

Chapter 8 Sherford: the South Hams New Community Proposal

Matter PSR4; proposal ST8 and Diagram 6 in pre-examination changes.

8.1 This proposal, carried forward with amendments from the adopted plan, is that in the period 2001 to 2016 there should be developed a new community within South Hams District. Although it could have been argued (but was not) that the proposal was one already decided in principle and therefore should not be again subject to examination, we did not take that view on account of the many changes that have taken place since the proposal's adoption, of which the revision of housing policy in 1999 of PPG3¹ and the issue in 2001 of RPG 10 are salient considerations.

8.2 In view of the importance to the plan's strategy, not only for the regeneration of Plymouth, but also for those living in the area itself our consideration of this proposal takes its lead from the sequential test for residential development that is set out in PPG3² and is itself based on a search sequence.

8.3 So we address first the validity of the plan's housing numbers for the Plymouth principal urban area. This consideration begins by checking on the validity of assessments of the capacity of that area for additional housing. It then considers the demands for housing in the sub-region to see whether there is a shortfall in capacity, and if there is a shortfall, what is its extent.

8.4 Then, second, in view of the fact that the Sherford proposal is at best arguable as an urban extension, we consider other proposals for such extension before finally addressing the merits or otherwise of the proposed "new community" (whatever that term should mean).

8.5 The importance of our checking on the proposal by the analytical means of a search sequence is highlighted by widespread criticism that the work by the Joint Structure Plan Authorities has followed, not preceded, the decision to develop at Sherford³. In this context it may be noted that two key documents produced by the plan making authorities, appeared no less than 10 months after the deposit of the plan. This is not to say that the documents lack value, but their authority would undoubtedly have been greater had they appeared as part of the consideration of the plan proposals.

¹ In particular we note the requirement in paragraph 21 of PPG3 to review existing allocations of housing land in development plans.

² PPG3, paragraph 30.

³ As picturesquely put by Mr P Watts on behalf of Brixton Parish Council: "plan, analysis, survey", the reverse of the traditional approach to plan making.

8.6 In the context of the capacity of the urban area, we also question in this report the continuing validity of excluding from the area of development a large area in the east of Plymouth including Plymstock Quarry. This land figures so prominently on the black and white Diagram 6⁴ as an area outside any development proposals that it was given the shorthand name at the examination of the “White Hole”.

8.7 The other proposals considered as potential urban extensions or new settlements are:

- a proposal for 3500 dwellings at Woolwell, to the north of Plymouth;
- a proposal for 3500 dwellings at Lee Mill, between Plymouth and Ivybridge; and
- the potential for developments at Boringdon and at Newnham, both to the east of Plymouth.

8.8 Our consideration of these areas has been not only to test their suitability as a preferred alternative to the Sherford proposal, but also as potential additions to the proposal. We also consider their strategic significance generally, rejecting the suggestion that there is insufficient evidence to recommend a preferred development distribution at the Plymouth principal urban area. To have taken this line would, in our considered view, be irresponsible having regard to the division of the area among so many local planning authorities.

8.9 What follows of our report in this chapter follows the line of our consideration outlined above. We first examined the capacity of the Plymouth principal urban area. Our conclusion on this consideration, set out in the preceding Chapter 7, is that, in the interests of ensuring that greenfield land should not be unnecessarily allocated, we consider that a somewhat higher target should be placed on the urban capacity of Plymouth. The effect of this higher target is to increase the urban capacity from the 8500 proposed in the plan⁵ to a round 10,000 net housing units.

8.10 Also in Chapter 7, having regard both to the demands of sustainability and regional policy generally, we conclude that sites for some 14,500 housing units need to be found in or adjacent to⁶ the Plymouth principal urban area in the Devon sector. Given the capacity of Plymouth itself this means that 4500 sites are needed on the edge of the City of Plymouth or in the South Hams at the principal urban area. In terms of rate per year, this works out at a round 300 annually. Given that we have preferred to deal with the problems inherent in assessing Plymouth’s urban capacity by risking over-assessment rather than under-

⁴ See p.55 of the *Pre-Examination in Public Changes to the Deposit Draft*.

⁵ Proposal ST17.

⁶ We use the term “in or adjacent to” in view of our own definition of “principal urban area” as that area bounded by the existing urban periphery. Policy SS 5 of RPG 10 uses the preposition “at”, presumably with similar intention.

assessment these figures must be regarded as a minimum. It is clear therefore that a major planning initiative is needed to accommodate such a number unless pressures are built up leading to unplanned sprawl.

8.11 Where should these 4500 housing sites best be located? We have already concluded in Chapter 7 that 500 (rather than the plan's 1000) should remain to be allocated in the local plan on the urban periphery. This leaves 4000. Should it all go to Sherford, or is there a better location? We examine first the challenges to Sherford, then, against similar strategic and sustainability criteria, the Sherford proposal itself, considering also the principal objections raised against it.

“The White Hole”: Land to the North of the A379, including Plymstock Quarry

8.12 This land lies in the east of Plymouth to the north of the A379 between Pomphlett and Plymstock on the one hand and Plympton on the other, and it includes Plymstock Quarry. Depending on its definition the area has an area very roughly 5 or 6 square kilometres. It includes the area of the disused Plymstock Quarry, the large active Moorhead Quarry, an area immediately to the east which has been given permission for quarrying and, further to the east, a small disused quarry which retains a permission for quarrying⁷. The A38 trunk road passes through the northern quarter of the area. Whilst most of the area is gently undulating, land to the north of the A38 rises steeply to a ridge, on the other side of which lies the suburb of Plympton.

8.13 From the point of view of strategic planning, we have no problem with the development of the Plymstock Quarry for mixed uses including housing. Having previously been worked for the extraction of Devonian Limestone, the site is now vacant, the ground cleared and development is ready to start just as soon as a master plan, taking account of the unusual character of the site, is ready and permission granted. The site is allocated in the First Deposit Local Plan as a site for 1000 houses, although its capacity could perhaps be higher, up to 1300⁸. The site also figures in the urban capacity study.

8.14 We agree⁹ that, being close to the city centre, and close to the A379, the site would be well located both to take advantage of existing and proposed bus services and also from the point of view of coping with the private car.

8.15 Nevertheless, for all that the site is of an unusual character and could support 1000 or more homes, we consider it to be rather a matter of ordinary town expansion rather than of sufficient strategic importance to be included as a proposal of this structure plan. Nor, bearing in mind the inclusion of the site in

⁷ Evidence of Mr S Redding on behalf of the Joint Structure Plan Authorities.

⁸ Evidence of Mr Barnard and Mr C L Tharnthong on behalf of Westbury Homes.

⁹ With Mr Tharnthong and Mr Barnard.

the current roll forward of the local plan, do we see any necessity for strategic direction and accordingly we make no recommendation on the matter.

8.16 As to the rest of the “White Hole”, this can be divided into the part subject to mineral working considerations — some 60% of the whole — and the area to the north, partly lying north of the A38. Here we note that, in formulating a previous structure plan, this area north of the A38 was deleted from the development area on landscape grounds¹⁰. It has also been the subject of unsuccessful local plan objections and section 78 appeals. Bearing in mind the attractive wooded character of the ridge and its prominence from, among other places, the A38 on its entrance to Plymouth, we see no good reason to challenge these earlier decisions. Thanks to the careful retention of green areas like this, Plymouth is a city that appears to be smaller than it really is.

8.17 Similar considerations also apply to the area to the south of the A38, but in addition there is, in our opinion, the added objection that this area could be satisfactorily developed only if the land further south were to be developed first.

8.18 This brings us to the area which is variously made up of: an existing quarry, the Moorcroft Quarry; an area to the east on the opposite side of a lane crossing the area, Haye Road, that has permission expiring in 2042 for an extension of the quarry; a small disused quarry in the far east of the area which has a permission renewed until 2048; and other land which is covered wholly or partly by local plan designations as a mineral resource area and a mineral consultation area¹¹.

8.19 Given that the area as a whole is well located as an area for urban expansion in terms of the spatial strategy of RPG 10, there appears a conflict between this consideration and need for mineral reserves to be safeguarded¹². The mineral concerned is Devonian Limestone which when crushed is used as a concrete aggregate and for roadstone as a sub-base. It is also used in the production of agricultural lime and to a small extent for building stone. In the area is a reserve of some 30 million tonnes. The only alternative sources are at Ashburton in the Dartmoor National Park and at Newton Abbot, where working a much smaller reserve is hindered by hydrogeological considerations. Whilst there are other sources of concreting aggregate in Devon, some 10% of the limestone extracted from the area is exported, mainly to meet the needs of the south-east of England¹³.

¹⁰ From the evidence of Mr P Watts.

¹¹ Evidence of Mr S Redding supported by a plan submitted by him, by leave, during the course of the examination [Devon EiP 62].

¹² MPG1, paragraphs 35 and 36.

¹³ By which, of course, we mean the real south east, covering London, the Home Counties and Hampshire and not the so-called South East Region of the Government Offices.

8.20 Quite apart from the questions of whether the beneficiaries of the rights and permissions would willingly give them up — a matter on which we received no real evidence one way or the other, or whether the compensation due to them for the surrender of their rights would be balanced by the value of the land for housing — a matter on which we received no secure evidence — the question of whether the minerals or the general development interest should prevail in this area is clearly a matter of balance. And although this question was strongly raised before us¹⁴, and the evidence of the planning authorities was clear, the structure plan itself shows little sign of having considered the matter in these terms. In our view, the authorities should continue to consider the matter on every appropriate occasion. At the least, in the review of the two local plans covering the area and in development control, consideration should be given to maximising the area to be given early release, and to minimising the area to be sterilised until worked¹⁵.

8.21 As to the strategic consideration, the issue is a matter of balance. In our view, the importance of the mineral working and the reserve is not absolute, given that the mineral concerned is far from unique. But unless no other satisfactory solution can be found to the housing question before us we see no good reason for any recommendation to direct the disturbance of the current allocations.

North Woolwell

8.22 Development at North Woolwell on the north-eastern fringe of Plymouth is put forward¹⁶ as an extension to the city that closely follows the form of previous extensions. Phased development of this area could provide some 140 units per annum from 2005 onwards until capacity was reached at 1900 units. Affordable housing would be included in an area close to much of the city's employment. The proposal has already been worked up in some detail by consultants¹⁷.

8.23 Although the promoters claimed that their proposal would offer significant public transport benefits, including a new park and ride facility on the edge of the city and also landscape and recreational benefits in the form of a new country park, both of these benefits were seriously challenged by the structure plan authorities (including Dartmoor National Park), amenity groups and the promoters of rival schemes¹⁸. Also challenged was the extent to which the proposal would

¹⁴ By Mr Melia.

¹⁵ Of course, we appreciate that practical considerations have to be brought to bear in such exercises, not least that of housing and quarrying being outstandingly bad neighbours.

¹⁶ By Taylor Woodrow, supported by the DPDS Consulting Group and WSP Development, consulting traffic engineers and other specialised consultancies.

¹⁷ DPDS, statements (PD/DSDP/2-8) and oral evidence of Mr A Chaplin.

¹⁸ See, for example, Addendum to Background Paper 1, *Assessment for urban extensions to the Plymouth PUA*.

be integrated with the existing community at Woolwell, using existing physical and social infrastructure¹⁹.

8.24 We saw for ourselves that the site would be almost fully exposed from several important viewpoints at the southern edge of the Dartmoor National Park. Typically from such viewpoints the site appears across a deep wooded valley, rising to the summit of high land and at a distance of some 3km or less. In our opinion the lie of the land is such that landscaping, though generously proposed, would have little or no concealing effect. What weight should be placed on this observation is a matter of subjective judgement: it is not as though Plymouth is hidden from the view of the national park anyway. Nevertheless, if it is accepted that the surroundings of national parks should retain a rural character, then the landscape considerations are hostile to the proposal. Maybe it is that a glimpse of the city from afar can be exciting, but too much exposure dulls the appetite for more.

8.25 The traffic considerations are more complex, but in a nutshell they revolve mostly around the capacity of the A386 primary route to accommodate more traffic on the scale proposed and the potential of the proposal to attract commuters from private car use.

8.26 Much of the employment in Plymouth lies in the north of the city, including much that would be within walking or cycling distance from the site of the proposed development²⁰ and our assessment of the evidence is that it should not be too difficult to extend bus routes already in the area into the proposed development so that the whole proposed residential area would lie within 200m of a bus stop²¹. As to the proposed park and ride facility, we can see the advantage of a location at the very edge of the urban area in attracting car users coming in from the rural area, but consider that the proposed site at the airport near the George Hotel junction some distance into town would attract more, both from the rural areas and from the northern city suburbs. Indeed, we see no satisfactory evidence that would lead to a conclusion that the modal split would be in any way markedly different from similar developments at the present time. Moreover, notwithstanding that much of Plymouth's employment lies in the north of the city many potential trips would still have to use the already congested A386 to get to it, as well as to go further south to the city centre and elsewhere. Despite some well thought out proposals for the amelioration of the traffic situation, we consider that it is unlikely that they could go far enough to sufficiently mitigate the impact of the proposal.

8.27 Undoubtedly, existing district and retail facilities would be within walking distance of the site of the proposed development²² but the evidence on the

¹⁹ A point commended in PPG3 at paragraph 67.

²⁰ DPDS statement (PD/DSDP/4) Figures 5 and 6.

²¹ *Ibid*, Figure 8.

²² *Ibid*, Figure 5.

provision of primary and secondary schooling is less obvious. Children in the proposed development requiring primary education could, in the early years of the proposed development, attend the existing primary school at Woolwell until the time came for a new primary school to be built on the site. But as to secondary education, the nearest secondary school, Southway School, is some 3km from the site and is to be closed, whilst the next nearest, Sir John Hunt Community College, is some 4km distant. In fact, as a result of parental choice, about half of local children get their secondary schooling in Tavistock, some 20km distant²³.

8.28 Our conclusion on integration with the existing community is that, despite leaving the question of secondary education in the air, it is one of the stronger points of the proposal.

8.29 Nevertheless, and largely on account of the traffic problem on the A386, we do not consider that the North Woolwell proposal can be regarded as a satisfactory strategic option for the accommodation of housing need that cannot be located within the urban boundary. This is not to indicate, of course, that a smaller, non-strategic development could or could not figure in a local plan.

Lee Mill

8.30 This is a proposal for a “compact” settlement, said by its promoters to have capacity for at least 4500 dwellings, to be located adjacent to the main Great Western railway line to the north of Lee Mill village.

8.31 Despite some ingenious pleadings on the proposal’s behalf²⁴ we regard this proposal as a non-starter from the strategic viewpoint. Although close to the proposed Langage employment area, it requires exceptional imagination to describe it as an “urban extension” in the light of PPG3. Rather, it looks to us to be a sporadic development partly filling the gap between Plympton and Ivybridge. This gap already contains rather more development at Lee Mill than is consistent with the avoidance of urban sprawl. We doubt, moreover, the feasibility of some of the proposals’ key points. In proposing an initial development of 3500 on a *gross* area of 82ha the resultant gross density would be around 42 dwellings/ha. But out of that area of 82ha would have to be found sites for schools, local open spaces, social and other ancillary facilities. This presumes the sort of development that one would expect in central London, not in a residential suburb, being at a density beyond that regarded as “an efficient use of land” in PPG3²⁵.

8.32 Although its location next to the railway might suggest that it be served by a new railway station, we do not think (in the light of our conclusions on new stations generally and the lack of firm evidence to the contrary) to be an altogether

²³ Oral evidence of Mr Barnard.

²⁴ By Mason Richards Planning in their statement *The New Community for South Hams* and in the oral evidence of Mr C M Sackett.

²⁵ At paragraph 58.

likely proposition, notwithstanding a very conditional measure of support from the local train operating company. In any event, we agree²⁶ that the patronage of a station in this location would not be of strategic significance compared with the likely flow of private cars. Moreover, access by road in our view would be wholly unsatisfactory. Detached from the main road system, access to the site is proposed via the unclassified road from Langage Cross to the B3417 at Langage and to the A38 at Lee Mill village. As the proposed development would be separated from both Langage and Lee Mill village, no less than six or more kilometres of new roads would be necessary just to link the site with the rest of the world. And we concur²⁷ that access to the A38, which as a trunk road is undesirable in principle, would be via the junction at Lee Mill, which would need major works to cope with the flow. Trunk roads in any event should be kept for long distance traffic.

8.33 Located on a north facing slope, the proposed development would also be prominent in the view (on a clear day) from the national park some 2km distant.

8.34 Although the proposal was not without its support, we have no doubt that each and everyone of the foregoing objections is fatal to it.

Boringdon

8.35 This proposal is for up to 3500 dwellings to be built on 144ha at Boringdon, to the north of Plympton. In the proposal some 1200 dwellings could be built on some 34ha within the plan period, partly as “clusters” to the north of the present built up area (10ha) and partly on a detached site to the north of the golf course, east of the Boringdon Hotel. Another 2300 dwellings could be built on land to the north and east of the initial development beyond the plan period. In addition it is proposed that some 48ha adjacent to the Plym Valley be made available for employment use by industrial firms already located in the area²⁸.

8.36 As a strategic site, we find it wanting in a number of respects. If the whole proposal, including the industrial area, were taken into account, it would have some claim to being an urban extension, despite being separated from the main urban area to the east by the Plym Valley. But the housing area itself would be quite detached. Limited in area by the understandable desire to avoid building on ridges to the south and north-east, it could never quite be integrated with Plympton. And unless access were to be taken through housing areas in Plympton, lengthy access roads would be needed to connect up the proposed development, including one to the Leigham Lodge interchange on the A38, some 3km distant. Using this junction would itself cause problems. While a park and ride facility at Longbridge using the remaining spur of the former Yelverton branch railway might be attractive, nobody, not even the promoters of the

²⁶ With the oral evidence of Mr L Bray of South Hams District Council.

²⁷ With the oral evidence of Mr I Parsons of the Highways Agency.

²⁸ Additional written statement by G L Hearn on behalf of Midas Homes.

proposal thought this a very practical proposition. Further expansion of the proposed development would take it out of the valley between the two ridges and over the ridge to the north-east²⁹.

8.37 But perhaps the most serious objection, to our mind, is that the initial area, limited by landscape considerations, is just not big enough for the purpose proposed. Detached from the main urban area, it would have to be self-contained in all but informal recreation areas, including its own primary schools as those nearest are full and not capable of expansion. This means that net densities on the site would have to rise to an *average* of 50 dwellings/ha. Again, this presumes the sort of development that one would expect in central London, not in a residential suburb.

Newnham

8.38 This is land at Newnham Farm, adjacent to the Great Western main line north of Chaddle wood. With a potential capacity of some 500 houses, this is not really a strategic site. Part is subject to a floodplain constraint, but other parts could be developable. With the appearance of an urban extension on the map, it would in fact be rather isolated unless there was much improvement to the access roads³⁰. Whether there is any real scope for new housing here is, in our opinion, entirely a matter for the local plan.

Sherford

The proposal

8.39 This proposal derives from the adopted structure plan, which, at proposal N1, featured a proposal for a “new community” within South Hams District. It was intended that it should include provision for at least 2500 dwellings in the period up to 2011, differing from the current plan proposal which proposes some 3500 units, but sharing the proposal of associated employment land provision and a range of community and other associated facilities. No location was specified in the adopted plan, but the proposal specified a list of locational criteria.

8.40 Over the years since the proposal was first formulated, a site has been selected with the agreement of the local planning authorities and much work in developing the design of the proposed “new community” has been undertaken by the developers, the local planning authorities and others³¹. While some of the

²⁹ Addendum to Background Paper 1, *op.cit.* Oral evidence of Mr J Phillips of G L Hearn, Mr Keech, Mr Barnard, Mr Bray and Mr R Ford of the Highways Agency.

³⁰ Statement and additional statement by Mr R Packham of Turner Holden on behalf of Persimmon Homes, Addendum to Background Paper 1, *op.cit.*, oral evidence of Mr Packham and Mr Bray.

³¹ See, for example, Participant Document PD1/SHER/1, *Sherford Valley, A Sustainable New Community for the South Hams*.

details that have been worked out assist our consideration of the proposal, that consideration itself was necessarily confined to the strategic elements of the proposal as they affect the structure plan. Of course, in the event of the proposal going forward, these details may well find their way into the next review of the local plan for the area³² and into the consideration of planning applications.

8.41 The proposed new community is intended to function as an urban extension forming part of the Plymouth principal urban area and should include provision for at least 3500 dwellings together with associated employment land and a range of community and other associated facilities.

8.42 The plan proposes that the new community should:

- be assimilated into the landscape of the area;
- avoid, as far as possible, the use of significant areas of the best and most versatile agricultural land;
- be well related to, but separate from, existing settlements;
- be linked to Plymouth, in the first phase of its development, by an effective high capacity public transport system;
- be accessible to the strategic road network and the local highway system;
- avoid areas of known mineral deposits of national importance; and
- be capable of accommodating further development beyond the current plan period.

The criticisms

8.43 As we see it, the attacks on the proposal boil down to a small number of important considerations: that it is not necessary; that the site is needed for a relocation of Plymouth Airport; that there are better locations available if a strategic new settlement is actually needed; and that it fails the sequential test of PPG3. There was also attack on the intrinsic merits of the proposal in terms of its effects on the countryside and on the nearby village of Brixton.

Is the proposal necessary?

8.44 We have noted earlier, using a sequential test, that a residual demand in the principal urban area outside the City of Plymouth remains in the plan period equal to a demand for some 4500 dwellings in the South Hams.

8.45 We have already noted that the provision of 4500 new dwellings in the South Hams would require building at an annual rate of some 300, to which should be added any backlog that may have accrued in the past couple of years.

³² Or local development framework if the proposed new planning system catches up on the local planning process.

We were assured of a building rate (and selling rate) of up to 500 annually at Sherford, comparable with that at Bradley Stoke on the outskirts of Bristol. Much would depend upon not only the state of the general housing market year by year, but also on the take up of the requirement of affordable housing³³. It may be the case that the economic outlook at Bradley Stoke in the 1990s was better than it will be at Plymouth in the decade yet to come, but nevertheless it shows what can be done where a consortium of builders is at work. Indeed, the problem could be that development at Sherford would be *too fast*, getting ahead of the residual demand indicated by the monitoring of the greenfield/brownfield nexus. In that case there would really be a danger that the development could sap investment from regeneration in the city. Both monitoring and management through phasing are important in this context, as recommended in PPG3³⁴.

8.46 On the other hand, given the potential building rate, we foresee no difficulty in raising the target figure by 2016 by 500 (from the plan's proposal of 3500) making the settlement by 2016 comprise some 4000 new dwellings. What is really important, in our view, is that the settlement is well designed without slavish adherence to a target figure or date.

8.47 We should emphasise also that we do not see the need for the proposed new community to be dependent upon the niceties of calculation of housing numbers. Such figures change frequently and are also capable of manipulation to "prove" one case or another. Rather, we consider the need for the new community to be more fundamental. The day may come when cities like Plymouth will be able to accommodate all their needs within the urban boundary. Until that day comes, if it ever does, there will continue to be a need for both re-used sites and greenfield sites. The present choice, as we see it, is not between one or the other, but between unplanned incremental expansion that inevitably attracts the opprobrium of "sprawl", and an imaginative and carefully planned new community. In North America, it is called "smart growth", and it goes hand in hand with urban regeneration.

Is the site needed for the relocation of Plymouth Airport?

8.48 Following our consideration of airports in Devon in Chapter 5 we see no realistic prospect of an early decision to relocate Plymouth Airport. In the absence of such a decision, we do not regard this issue as a real one.

Is there a better location?

8.49 In our consideration above, we find little comfort in the possibility of alternative locations. Of the locations considered above, only North Woolwell comes close to being a rival. But its smaller size means that other land also would

³³ Oral evidence of Mr Gareth Jones, and subsequently checked with South Gloucestershire District Council. Their figures indicate completions of over 700 at peak and a sustained annual output of 500-600 in the decade up to 1999.

³⁴ PPG3, paragraph 34 as "clarified" by the Parliamentary Statement on 17 July 2003.

have to be allocated and we have already concluded that insufficient exists either as one or a few strategic locations, or as an aggregation of smaller, non-strategic sites. Even if development at North Woolwell were a chosen option, sooner or later in the plan period eyes would have to turn elsewhere.

8.50 Having noted the problems of integrating the traffic from North Woolwell into the highway system of Plymouth, we must of course ask if Sherford would be any better.

8.51 Inevitably, some of the traffic and transportation criticisms of the Sherford proposal relate to its current design, for example to its proposed layout³⁵. To the extent that these criticisms are justified, and we make no judgement on this point, we consider that they are matters which could be put right at the local plan or development control stage. What is more serious, however, is the criticism that its impact on the A379 Plymouth to Kingsbridge road would be every bit as serious as North Woolwell on the A386³⁶. However, we find the evidence on this point (of which there was much at the examination) less than convincing. Like all the radial roads into and out of Plymouth, the A379 suffers from congestion³⁷ and suffers from markedly poor layout and alignment in the South Hams³⁸. Nevertheless, nobody suggested that the A379 was *less* congested than the A386, and if they had we would have had difficulty believing them. Indeed, there was expert evidence that, despite apparent congestion, there was no physical capacity constraint on A379 and the A374 (which links the A38 to the City Centre)³⁹.

8.52 A further merit advocated, which we find to be supported by the evidence, is that the chosen location is well placed to spread the potential traffic about in several directions, at least once the River Plym is crossed. In particular, the proposed location would be well related to existing and proposed development at Langage⁴⁰.

8.53 One merit suggested in favour of the Sherford proposal is that, as well as having the A379 as access, it would also be served by the A38 trunk road. So it would have two means of access, unlike North Woolwell with one⁴¹. But this to our mind is a double edged argument. Serving local communities is not what trunk roads exist for, and simply for congestion to be transferred from other

³⁵ DPDS *The proposed new community at Sherford including comparison with the Urban Extension at North Woolwell (PD/DSDP/5)* Chapter 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ From our own observation and the oral evidence of Mr T Cross on behalf of DPDS.

³⁸ Report by Colin Buchanan and Partners, *South Hams Transportation Study* (SHTS) October 2000.

³⁹ Oral evidence of Mr N Lean on behalf of Plymouth City Council.

⁴⁰ *Sherford Valley, op cit.*, at p.8, and Mr Gareth Jones's additional statement, also DPDS *op.cit.*, Figure 3.

⁴¹ Oral response by Dr I Harrison of the Joint Structure Plan Authorities and other evidence.

radials onto the A38 would be a very bad thing from the point of view of Plymouth's role as a regional centre⁴². Nevertheless, the Highways Agency, as the authority responsible for the care of the trunk road, has no fundamental objection to the Sherford proposal, given that a comprehensive transport assessment establishes the extent to which the traffic generated by the development affects the A38 and the operation of its junctions (including the nearest junction at Deep Lane to the north end of the chosen site) and identifies a necessary package of sustainable transport options⁴³.

8.54 We also heard inconclusive evidence as to the merits of linking the A38 to the A379 alongside the proposed development. This, we conclude, can be left to the local plan process or development control.

8.55 We concur that the impact of the proposal on the A38 would be mitigated by the provision of the park and ride facility proposed by the consortium⁴⁴ which would, among other things, intercept traffic to and from the east. In our view, this part of the proposal is of strategic importance.

8.56 As to sustainable transport, the community's promoters were keen to decouple their proposals for public transport from proposals to develop a light rapid transport system in Plymouth. In the beginning, it is more likely that the development would be served by a high quality bus service. If, later, light rapid transport system came along, so much the better. This seems to us a sensible approach to the question, having regard to all the many problems inherent in the delivery of a light rapid transport system scheme. It is, however, of cardinal importance that a high quality (not just high capacity) service should be *in situ* from the very earliest days, so that people's decisions on home and work location and travel habits are built on a sustainable basis from the very outset, rather than more vaguely "in the first phase".

Does the proposal satisfy the sequential test of PPG3?

8.57 A particularly serious criticism of the Sherford proposal is that, unlike North Woolwell, it would not be a true urban extension. In our opinion there is much force in this argument. We do not disagree with the proposition that it would have many functional links with the city⁴⁵. Nevertheless, if the criteria for an urban extension are both contiguity and also that it would build upon the existing urban infrastructure⁴⁶, then the Sherford proposal as currently formulated fails on each criterion. Even if the site were to touch the outskirts of Plymstock it would only just do so, and we see plenty of conventional good reasons for

⁴² Plymouth Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

⁴³ Statement by the Highways Agency.

⁴⁴ *Sherford Valley op.cit.*, at p.8, amplified by the oral evidence of Mr Cross.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp.4 and 8.

⁴⁶ As, reasonably in our opinion, argued in respect of North Woolwell.

separation of the two communities. Equally, we note that all the ancillary facilities conventionally required in a self-contained new community are proposed, and, in our view, necessarily so. Seemingly, the only overlap would be that a new secondary school in the proposed development would be useful in remedying problems in secondary education in this part of the South Hams⁴⁷.

8.58 If there were wholly acceptable proposals that better satisfied the search sequence of PPG3, then this consideration would be a serious flaw in the proposal. However, there are not, and bearing in mind the near proximity of the proposal to the principal urban area we consider the proposal acceptable in sequential terms. Having said this, we believe it to be only honest that the plan should not pretend that the proposal is what it is not. It is a new settlement.

What about the effects on the environment?

8.59 Every new settlement or urban extension is built on land that was once countryside: there is no avoiding that statement, for all of its triteness. But the questions to be asked are whether it is necessary, and in this case we conclude that it is, and whether a reasonable location has been chosen in terms of landscape and other environmental constraints. On the second question, we find little of substance to challenge in the careful appraisal produced by the promoters⁴⁸. In particular we are assured that the proposed development would not be prominent in the view of passers-by on the A38. In our view the design, in satisfying the criterion that the proposal be assimilated into the landscape of the area, should ensure that it is not in the least prominent in the view from the A38 and preferably not seen at all. It is important, in our opinion, that Plymouth should continue to appear to be smaller and more compact than it really is.

And what about the impact on Brixton?

8.60 As the proposal is currently formulated, the village of Brixton would not be included in the site of the proposed new community. Undoubtedly many village residents feel uncomfortable with the proposal⁴⁹, and understandably so, since most are likely to have chosen a home and lifestyle that combines proximity to Plymouth's employment and amenities yet go a long way to satisfy the rural idyll. As the development proceeds, life will not be quite the same. Yet change of this nature is an inevitable fact of life that has to be accepted by the responsible authorities in the general public interest.

Tailpiece — further growth

8.61 Finally, we strongly support the plan's criterion that the development at Sherford should be capable of accommodating further development beyond the

⁴⁷ Oral evidence of Mr Gareth Jones, Mr Bray and Dr Harrison.

⁴⁸ *Sherford Valley, op.cit.* pp.12ff.

⁴⁹ Mr P Watts on behalf of Brixton Parish Council.

current plan period. Government policy now is that plans should make provision for at least ten years' potential supply of housing⁵⁰ and it makes sense to us that the potential for a continued supply should be available if, in whatever should be the circumstances after 2016, it should be needed. Whilst the point has not been so well explored as others at Sherford, we see no reason to doubt the assertion⁵¹ that there is potential for further expansion after 2016.

Recommendation 8.1

- (i) Confirm the proposal for a new settlement at Sherford, but modify the plan to increase the target figure to 4000 by 2016; and to make clear both its chosen location and that it is a new settlement and not a *bona fide* urban extension.
- (ii) Modify the plan also to include among the strategic criteria for the proposal the necessity for phasing, the proposed park and ride at the Deep Lane junction of the A38 and the provision from the outset of development of high quality public transport.

⁵⁰ Parliamentary Statement on 17 July 2003. See Chapter 1.

⁵¹ By Mr Gareth Jones.