguous framework for the process of identifying a site (or sites) for the urban extension to Bath through the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF).

As you are aware the Council is of the view that land to the west of Bath close to the A4 should be included within the area of search and that given the national importance of the AONB designation and high level of protection that they are afforded the decision regarding the appropriateness of urban extension development within the Cotswolds AONB should be taken at a Regional, rather than local level. Council representations submitted to the EiP made it clear that within the broader area of search sought by the Council there is scope for deliverable urban extension development and that as such development within the Cotswolds AONB is not justified within the terms of PPS7. It is appropriate and necessary for the RSS to provide clarity on this matter. The recently published additional schedule fails to provide this clarity and indeed by changing reference to the location of an urban extension from 'to the south west of Bath' in the Proposed Changes to 'to the south/south west of Bath' has created further uncertainty.

It is noted that the Secretary of State's reasons for not amending the area of search refer to PPS11. References in PPS11 to RSS being 'locationally and not site specific' and 'identifying a broad location' (by means of an area of search) does not support the Secretary of State's assertion that areas of search are merely indicative of a broad direction of growth and the resultant lack of clarity in the area of search shown on the Key Diagram. In stating that RSS should be locationally specific PPS11 makes it clear that RSS should provide clear locational guidance through means of identifying an area of search within which a number of suitable sites may exist. It is then the job of the Council through the Local Development Framework to identify precisely the site(s) for development.

Whilst the Council accepts that the area of search is not precise and is not shown on an Ordnance Survey (OS) base it is necessary for that area of search to be clear in identifying the area within which the Council should be seeking to allocate precise site(s) for development. Whilst not shown on an OS base it is evident that the area of search shown on the key diagram does not currently include either the land to the west of Bath (suggested by the Council) or land to the south of the city (as suggested by another objector at the EiP). In order that the Council can fully explore the deliverable opportunities for urban extension development via its LDF it is requested that the area of search shown on the key diagram is amended to clearly include land to the west of the city up towards the A4. This will provide the necessary clarity and will ensure that the Council's LDF assessments accord with PPS11 in looking at sites that lie within the area of search.

The Council is also concerned that it remains uncertain whether the amended reference to an urban extension 'to the south/south west of Bath' enables consideration of this land. Clarity on this issue is therefore sought and it is requested that either this clarity is provided in the text of the approved RSS or in writing by the Government Office for the South West.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Cllr. Charles Gerrish
Cabinet Member for Customer Services