Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options Consultation: Summary of Main Findings Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Core Strategy: Summary of Main Findings report (Appendix 1) to the Issues and Alternative Options consultation document is prepared for the purposes of publication, prior to preparation of the Preferred Options. The report summarises the main findings of the responses to the informal consultation in accordance with Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004, which will be used in the production of the Preferred Options at the next stage of production of the Core Strategy in accordance with Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.

2.0 Overview

2.1 A total of 75 respondents commented on the Core Strategy Issues and Alternative Options document. A significant proportion of responses to individual options were comprehensive. The mean average is 37 responses to each of the 29 issues. The issues that attracted the most responses were: Issue 1: How could future growth be accommodated in a sustainable manner; and, Issue 19: Affordable housing and house sizes.

2.2 In addition to the alternative options, responses were welcomed on the Spatial Portrait and Vision that will become part of the Core Strategy policy document.

3.0 Portrait

3.1 Responses on the Spatial Portrait expressed concern that the environmental quality of the rural character of the District conveyed in the Spatial Portrait was not continued throughout the document. The document is concerned with growth rather than dealing with the future of rural activities such as agriculture. However, consideration should be given to this comment in moving on to the next stage i.e. the Preferred Options document.

3.2 The majority of comments on the Spatial Portrait related to the transport element, and in particular a suggestion that the difficulties in reconciling conservation and enhancement of the landscape with transport demands should be included. It was also suggested that a statement of recognition of the difficulties balancing appropriate development along primary routes with the levels of transport demand on routes restricted by the natural land form should be included, and that the importance of the A354 as a route to the two Strategically Significant City's or Town's (SSCT's) of Dorchester and Salisbury, which are outside the District, be mentioned along with recognition that the A357 is used as an alternative route to the A350. Consideration of these comments should be given when moving on to the next stage.

3.3 Some of the responses made in relation to Settlement Pattern, Population Growth, Housing, and Community were comments on the past growth of the district and concerns over its future as well as offering reasons for some of the statistics quoted. These comments did not address any failing of the Spatial Portrait to describe the district as it looks today.

4.0 Vision

4.1 Four responses stated the vision provided clear strategic direction; five responses supported the reflection of aspirations; five responses stated that the Vision was good; and, a further six people responded that it is not a *spatial* vision and did not guide further growth. Suggestions for improvements to the vision were: to provide clarity about what the towns, villages and rural areas will look like in the future; reference to sustainability aspects which include a reduction in carbon footprint; a forward view of the landscape which combines the natural environment with the interaction of people; what the transport network should look like; and, what the employment profile should look like. Consideration of these comments should be given when moving on to the next stage.

4.2 It was also suggested that negative aspects based on past trends should be included in the Vision as a possible outcome for the District, such as the impacts of the District attracting retirees including the working population continually having to commute to the SSCTs. Although this could be argued as a potential outcome dependent on trends, it is considered that this may be inappropriate to form part of a Vision that the District should be working towards as the vision is interpreted to be aspirational and that negative trends can be dealt with by policy.

5.0 Managing Growth

5.1 General concerns expressed in pursuing sustainable growth patterns were to avoid overdevelopment of the towns and underdevelopment of the villages. However, generally the settlement hierarchy approach was supported with 66% of responses to Issue 1 supporting the recommended Development Policy B towns of Blandford (Forum and St.Mary), Gillingham, and Shaftesbury, and to support an increase in self containment.

5.2 Support was shown with 17% of responses to Issue 1 recommending that no other market towns should have Development Policy B status, and yet support was also shown with 6% of responses for Stalbridge and 22% of responses for Sturminster Newton to be considered for Development Policy B status. The results of these options should be considered when progressing to the next stage.

5.3 The recommendation that Stalbridge, Sturminster Newton and the larger villages be considered for Development Policy C status seemed to be generally accepted and non controversial with support from 32%

of respondents to Issue 1. 16 individual villages were suggested for Development Policy C status, and a range of criteria were put forward as a basis for selecting villages. The supporting document, Assessment of Settlements Based on Population and Community Facilities, was welcomed as a guide and other factors were suggested to provide robust selection criteria, which should be considered when progressing to the next stage.

5.4   Responses by respondents with related land interests, specifically at Okeford Fitzpaine and Hinton St.Mary, proposing that particular villages should expand, did not seem to consider whether future growth could be accommodated within these settlements as a consequence of their proposed Development Policy status.

5.5   20 villages, plus a range of criteria as a basis for selecting villages, were suggested *not* to have Development Policy C status. In particular, one response suggested that Hazelbury Bryan *should* have Development Policy C status, however two responses suggested it should *not* have Development Policy C status due to its unique arrangement of hamlets with insufficient facilities and services between them to support further development, coupled with inadequate transportation routes to other settlements. No response to this issue was received from Hazelbury Bryan Parish Council.

5.6   The same proportion (20%) of responses supported a 'rural emphasis' and a 'greater urban emphasis' when considering the focus for the direction of housing land requirement up to 2016. The proportion of responses in support of the 'urban emphasis' were only 2% less than of those for 'rural' and 'greater urban emphasis', reflecting the feel from the community of the importance of striking the right balance between the urban centric sustainability strategy and supporting the villages in the rural area and avoiding neglect.

5.7   The responses show that there is clear support to redevelop brownfield land and regenerate settlements in support of a sustainable strategy, and a clear lack of support for expansion on to greenfield land. However, a combination of the two was recognised as a means to identifying appropriate and deliverable sites with a focus on a 'brownfield first' approach.

5.8   Over twice as many responses supported identifying previously developed land at the higher level (40%), in line with the regional target, than at the lower level (16%) which reflects past performance. However, infrastructure was an important consideration for development on either previously developed land or greenfield.

5.9   Over half of all responses to Issue 5 supported the option that green travel plans be required for any development that may generate *significant* volumes of traffic of any kind. This was at least 30% more than responses in support of green travel plans for *any* development,

or development that leads to an increase in *car* based travel. The results reflect the general feeling of negative impacts on living conditions from traffic, but an awareness of the lack of transport alternatives. It was suggested that the North Dorset Trailway be given a higher priority in order to provide an alternative travel opportunity.

5.10   Nearly three quarters of responses to Issue 6 supported the combination of public funding, funding from development, and searching for innovative opportunities from other funding sources to secure investment to support community infrastructure. This option was 60% and 70% more popular than relying solely on developer or public funding, respectively, alone. However, it was highlighted that there was a risk that securing a particular planning gain with significant corporate priority would reduce the range of contributions that could be provided for other obligations.

5.11   The options relating to climate change and renewable energy are not mutually exclusive. Support for BREEAM standards that are higher than current statutory targets was high, and there was a good response for identifying opportunities for both renewable energy and micro-renewable schemes. Some responses qualified their support by advocating community schemes.

6.0   Environmental Protection and Enhancement
6.1   There was a clear general consensus in support of planning policy taking a wider view of environmental protection, rather than the lesser supported option of focussing primarily on the protection of designated sites to conserve the environment. Suggestions were made as to how to extend the range of factors requiring environmental protection and these should be considered.

6.2   Despite the general show of support, the option to prioritise protection of environmental assets and resources above the development needs of the local community was considered to be a bit of a 'red herring' as the Council is already obliged to prioritise the protection of the environment in line with government and European legislation. However, additional support was shown for the option that seeks to protect environmental assets and resources where possible when meeting the development needs of the community. It was suggested that the community should identify need locally, and that planning policy should set out a hierarchical approach depending on the status of assets.

6.3   More responses suggested that the Council's current approach to providing green space was inadequate, as opposed to adequate, in disagreement with the option. The most support was shown for an integrated approach to planning, delivery and maintenance of multi functional green infrastructure to meet the community's needs. This option would have a greater impact on the Council's general approach and resources to provide for an integrated approach to planning,

delivery and maintenance. It was also suggested that where densities on new development are high and private space is small that public green infrastructure should be greater, for example by providing for green paths and more trees.

7.0 Economic Prosperity

7.1 The majority of the responses to Issue 11 supported that existing employment sites should be extended where appropriate and that other sustainable sites should be identified. It was suggested that extensions should only apply when the current district wide supply is used up, and that the identification of other sustainable sites should incorporate flexibility into the system and support rural regeneration and diversification aspects towards longer term sustainability of rural communities. The lesser supported option was to concentrate land suitable for employment within the three main towns, however this option was recognised as sustainable, and Blandford in particular was perceived to have a shortfall. The suggestion that only local workers be employed is outside of the remit of Planning which has no control of the free movement of labour.

7.2 There was general consensus that employment uses should be strictly controlled on employment sites and that no control was particularly unpopular. Partial control was perceived to risk incompatible uses, e.g. food handling businesses and refuse servicing conflict at Roll's Mill. A variety of criteria were suggested for control of sites which will require consideration when moving on to the next stage.

7.3 The majority of responses to Issue 13 supported the option to protect committed and allocated employment sites, apart from those sites listed in the Employment Land Review which may be more suitable for mixed use development, as opposed to protecting *all* committed and allocated sites. It was suggested that employment sites that have been vacant for a long time should be considered for mixed use. The identification of such sites will continue to take place in the future through the Employment Land Review and subsequent monitoring.

7.4 With regards to retailing, the most support was to retain the current retail hierarchy as set out in the Local Plan with need to reassess and formalise town centre designations following the recommendations of the forthcoming retail study in order to promote the 'town centre first' approach. In recognition of encouraging sustainability within the rural communities it was commented that village and farm shops should also be encouraged to serve the local community. However, in support of production of the evidence base some respondents felt hindered in their response by the lack of an available up to date district wide retail study.

7.5 Collecting and directing contributions towards a fund to develop employee's skills levels within the District was generally not supported as it was perceived that this fell outside the remit of Planning and that

the implementation would be too restrictive and unworkable. An alternative option suggested that employers of a high calibre which would foster a learning environment should be encouraged to locate in the District. This topic will require further discussion with other organisations.

7.6 To assist in sustainable working patterns, homeworking was generally supported for both the towns and the rural areas, with an emphasis on developing policies to permit homeworking where acceptable.

7.7 Support was shown to promote sustainable forms of tourism based on evidence to support sustainable location, and to promote quality accommodation. This was considered an opportunity to make the North Dorset tourism offer an exemplar in sustainability.

7.8 The option most supported to enable sustainable re-use of buildings and rural diversification was to set out criteria to ensure a balance between promoting a diverse and healthy rural economy and other objectives including the protection and promotion of the countryside. It was recognised that this option might also assist in sustainable living and working patterns. However, it was commented that issues of scale and impact are also important factors to consider. The suggestions that these buildings be used for open market residential or classed as exception sites for affordable housing however does not consider other planning related implications.

8.0 Balanced Communities

8.1 There was general consensus that affordable housing was an important issue. The majority of responses supported the negotiation of a higher proportion of affordable housing based on the needs of the District. Housing mix, affordable housing only in large villages, and rural exceptions were all equally supported. Negotiation for affordable housing on smaller sites down to one dwelling was supported, although to a lesser degree. A perception was expressed that affordable housing would be more easily achieved on greenfield, and there were opposing views as to whether mix of type and size of housing should be linked to the other options. Concern was also expressed about viability of locating affordable housing in settlements with few facilities. Many suggestions were made as to how an increase in levels of affordable housing could be achieved and these require consideration.

8.2 The majority of responses for the issue to identify sufficient land suitable for gypsy and traveller pitches favoured the option that pitches should be found in and around the towns where access to facilities is easier. To a lesser extent support was shown to identify sites in and around villages and rural areas. It was pointed out that gypsies and travellers have different needs. One suggestion was that a number of smaller sites were perceived to be preferable than fewer but larger sites.

8.3 A clear majority of responses to the issue of how housing development can be accommodated whilst making efficient use of land supported the option to allow lower densities than 30 dwellings per hectare to protect the character and amenity of areas but to define other areas where density can be higher. A suggestion was made that the Council undertake a District wide character assessment in accordance with PPS3 to identify where higher and lower densities would be appropriate, and that urban extensions could be developed with a range of densities decreasing towards the edge of the development.

8.4 A clear majority of responses to the issue of locating living and working uses together supported the option of mixed use developments. It was highlighted that mixed use developments should be where use classes are compatible and that industry should be located on the edge of towns to avoid HGV's moving through town centres. Locating uses on separate estates was also supported, but to a lesser extent.

8.5 To the issue of whether development designs should incorporate separate lanes or shared space for all types of transport in order to mitigate impact from choice of transport used, the majority of responses supported the option of having shared space that provides convenient shared routes for movement of all types of transport. However, it is clear that some respondents did not differentiate between the implied sense of application to future development and instead considered existing roads that would be redesigned as a result, although in practise this is not the case. Main concerns were those of safety and of providing a pleasant environment for walkers and cyclists.

8.6 To help communities be proactive in accessing public and community transport services the majority support was expressed for the option to identify land within a village or community that would make good accessible, perhaps central, location as a main passenger collection point for demand responsive transport. Support was also shown for the option to identify land that would make a good connection route, although to a lesser degree. It was recognised that this may prove difficult to achieve in linear villages. Many suggestions were made to improve public transport provision and to make the network more user friendly.

9.0 Quality of Life

9.1 Responses to the issue of protecting our built heritage and encouraging high standards of design strongly supported all of the options to encourage the opportunity to create well designed places that encourage leisure facilities and safety. The majority of this support was for the option to ensure there are policies which require high standards of design for all development. One response questioned whether villages that will have no development or low levels of development have the need for Village Design Statements. The production of Village Design Statements will generally be prioritised in accordance with the settlement hierarchy as and when a village show

interest in producing the document, although this is not to the exclusion of those with no or low growth levels. However, Village Design Statements can be applied to alterations to existing structures without an additional requirement for growth. It was suggested that high quality design should specifically include eco-development however this aspect will require clarification through forthcoming Government guidance and is currently controlled through Building Regulations.

9.2 Responses to the issue of reducing reliance on unsustainable modes of transport showed strong support for all the options to locate, encourage and design facilities that positively provide for pedestrian and cycle access and encourage forms of public transport. It was expressed that a combination of all of the options would be most effective in tackling the issue. It was suggested that low key and local facilities be provided within sub-urban residential estates to discourage the need to travel, and this suggestion links with support shown for mixed use developments. Again, the Trailway was identified as a catalyst to reduce reliance on unsustainable modes of transport.

9.3 Support for all of the options was shown (38% to 59%) in response to the issue of provision of facilities in accordance with community's needs. Marginally more support was shown for the option that suggested a combination of options plus a requirement for facilities to be in place or planned prior to residential development taking place. However, this was also the most objected to option (9%) from the issue, as unworkable and that it may conflict with national planning policy. Development of this will need to take account of latest government advice.

9.4 Responses to the issue of provision of multi-functional open space showed support for all the options with marginal majority to protect existing open space and expand categories of open space to include green corridors, such as the Trailway, whilst continuing to seek contributions from developers. There seemed to be general consensus that community involvement and appropriate use of open space are important issues.

9.5 Clear support was shown for parking standards to restrain the levels of residential and destination car parking, but that this should vary spatially according to: accessibility to facilities; accessibility to other forms of transport; and, promotion of dual use of car parks. The level of car parking at Gillingham train station was also highlighted as a particular issue.

10.0 Conclusion

10.1 The responses will be considered along with Government, Regional, and Local policy and the evidence base in the production of the Preferred Options document which will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal.