

The Draft Local Plan

Comments Regarding the Settlement Hierarchy Assessment

Producing the Draft Local Plan is a mighty and unenviable task for all engaged in its preparation. And it certainly would be an incredible feat if the utopian image portrayed on the front page of the Draft Local plan expressing the vision for the future of Test Valley could be achieved; where the landscape is a parkland; where bicycles are the mode of transport, the motor car is no longer and where the built environment occupies less than one percent of the land.

The Draft Local Plan is a substantial document, where its analysis (for a person in full-time employment) would require far more time than the six weeks allocated for public comment, however, there are a couple of points that 'stand out' that may need further assessment.

I have noticed that the single facility 'a good level of public transport' has been given very high weighting in the assessment, in particular as a means to travel to and from work, yet throughout the whole of the southwest region, including the major centres, less than 3% of the population use public transport to travel to work (National statistics - Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2021). This begs the question how have the other 97% been considered in the drafting of this assessment. Has the Draft Plan assessment evidence of the usage of public transport rather than the provision for it?

Whilst public transport may play an important role within major centres, it is questionable whether it plays a major role in the sustainability of rural settlements. Public transport is weighted highly across all the rural settlements as exemplified by the statement 'Table 12 in the Appendix showing all of the settlements and their scores in terms of facilities and public transport provision'.

A table has been produced containing, in great detail, the facilities within each settlement or within groups of settlements and it is a shame that the Tiering of settlements has deviated from the facts of Table 12. Attached are two tables containing the exact facts produced in Table 12; the first showing all the settlements as graded by the SHA and the second showing a grading purely on merit – the six key facilities being gold and the remaining facilities treated equally as silver.

The Tiering of settlements should be delayed until Table 12 is updated and to nearer the time that the plan is to be adopted, until then there should be just a single table. To further improve the validity of the settlement hierarchy many of the facilities within settlements should be better quantified. Also, other facilities should be added to the list, for example, employment within settlements and proximity to Major Centres are important factors and should certainly be in the key listings. The Settlement Assessment Table 12 is the most important data informing future planning. Table 12 should be expanded to encompass more facilities that are on offer and perhaps attach a value to each facility.