

PMB and MAG Officer Group

Core Strategy Workshop 4

Yeovil Urban Extension – Discussion Paper - Reappraisal

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1. Introduction

The last Project Management Board/Major Applications Group on 14th June 2011 considered the Discussion Paper on the Yeovil Urban Extension. It resolved to defer a decision on the preferred location for the urban extension until several aspects of the report had been reviewed and represented for consideration. In particular Members wanted to

- review windfall provision to inform how many dwellings could be built within the urban form
- review density and other assumptions relating to the potential urban extension land take
- review reasons for discounting a possible site option identified through the constraints analysis directly to the north of the town about Yeovil Marsh
- review potential siting of the proposed urban extension for the option south and west of Yeovil (a form of initial master planning)

This report seeks to address these requests and additionally present additional requirements to traffic model the developing options to ensure up to date and directly relevant traffic impact information in relation to the final options and ensure that the established requirement of the Highways Agency to explicitly assess the potential impact of proposals on the A303 is provided for and assessed.

2. Potential Land Availability within the Existing Development Area

Table 1 of the original Yeovil Urban Extension discussion paper that presented the potential provision and sources of dwellings within the existing urban framework of the town is set out below in revised form.

The table remains unchanged (apart from a minor adjustment in relation to Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment estimates) until the row presenting the potential windfall estimate. The much lower estimates of potential windfall in the original report are considered inappropriate as they are based on a planning judgement neither a realistic market assessment nor an informed view of likely owner/user preparedness to consider housing reuse. As such they are considered unjustifiable at Examination despite the prospect that in reality they may well come forward for housing development in the period. Given that the Council has asked through the SHLAA process for sites that landowners and developers and others wish to consider for development then there is a clear logic to consider these sites presented through that process and within the urban frame of Yeovil as a key possible source of dwellings and a surrogate for windfall provision.

The Government guidance in Planning Policy statement 3 precludes use of windfall estimates to derive sources of housing provision supply in Core Strategies for the first ten years of the Plan period. There is no constraint however on application of a windfall estimate from past evidence for the post 10 year period. In the case of the emerging Core Strategy this will be from 2022 (ten years beyond anticipated adoption) through to the new end date of 2028. This approach reflects that set out in the Baker Associates report on Housing Requirement for South Somerset and Yeovil and the figure of 20 dw a year reflects their estimation of windfall development within Yeovil. Hence a total of an additional 1,200 dw is derived. The row showing a provision of 61 dwellings due to flats above shops and housing conversions reflects the fact that these sources of provision are not part of the SHLAA assessment and so have not been accounted for in the period to 2022. Taking the information from the

Urban Housing Potential Study of 2006 suggests the figure of (15dw from flats above shops and 48 from annual conversions)

Table 1 Potential Dwelling Provision within Yeovil Urban Framework

| | Achievable Capacity | Theoretical Potential (windfall at 58dw/ha) | Approved | Potential/Allocated |
|---|---------------------|---|------------------|---------------------|
| Completions | 726 | 726 | | |
| Commitments | 2906 | 2906 | | |
| Key sites | | | | |
| KS/BRYM/1 | 97 | 97 | 620 commitments | 717 |
| KS/YEWI/1 | 150 | 150 | *636 commitments | **786 |
| KS/YEWI/2 | | | 830 commitments | 830 |
| Yeovil Urban Village | 196 | 278 | | |
| SHLAA sites | 257 | 724 | | |
| Potential windfall sites 2022 - 2028 | 1200 | 1200 | | |
| Flats above shops and conversion of houses (Urban Capacity Study) | 61 | 61 | | |
| Total | 5593 | 6058 | | |

The difference between the two figures in table 1 relates to a decision on whether the SHLAA sites identified by the Panel of Developers and other parties as suitable, available and viable is the appropriate figure. Alternately the figure of all sites put forward regardless of suitability, availability or deliverability could be used (the higher figure) on a presumption that over the period to 2028 obstacles will be overcome or that other sites may come forward. A higher figure might be more appropriate given a view of events yet to unfold based on past experience but henceforth both options are carried forward so that Members can see how the 500 dw difference plays out.

3. Urban Extension Potential Land Take

The number of dwellings within the urban framework set out above points to a residual requirement for a Greenfield extension(s) of 3,000 dw or 2,500 dw depending on the presumption made in relation to the two options presented. The table for land take in the original Yeovil Urban Extension Discussion Paper is set out below in revised form.

The key decision to make is what is the appropriate density of an urban extension. It is considered that the range of 40 to 50 dw per ha set out in the original document is appropriate reflecting recent experience elsewhere in developing urban extension of

quality design. The figure of land take for employment is slightly less than in the original report reflecting the lower numbers. All other numbers for land take in relation to the original report table reflect the lower requirement and the one density figure at 45 dw per ha.

Table 2 Potential Land Take of a Yeovil Urban extension

| Land type | <i>Land take for 3,000 dw in ha</i> | <i>Land take for 2,500 dw in ha</i> |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Housing at 45 dw ph | 66.6 | 55.5 |
| Employment (B uses) 1 job per economic active house=hold | 16.2 | 13.5 |
| Education (1 sec and 1 primary school) | 7.5 | 7.5 |
| Health Centre | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| Local Centre | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Energy Centre | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Strategic roads (5% of housing/employment built form) | 4.1 | 3.4 |
| Total built form | 96.0 | 81.5 |
| Strategic landscaping (25% of housing/employment built form) | 20.7 | 20.3 |
| Open space (40% of all land types excluding road and structural landscaping) | 36.8 | 31.2 |
| Total Land Take | 153.5 | 133.0 |

The resultant figures are considerably less than the 190 ha of the original report reflecting the sensitivity of the calculations to the original requirement figure and density assumption. The extent to which structural landscaping and open space requirements will duplicate one another will be a matter for subsequent master planning. The figures above are therefore maximum figures and likely to be less in reality.

4. Further consideration of northern option for development

Members expressed concern at the lack of evidence supplied to justify the removal of the Northern Option about Yeovil Marsh (depicted on maps 3 & 4 of the original Discussion Paper) from the site search process. The original justification stated that:

'Given the steep topography of the northern escarpment it would still seem prudent to locate any development at the foot of this hill to avoid the worst of the effects on the landscape. In avoiding the steepest points of the hillside, it could be argued that development is no longer technically contiguous with Yeovil although open space and strategic landscaping could be suitable in these locations. It is considered that the discontinuity to Yeovil, distance and proximity to the A303 make this site

effectively a form of new settlement which is considered inappropriate for all forms of reasons focussed principally on lack of sustainability.'

This re appraisal now seeks to expand on the points raised above and provide a more robust set of evidence as to why a Northern direction of growth is not a feasible option for Yeovil.

Self-containment

The northern option has been drawn well away from the Yeovil Urban area to avoid the steepest sections of the northern escarpment. Because of the degree of separation between this proposed new community and Yeovil the northern option should be considered a new settlement or detached suburb. The objective of achieving sustainable development goes to the very heart of the Planning system but doubt must be cast on the ability of a northern option to be built as a sustainable community. Job provision and opportunity in Yeovil would be some distance away and conversely the high employment land provision within the extension would be a distance from the rest of the Yeovil workforce. Doubt must also be cast on a freestanding extension being able to economically provide essential services, as it will not be supplemented by existing adjacent communities, which create a higher population to help make community facilities viable. If a 2,500 dw extension is the option taken forward then provision of a local community centre is suspect and a health centre would be very unlikely requiring trips into Yeovil for these basis services. It would be difficult to seek a secondary school to be located in the extension as a focus for town students and a focus for a new community (given that the overall growth proposed for Yeovil that would suggest a new school be provided) as it would not fit easily into a holistic town catchment pattern.

Sustainable Transport

The northern options location away from the Yeovil Urban Area mean that distances to existing Yeovil facilities are far greater than any alternative contiguous Urban Extension therefore significantly increase the propensity to drive unless a greater level of self-containment can be met. Somerset County Council as Highways Authority have expressed concern at this option as development in this location would likely attract a specific housing market who would be drawn to the easy access to the A303 further increasing the propensity to travel. Although the Parsons Brinckerhoff Transport Report has modelled options around Yeovil's periphery including to the north (option 2 Combe Lane) it is not thought that this option accurately reflect the emerging northern option. This option as drawn would be dependent on a single access to the A37 as opposed to the modelled transport option which shows three links spread evenly across the north making it difficult to draw any solid conclusions. The Highways Agency have previously expressed concern regarding development that would filter along a single route onto the A303 due to the junction capacity.

Settlement Coalescence

The northern options location away from the Yeovil Urban Area means that development will inevitably impact on the character of the Yeovil Marsh. In avoiding the areas of highest landscape value, development will be unable to avoid abutting Yeovil Marsh, potentially overwhelming this existing settlement.

Renewable energy potential

The possible northern option for development would not be in location that could foster a South Somerset Combined Heat and Energy Scheme that would help enable the extension meet eco town aspirations. The District Council have appointed renewable energy consultants Brooks Devlin and Font Energy to investigate six different site locations and judge their suitability for the proposed Decentralised Energy Scheme. In considering these issues, Font Energy concluded that development to the North of Yeovil was not well placed to accommodate such a scheme.

Conclusion

In reviewing the issues of self-containment, sustainable transport, settlement coalescence and renewable energy potential this report concludes that this northern option performs inadequately against other options and should be removed from investigation. The Council at this stage in the Core Strategy process are seeking to refine down options into deciding which option to actually propose as the strategic direction for growth. It is considered that a directly northern option which was considered and dismissed on sustainability grounds early on in the Core Strategy process has not, despite emerging through the constraints analysis process, presented enough strong supporting planning arguments in its favour to be considered further and indeed the north western option already being assessed against the Core Strategy preferred option is a better option.

5. Initial siting (masterplanning) of Urban Extension

In accord with the Project Management Board and Major Application Group's wishes an attempt has been made to site a potential urban extension to the south and west of Yeovil through a rudimentary master planning exercise. The Conservation Architect and Landscape Architect have undertaken this in support of Spatial Policy officers and for both a 2,500 dw and 3,000 dw extension. The outcome of this work is set out in the three plans attached to this report. Before commenting on their implications the methodology undertaken to produce this work is set out below.

Siting (master planning) Methodology

The sketch master plans indicate an outline disposition of land-uses to demonstrate the proportionate extent of land-take for both a 3000 dwelling, and 2500 dwelling urban extension working to land areas as supplied by the Spatial Policy Manager.

Evolution of the proposals took the following sequence;

Stage 1) identification of potential built development area

objective – to review and reduce the extent of the study area, to thus indicate a potential built development area, by identifying those areas that avoid undue impact upon sensitive and historic sites, and have a greater capacity to accommodate built form.

This initial stage was effectively a sieving process:

- process
- identify sensitive sites (listed buildings; conservation areas; historic parkland & gardens etc)
 - access and plot settings
 - plot flood plain
 - determine settlement buffers

- plot main landscape constraints

of particular note are the buffering considerations for Naish priory, Pavyotts Mill, roman villa site and the Greggs riding school.

Stage 2) refinement of built development area (bda)

objective – to refine the extent of the area best suited to accommodate development form, by identifying sub-areas with high – moderate capacity to accommodate built form.

This stage enabled a zoning of the site, to highlight core areas for high-density development (high capacity) whilst areas of moderate capacity indicated options for either low-intensive development form, or open space uses:

- process
- identify sensitive/prominent areas within bda
 - identify low visual impact areas within bda
 - review relationship with Yeovil's current edge
 - review relationship with open countryside around village settlements
 - plot notional capacity areas

Stage 3) suggested distribution of land uses.

objective – allocate land uses to respond to the foregoing work, to provide a layout that demonstrates a balance of uses, that are appropriately sited; reasonably linked; accessible, and tied into the wider landscape and settlement pattern.

This stage required ongoing testing, re-measuring and adjustment to ensure the required land areas are achieved, without detriment to the coherence of the overall plan.

Description of emerging sites (plans 1 and 2):

The outcome of the siting (master planning) exercise is set out in Plan 1 (3,000 dw) and Plan 2 (2,500 dw) attached to this report. Residential areas (red) are located in areas where there is clear physical and visual correspondence with existing built form, and projection into open land is contained. Hatching denotes those residential areas where higher housing density (45-60 dph) is feasible, whilst the remaining areas are considered more suitable to a housing density of 30-45 dph due to a greater level of site sensitivity. An overall site density of 45 dph given by the Spatial Policy Manager is achieved on the site overall.

School sites are outlined in pink - Sc1 (secondary) is located convenient to the prime street network; assists buffering of the larger employment area from residential areas; whilst its playing fields soften the development's edge in transition to open countryside, whilst Sc2 (primary) is convenient for the existing Wraxhill area and the proposed local centre.

Main employment areas (purple) are indicated close to existing transport routes and on land of suitable gradient. Notional secondary employment areas (brown) are indicated closer to the residential core, and potentially could be further dispersed within the residential areas, depending on their nature. The largest main employment area will accommodate all types of employment use (B1 – B8 of the planning use classes. Those in the residential areas will be of B1 type to be suitable

for locating within residential areas. Several sites are recommended to ensure all can walk to local employment opportunities.

A relatively central location is indicated for the Local Centre and other potential community facilities (orange) that is readily accessible from the current road infrastructure, and also has the potential of serving the residential area south of West Coker Road. This is also located close to the proposed primary school so journeys could be combined.

A notional prime Road and Street pattern (black) is indicated which links through the site, and ties into the wider road network (the A37 and A30). There are currently no direct links into the Wraxhill Road area, yet scope exists for linkage for car; dedicated bus; and cycling use.

Open space and strategic landscape provision (green) is amalgamated to enable both a substantive green urban edge treatment, and quality open space standards within the built environment. The 40% open space provision required by 'eco-town' status offers the opportunity to create a strong green buffer to the urban edge, that would include formal and informal parkland, play space, and sports use, designed to both contain the urban edge, and confirm limits of growth. Green space within the built areas is also arranged to break-up building mass, whilst providing corridors for urban-rural linkage; wildlife; and a choice of cycling and pedestrian routes. A prime Sport and Play facility is indicated central to the Upper Keyford area of the site, whilst the green infrastructure is shaped to enable provision of further informal pitches and play opportunities within walking distance of all residential areas. The formal play provision meets new open space standards and less formal open space standards are also accommodated in the overall "green space".

Implications

The main implication is that an urban extension of either 3,000 or 2,500 dw and associated employment and other land uses can be accommodated within the south and west quadrant of Yeovil (an amalgamation of parts of the draft Core Strategy Preferred Option of East Coker, Keyford and Barwick and the Brympton and Coker option to the south west). The accommodation is possible without impinging on key local landmarks and constraints and without adversely affecting the overall setting of East Coker.

The initial siting exercise can only be used in an indicative way as the Core Strategy is seeking to establish a direction of growth not a strategic allocation however the boundary of built form established as it is against the requirement to meet appropriate buffers for East Coker settlement and specific local land constraints can and should be presented as a strategic boundary to further growth with an appropriate supporting policy and supporting text expanding on the justification. This is considered to be a strategic boundary and can and should be presented with the policy in the next revised version of the Core Strategy. This boundary is set out in the third attached plan.

In the light of the siting work it is considered that the multi choice option put forward in the original Discussion Paper can be dismissed for the various planning reasons sites in that report as the 1 site options are clearly superior.

6. Additional traffic modelling to inform decision on preferred option

Parsons Brinckerhoff Ltd (PB) has previously been tasked as Consultants to Somerset County Council and at South Somerset District Council's request to undertake traffic modeling assessments (SATURN Model Based) to identify a preferred location in transportation terms for an Eco Urban Extension (EUE) in Yeovil. The *Review of Yeovil Eco Urban Extension (February 2011)* and subsequent *Addendum to Review of Yeovil Eco Urban Extension (June 2011)* produced following specific criticisms of the approach accepted by Somerset County Council with the addendum paid for entirely by the County Council considered six potential locations for the Urban Extension. Three different traffic demand scenarios; eco success, partial eco success and eco failure were applied. Previous modelling work and reporting has been undertaken in order to understand the likely transport impacts of the proposed development on the highway network in and around Yeovil to inform Somerset County Council's response to the consultation and South Somerset District Council's deliberations. The outcome of this work has informed Members consideration to date of options.

In discussions with the County Council it is considered that there is a need for further traffic modelling for two specific reasons

- changing option location - of the 3 options for the extension discussed in the Yeovil Urban Extension Discussion Paper the South and West option is an amalgamation of two options in the Core Strategy and the siting (masterplanning) presents a much more specific and different location for development that has not been modelled specifically. Secondly whilst the northwest option is similar to that modelled previously it was modelled with direct access onto the A 3088. It is considered appropriate to model a north west option to help finalise the decision making process on an option that does not access the A3088 but accesses Yeovil through Thorne Lane and the Western Avenue.(the differing potential impact of these two variations on the A3088/A303 junction and on Western Avenue being strong arguments to do this) The split site option put forward in the original Discussion Paper has not been tested for traffic impact in any version.
- Requirement to model in detail impact of options on A3088/A303 Cartgate junction. This was established in the original report by Parsons Brinckerhoff as a requirement to establish comprehensive information on which to choose between options on traffic impact grounds and has been noted as a requirement by the Highways Agency for the soundness of any evidence base.

Somerset County Council have in consultation with the Report Author prepared a brief for the further modelling that is attached as an appendix to this report for confirmation subject to agreement of the requirement for further modelling by the Project Management Board. The cost of the modelling to date has been £4,500 for the District Council, which was approximately half the total cost of the initial modelling (although in practice it turned out to be substantially less than half with the study costing £14,000). The County Council paid in full for the Addendum report in order to complete the necessary evidence base in transport terms. An estimate for the further modelling which will require to be paid by this Council is £29,000, although there is the potential for this to be reduced if the number of additional strategic tests (options and option variations) is minimised.

The 3rd multi site option will require further detailed work to establish how many sites are involved, which sites and what land uses are to go on these sites. Without this a

traffic model cannot be calibrated and run. Should Members wish to continue with the split option then it is suggested a decision in principle is needed as to which sites are to be part of the option and delegation of the details on which land uses go where to the Spatial Policy Manager in order to be able to calibrate the model so that it can be delivered in time to feed into final decision making in September.

It is considered that the re running of the traffic modelling is essential to ensure that the outcome is robust in terms of both the detailed nature of sites modelled in the final analysis and in terms of potential impact on the Cartgate junction. Without this further work the process could be argued as being unsound.

Members are reminded that any decisions at the Project Management Board need to be made subject both to the results of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and final traffic modelling information. Assuming a project start date of 6th July 2011, Parsons Brinckerhoff have indicated that additional strategic testing and sensitivity testing will be finalised by the 15th September 2011 but that initial results will be made available in advance (15th August) to align with the broader core strategy timetable. This will enable the results to feed into the reports being finalised for the final Project Management Board meeting in mid September prior to presentation of the Report on the consultation process and its outcome to the Area Committees in October.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This reappraisal should be read in conjunction with the original Yeovil Urban Extension Discussion Paper presented to the Project Management Board/ Major application Group workshop 3. It is recommended that

1.the potential dwelling provision within the Yeovil urban framework be 6,100 dwellings (rounded) leaving 2,500 dw for an urban extension

Reason: to reflect a more formal post 2022 windfall provision; removal of the provision previously made on basis of professional judgement difficult to substantiate; an allowance for conversions and flats above shops and an ambitious assessment of capacity coming forward from SHLAA sites

2. the requirement of 2,500 dw be built out at a density of 45 dw per ha result in a land take maximum of 133ha

Reason: to recognise experience elsewhere in delivering urban extensions of quality at this density and by enacting high green space eco town requirements to secure such quality

3. the northern option presented and proposed for dismissal in the original Discussion paper not be pursued further

Reason: the site cannot be delivered in a sustainable form and is less appropriate than the Northwestern option that was considered to assess against the option for development to the south and west of Yeovil

4. endorse the initial implications of the siting (master planning) exercise undertaken indicating that the urban extension can be delivered in the south and west in a form that does not compromise the settlement of East Coker or other key landmarks (Naish Priory, Pavyotts Mill, Greggs riding school and site of roman villa). To protect East Coker village and other landmarks from future potential deleterious development a strategic cordon sanitaire as set out in the third plan with this report be adopted with accompanying policy and supporting text to be inserted in the revised Core Strategy. In the light of the siting exercise and in view of the disadvantages of the North western option and multi site options set out in the original Discussion Paper re assert the preference for the strategic location for the Yeovil Urban extension to be to the South and West of Yeovil.

Reason: The siting (master planning) exercise demonstrates that the placing of the urban extension to the South and West of Yeovil can be achieved without adverse impact on East Coker settlement and landmarks, which should be protected by recognition of a cordon sanitaire (as set out in plan form). Having established this the other reasons set out in the original Discussion Paper serve to point to this option being the finally preferred option

5. Members decision in 4 above is subject to review in the light of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the findings of the outstanding traffic modelling still required (both to be addressed in September meeting of the Project Management Board).

Reason: so all relevant information is brought together at the final decision point

6. Members are asked to endorse the further traffic modelling at an estimated cost of up to £29,000 with the funding to come from Housing and Planning Delivery Grant funds remaining. Members are also asked that, in the light of the siting (master planning) exercise to no longer pursue the multi site option because it can be dismissed on the planning grounds sited in the original Discussion Document rather than do detailed sites' review and siting (master planning) work in order to calibrate a traffic model that is not needed because of other good reasons not to pursue the option.

Reason: to provide the necessary full information on traffic on the preferred option and that suggested to the northwest. It is felt inappropriate to undertake traffic modelling for an option in the report that can be dismissed on broader planning reasons