

Bruton Town Planning Policy

Introduction

The aim of the Bruton Town Planning Policy is to define Bruton's planning policy over the period 2013–28 in order to ensure that sustainable growth for the town is in line with local wishes.

History

More than any of the other settlements of South Somerset, Bruton's current configuration is the product of its geography and its history, in combination. It is a deep valley settlement at the point where six valleys meet. Its layout was largely determined in the 15th century, when the street pattern was laid out, at the point where the fast-flowing and frequently flooding River Brue loses impetus. Most of the area south of the river has remained dominated by the ecclesiastical ownership of that time and the town lies on the north, along a shelf.

The River Brue is prone to flooding. Since 1984, Bruton has benefited from protection from flooding with the building of the dam/flood prevention scheme, allowing some development, mainly at King's School, but also with other locations being made available for commercial and housing. Land at West End also floods. The recent upgrading of the Flood Prevention Scheme has not yet altered the potential for development. However, criteria and techniques of building may change during the plan period.

The core of the town was declared a Conservation Area in 1972. This has twice been reviewed and extensions made, including Lower Backway and, latterly, the whole High Street. Views into and out of the conservation area are important. The Conservation Area covers a dense settlement offering few opportunities for further development, and little scope for employment creation, except where it floods. The development boundaries are tightly circumscribed. Outside the C.A. what was originally a nuclear settlement has, since the 1920s, become a linear one following the east–west main river valley and the main roads. Intrusion into countryside has occurred at Brue Close and recently at Cuckoo Hill. So far, there has been limited development on the town's hillsides, and development outside the core has been resisted, including any on dispersed sites that may now need to be considered, so long as they can be categorised as sustainable.

The Current Situation

The Government has stated that the country will need over 500,000 new homes. This will affect counties in different ways and Somerset has already made a number of key decisions with regard to future growth.

South Somerset District Council (SSDC) adopted its Local Plan in January 2013, although this is still subject to examination by an inspector. Bruton is designated a 'Rural Centre' and is required to plan for 104 dwellings and two hectares of land for business/employment growth, during the period of the local plan (now–2028). The SSDC Local Plan does not designate any new sites for housing and leaves the way open for a local implementation policy to be devised by the town. Central government has also introduced significant reforms to the planning system which will, theoretically, make it considerably easier for developers to build in the countryside.

It is, therefore, imperative that the town develops its own planning policy to ensure that sustainable growth can be achieved in line with local wishes, rather than being led by developers. This policy seeks to address these issues. An initial consultation about the proposed plan was held in July 2012, with high response rates (see Annex A). This consultation focused on identifying sites for potential future housing. The policies formulated in this document require further consultation and have been gathered from a number of stakeholders, including: Bruton Town Council, South Somerset District Council, Bruton The Way Forward and The Bruton Trust.

Housing and Development

Principles

All new building must sustain and enhance the focus of the town. Satellite developments will not be acceptable and the town should be eager to see progress within the valleys and not 'over the hill'. In simple terms, the Ttown should develop as one and not be separated.

Any new housing, especially medium to large developments, must be sited with careful consideration to the infrastructure capacity and the social and business needs of the community. It should be added that any unnecessary greenfield development must be discouraged and due regard must be given to drainage and flooding.

Approaches

There are two approaches to meeting the requirement for additional housing in Bruton. The first is in a single development which will inevitably require the use of greenfield sites and the second is by infill, conversion and expansion within existing resources. In reality, with 104 homes included in the district local plan, a mix of both approaches will be required.

Options

Now that Bellway has made it clear that there will be no further construction at the Cuckoo Hill site on the east of the Frome Road, the only suitable site acceptable to the council for sizeable development is the Somerset County Council-owned land to the west of the Frome Road. Housing will be better focused on the town centre and avoid the further over-expansion of the eastern side of the town.

With regard to infill, research has identified a number of sites at Appendix A. These sites range from single houses to small developments. Some are obviously only suitable for housing and others may need to compete with the other essential development of business and employment.

Policy Recommendations:

- 1. Any larger developments will be focused to the west of Frome Rd.**
- 2. Within the remainder of the parish, the scale of new housing will usually be limited to small infill plots/developments.**
- 3. The delivery of local housing needs through infill will be kept under review during the plan period. Should this clearly demonstrate that local needs are not being met, land will be allocated periodically for phased development throughout the policy period.**
- 4. Affordable housing shall be provided at a rate of 30% unless a higher figure is published by South Somerset District Council during the plan period; at which point, the target shall at least**

match that established by South Somerset District Council.

- 5. In the case of larger developments, social housing will be distributed across the site and not concentrated in a single location.**
- 6. When social housing becomes available, preference should be given to allocating new stock to people with a connection to the town (as done at Cox's Close).**
- 7. Housing developments will include a range of house types that reflect the needs of the local community, with a stronger emphasis on quality family-sized homes.**
- 8. The redevelopment of brownfield sites for mixed uses, including houses, will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the use of the site solely for employment is no longer viable.**
- 9. Infill development and the conversions of buildings which contribute positively to the area's character will be supported provided they help meet local housing needs. Within the conservation area, any infill development should conserve and enhance the town's special architectural and historic character.**

Business and Employment Development

Alongside the provision of further homes there is a requirement for the town to have plans in place for the provision of two hectares of land suitable for business development, leading to employment. Some space considered suitable for homes may prove better used for business. There is not enough brownfield space in the town and none is due to appear in the foreseeable future. It is probable that meeting this target will extend the footprint of the town into land that is traditionally seen as agricultural. Should the redevelopment of Durslade Farm be allowed to count towards this target, then it is unnecessary to allocate other sites at this time.

However, in order to protect and enhance existing business provision, it is useful to have a number of local planning policies in place.

Policy Recommendations:

- 10. The provision of sites for small-scale office, workshop and light industrial uses (B1) will be supported, subject to any proposal being appropriate in terms of scale, appearance, parking and impact.**
- 11. Existing employment land will be protected and enhanced where appropriate by:**
 - **Retaining existing employment sites for that purpose where they are well located and well suited to employment use.**
 - **Supporting the more effective use of existing employment land (e.g. Station Road and the former F & B site).**
 - **Supporting a change to mixed uses on employment land where it can be shown that the use of the site solely for employment is no longer viable and that the proposed alternative use would provide equal or greater benefits for the local community than the current use.**
 - **Supporting the expansion of existing businesses where additional jobs will be created, subject to the suitability of the scale and impact of the proposal.**
- 12. The provision of any new or additional retail floor space will be supported provided that it complements local provision; is compatible with the size and scale of the existing town centre; does not have unacceptable impacts on the road network; and enhances the town's shopping offer, especially in and around the High Street.**
- 13. The loss of business premises used for A1–A5 uses to other uses will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the use of the premises for these purposes is no longer viable; or the proposed alternative use would provide equal or greater benefits for the local economy and community.**
- 14. The policy supports appropriate proposals for mixed use developments which encourage 'live/work' opportunities.**
- 15. General industrial use (B2) and distribution and storage uses (B8)**

are considered inappropriate for the town because of the HGV traffic they can generate. Any scheme shown to have an unacceptable traffic impact will not be supported.

- 16. Proposals for recreational and tourism activities and facilities will be supported providing that the siting, design and scale of the development conserve the quality of the town's built and natural environments.**

Services and Amenities

Service provision and enhancement largely sits within the Bruton Community Plan. However, we strongly support utilising land to the west of Frome Road for the provision of a new medical centre, as all other identified sites have been proven to be unobtainable or on land with unacceptable flood risks. There is a need to ensure the current services and amenities can accommodate the new 104 homes and businesses.

Policy Recommendations:

- 17. The policy supports the protection of existing facilities designed to meet the needs of local residents, businesses and visitors and will not support any developments which remove community facilities unless:**
 - **The facilities are replaced by equivalent facilities which the town council considers to have a higher community value.**
 - **It can be clearly demonstrated that the facilities are no longer needed or viable and there is no realistic alternative community use.**
- 18. New and/or improved community facilities will be supported providing that the new facility is appropriate to its location, having regard to its use, size and design, impact on traffic, the environment and neighbouring residents.**

Water Management, Drainage, Sewage & Flooding

Current problems with flooding in Bruton must be properly identified, addressed & rectified by Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and the Environment Agency. This includes run-off from brooks, fields and paved areas throughout the town. The recent upgrade of the flood prevention scheme has greatly enhanced the protection of the town centre but there are still problems to be addressed elsewhere and it is essential that new developments do not further exacerbate existing issues.

Policy Recommendations:

- 19. Any new development should remain within the capacity of the town's existing drainage/sewerage infrastructure or be required to contribute all or part of any necessary expansion.**
- 20. All developments in flood-sensitive areas, including new green spaces, will be designed and constructed to reduce the overall level of flood risk when compared to current use.**
- 21. Any significant new development will be required to route storm water and excess water away from existing developments.**
- 22. No development will be permitted which reduces the ability of existing flood attenuation areas to alleviate flooding.**
- 23. All parking places and driveways associated with new developments will be designed to have permeable surfaces to reduce water run-off and contribute to flood reduction measures.**
- 24. In line with Level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, all new dwellings will be designed to have a predicted water discharge of no more than 80 litres of water per person per day.**

Traffic Management and Accessibility

HGV, parking, speeding and traffic issues have regularly featured in local surveys and plans as a key area of public concern. The town council's plans to extend parking provision, combined with the improved on-street parking enforcement service, will significantly help within the town centre. However, further development could bring negative impacts, especially if it increases the need for car journeys. In addition, public concern regarding speeding, combined with narrow streets and a high number of school buildings dispersed over a wide geographical area, have led to a number of calls for the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit.

Policy Recommendations:

25. Proposals for new housing developments will include adequate on-site parking to meet current and future needs at a rate of two spaces per dwelling, unless alternative car parking arrangements can be made which do not add to on-street congestion. In accordance with the Bruton Parking Strategy (12 Jan 2012) the provision of parking in new residential developments will be in line with the zoning standards set out on page 58, para 5.3 of the Countrywide Parking Strategy (Oct 2012).

In summary:

- 1 bedroom – 1.5 car spaces**
- 2 bedrooms – 2 car spaces**
- 3 bedrooms – 2.5 car spaces**
- 4 bedrooms – 3 car spaces**
- Cycle parking – a minimum of 1 per bedroom**
- Motorcycle parking – a minimum of 1 motorcycle parking space per 5 dwellings or 1 motorcycle space per 20 car spaces, whichever is the greater.**

26. Developments which remove recognised off-road spaces will not be supported unless alternative provision is made which increases or maintains the number of accessible parking spaces available.

27. Developments will be encouraged which promote improved traffic management by reducing traffic speeds and volumes; improve safety and access for pedestrians and cyclists; and do so in a way which respects the amenity of the locality.

28. Developments including garages will be required to build these to a suitable size, commensurate with their use.

29. Developments will be required to take into account the need to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, both within and adjacent to the development site (e.g. drop kerbs).

30. New development which generates additional HGV/LGV traffic will be required to undertake a transport assessment and will only be permitted where it can be clearly shown that the proposal does not have an unacceptable traffic impact for local residents.

31. The Town Council Transport Plan and its recommendations will form an appendix to the Town Planning Policy.

Open Spaces, the Environment and Renewable Energy

This issue largely rests within the community plan but there are some issues that will have a bearing on future developments, with the local community keen to prevent unnecessary encroachment on to greenfield sites, while promoting the need for green spaces and parkland within the built environment.

The deployment of large-scale photo-voltaic farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in very undulating landscapes, such as the countryside surrounding Bruton. In line with the town's desire to minimise greenfield development, the siting of any large scale photo-voltaic farm will only be supported if its position complies with the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) guidelines, issued in 2013 (The Planning Practice Guidance For Renewable And Low Carbon Energy).

In summary, these guidelines make it clear that large-scale solar arrays should be sited on brownfield sites, on industrial roofs, on land that is flat and easily screened, or on land that is close to major trunk roads.

The guidelines note that local planning authorities will need to consider the following:

- **Encouraging the effective use of previously developed land, and if a proposal does involve greenfield land, that it allows for continued agricultural use and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays.**
- **That solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use.**
- **The effect on landscape of glint and glare and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety.**
- **The extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun.**
- **The need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing.**
- **Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its**

setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large-scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large-scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset.

- **The potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges.**
- **The energy-generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including latitude and aspect.**

The approach to assessing cumulative landscape and visual impact of large-scale solar farms is likely to be the same as assessing the impact of wind turbines.

Policy Recommendations:

31. Public, green open spaces within the town must remain protected and properly maintained. Additional spaces and play areas should be acquired whenever feasible and any large development must include play and/or recreational public space.

32. New developments will be encouraged to create accessible links from development sites to the wider footpath network, to address gaps in the network and to improve existing provision.

33. The town council will expect development to retain important hedgerows, mature trees and existing areas of woodland and to improve the connectivity between green spaces, to enhance the green infrastructure of the town.

34. Trees with existing TPOs (Tree Preservation Orders) should be fully protected from loss due to development unless they can be clearly shown to be diseased or a risk to the public.

Annex

Land south of Marksdales, and to the east of the house

(Greenfield site; low-lying... could give access to county fields. Surgery site?)

Land at Burrowfield House

(P.P. for 14; unlikely to be proceeded with; Perhaps 5/6 dwellings

The County Council-owned fields north of Burrowfield, Uphills and the Townsend estate.

(Priority site for sustainable development. Could serve many purposes. This south-facing site offers the opportunity for exciting departure from pastiche architecture – a third renaissance compatible with and sympathetic to nature conservation?)

A site to the south of Linley;

(Plans initiated for one)

A site with P.P. accessed from Darkey Lane;

(Can this be implemented? For 1)

Redevelopment of the Constitutional Club may become a possibility

A small, eastern extension of the industrial estate

Difficult to access. One unit for employment is possible

Land owned by Network Rail, to the south of Batts Field, might find a use, as with other land to the north of Jubilee Park *(both could be used to generate employment)*

South of river and railway is a site abutting Dropping Lane, owned by King's School

(Car-parking?)

A site for three dwellings at the Tanyard, Q.S.

One available site in Uphills

Redevelopment of the Quaperlake Street flats

(Site for old people's dwellings)

Four dwellings have P.P. at Quaperlake House

The redevelopment of the Lilacs, in Coombe St., could produce two dwellings.

A large modern house at the Ropewalk is in prospect.

The telephone exchange site could accommodate two dwellings or a mixed development.

(Most likely is a housing development)

There is scope for more housing along Tolbury Lane and Huish Lane;

Footie and Bicknell's yard and West End mill could be flexibly used.

Sites abutting Trendle Lane and Godminster Lane (above flood level), might be considered.

Sites along the road to Wyke might be proposed

(One field only has possibilities; otherwise traffic and landscape are more important)

Sites at Redlynch and two at Wyke could be considered (for job-creation).

The above is only a small contribution to the demand.

Some of the above sites are clearly only suitable for housing, others only for

commerce. Others might serve for mixed use depending on design.