

LDF PMB and MAG Combined Group

Core Strategy Workshop 10 – December 16th 2011 East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone Policy Justification

Report by Spatial Policy Manager

Introduction

This paper forms a review of the 'Yeovil Urban Extension - Built Development Buffer Line' Policy justification presented to Project Management Board (PMB) on the 23rd November 2011. At that meeting PMB agreed not to accept the Officer recommendation but for the paper to be revised to reflect the following changes.

1. That the 'Yeovil Urban Extension – Built Development Buffer Line' between sectors 5 – 7 presented in the report to the PMB on 23rd November (from near Redland farm to A37) be removed. PMB considered these directions for growth were already afforded sufficient protection by existing designations, the flood zone to the south and the Historic Parks & Gardens designation to the east. There was also not considered any need to buffer Barwick due to topographical constraints and the relative merits of the village in relation to new development.
2. That the location of Strategic Landscaping is made more explicit within the mapping (Appendix 2). PMB noted that there was some confusion regarding whether Strategic Landscaping was located within the 'Built Development Buffer Line' or without.
3. That the 'Buffer Line' becomes a designation with an inner and outer edge separating the Yeovil Urban Extension from the Village of East Coker. PMB wanted a 'Buffer Area' to be depicted on the proposals map for clarity purposes.

This paper seeks to address these suggested changes.

Background

Policy YV2: Yeovil Urban Extension in the draft Core Strategy (incorporating preferred options) identifies a strategic location of growth to the South of Yeovil in the vicinity of Keyford, Barwick & East Coker for approximately 3,700 new homes, 23 ha of employment land and community facilities. The LDF Project Management Board should note that the proposed housing provision for the Urban Extension has subsequently been reduced down to 2,500 new dwellings and 13.5ha of employment land to reflect changes in economic projections. This revision was agreed at LDF Project Management Board on the 5th July 2011.

This Southern direction for Yeovil's growth has evolved as a result of a comprehensive site search process including constraints mapping and Sustainability Appraisal. The combined exercises have both confirmed that there is broadly sufficient capacity to accommodate the proposed level of growth in this location but that the landscape and historic environment is particularly sensitive. Equally there is a strong desire from local residents to protect the historic settlement pattern so as to prevent settlement coalescence and retain the distinctive edges and the sense of clear separation of settlements, many of which are in close geographical proximity to Yeovil's edge. This is a clear, common and legitimate planning concern to address.

The Council therefore recognises that although each individual historic asset is afforded its own statutory protection through its individual designation there is considered strong

merit in formalising this boundary on the western side of the Urban Extension as a single entity for simplicity and transparency reasons.

East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone

The purpose of the East Coker and North Coker Buffer Zone is to provide a defined boundary to Yeovil's growth to the south and west of the urban extension to prevent the coalescence of the village of North Coker and part of east Coker and protect the historic environment in this location.

The 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' will act as a definitive boundary to development providing the community with reassurance that key landscape and historic features beyond this edge are protected and will not be compromised. The 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' should not be considered an area of constraint to all development as landscaping / green infrastructure proposals can benefit the natural environment and setting of nearby villages and should be encouraged where appropriate. Similarly all existing dwellings within the 'Buffer Zone' will retain their permitted development rights.

The proposed 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' seeks to perform the role of a strategic gap, which is to:

- Protect the setting and separate identity of these settlements, and to avoid coalescence;
- Retain the existing settlement pattern by maintaining the openness of the land; and
- Retain the physical and psychological benefits of having open land near to where people live.

In this regard the Council are justified in drawing the 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' in some instances wider than the historic or natural environment designation to ensure these objectives are achieved. The proposed 'Buffer Zone' is also considered to have many of the characteristics of a 'Local Green Space'. The Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explains that a Local Green Space designation should only be used:

- Where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to a centre of population or urban area
- Where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance because of its beauty, historic importance, recreational value, tranquility or richness of its wildlife
- Where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land; and
- If the designation does not overlap with Green Belt.

The Draft NPPF clarifies that by designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. As and when the NPPF is adopted the Council should seek to further pursue this designation status for the East Coker and North Coker Buffer Zone.

Historic and Environmental Constraints

The impact of new housing and employment sites on Yeovil's historic periphery is of considerable importance to the Council. Fundamental to this approach is an emphasis on a thorough appraisal of the historic character and sensitivities of Yeovil's peripheral landscapes in the context of its rural-urban fringe position. As a starting point the Yeovil Historic Environmental Assessment (July 2010) and Yeovil Peripheral Landscape Study

(September 2008) provide a robust evidence base that map historic sites, define their setting and record landscape sensitivity.

It is considered that the visibility setting and designation of the relevant listed buildings is crucial information if an 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' is to be established and as such the Council's Conservation Team has undertaken a more detailed site survey to establish their settings. The specific historic features that require protection to the South West of Yeovil are:

- The visibility setting and designation of the North Coker Conservation Area.
- Naish Priory – Grade I
- North Coker House, North Coker – Grade II
- Outbuildings, 5 metres East of North Coker House, North Coker – Grade II
- The End House, Burton Lane (East Side), North Coker – Grade II
- Herne Cottage, Higher Burton (North East side), East Coker – Grade II
- North Coker Cottage – Grade II
- Former Stable building, 10 metres South of Naish Priory, Nash – Grade II
- North Lodge with attached South East boundary wall and gateway, Longlands Lane, North Coker Park – Grade II

The mapping of all these features effectively forms a continuous line of designations that act to form a natural limit to development; a map of historic and environmental constraints is attached.

East Coker and North Coker Buffer Delineation

The 'East Coker and North Coker Buffer Zone' will lie between the proposed edge of the urban extension; North Coker's development area, and the alignment of the Coker brook, to encompass North Coker Hall and Park; Naish Priory, and the setting of those listed buildings and of the North Coker Conservation Area. The buffer's edge is suggested to take the following course;

(Preferred option 1)

1. Commencing at the north end of Burton Lane (at the edge of Coker's development area) to follow the green lane towards Nash Farm, turning east to correspond with the built edge of Yeovil, around the Nash Lane properties to link with Placketts Lane by Greggs riding school.
2. The buffer edge is then drawn within the urban extension, to follow its nominal built edge along its western face, to include open land between the development's built face, and Gunville Lane. This recognises that such land within the urban extension will be necessary to provide landscape mitigation, and to contribute toward the urban extension's dedicated open space. It would run broadly parallel with Gunville Lane, crossing the Yeovil Road to head south across the intervening field to Redlands Farm, aligned on the farm's east face.
3. At Redlands Farm, the buffer edge then runs east and south around the farm complex to end at the Coker brook. The buffer edge then follows the course of the Coker brook which acts as a natural limit to development to the south to meet the North Coker development area, to then follow the edge of the current North Coker Development Area across its northern edge, to rejoin Burton Lane.

(Option 2)

1. Commencing at the north end of Burton Lane (at the edge of Coker's development area) to follow the green lane towards Nash Farm, turning east to correspond with the built edge of Yeovil, around the Nash Lane properties to link with Placketts Lane by Greggs riding school.

2. From Placketts Lane, the buffer edge then follows the hedgerow south (a southward projection of Beaconsfield Road) to join the green lane along the east boundary of the property 'Gunville' before turning briefly east, then south, to follow the field boundary that runs parallel with Gunville Lane, to Foxhole Villas on the Yeovil Road. Crossing the road, the buffer edge would then follow Redlands Lane and its southward projection across the adjoining field to end at the Coker Brook.
3. The buffer edge then follows the course of the Coker brook which acts as a natural limit to development to the south to meet the North Coker development area, to then follow the edge of the current North Coker Development Area across its northern edge, to rejoin Burton Lane.

The above description defines the boundaries of the East Coker and North Coker Buffer and the area in which the proposed policy should be applied.

In terms of the relative merits of the two options;

1. Option 2 deviates from the general area agreed to date (PMB / MAG workshop 4), and considered by members of the area south site visit by virtue of retracting the built edge of the urban extension back towards Yeovil and widening the green buffer area;
 - a. Option 2 reduces the area available for the urban extension by 17.17 ha, which in turn will proportionally reduce the house numbers to 2,346 if building at 45 dph, or 2,156, if building at 40 dph which has been previously recommended and is considered more appropriate
2. Option 2 pre-empts and potentially constrains/compromises the masterplanning process for an area that is to be a high quality 'eco-town model'
3. With Option 2 we would be omitting land that our evidence (landscape impact et al) indicates as having a potential for development and would make us vulnerable to challenge on how we determined the outward boundary for the urban extension.

By virtue of accepting a reduced provision requirement for Yeovil at the last PMB on the 23rd November 2011 the reduced provision achievable at the Urban Extension will not require us to find further provision elsewhere around Yeovil. It will however reduce the prospect of scale and the benefits associated with that in achieving community facilities.

In summary, option 2 is not favoured as it severely compromises the flexibility of masterplan to provide a high quality development, conflicts with the Council's existing evidence base while also compromising a legitimate line of built form that reflects the existing site features within which the indicative Masterplan was prepared. For the above reasons, Option 1 forms the Officer recommendation.

East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone and Associated Policy

The East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone requires a policy and supporting text in the Core Strategy to explain and articulate how it will apply to future development proposals.

In this policy, land within the 'East Coker and North Coker Buffer Zone' is to be understood as land for which new build development and its associated built elements are precluded; and that the emphasis is placed upon the retention of open countryside, and the conservation of historic assets, and natural landscape features.

The limit to a spread of urban development, have been informed by the findings of the Yeovil Historic Environment Assessment (2010), the Yeovil Peripheral landscape study (2008) and the principle of settlement coalescence. Specifically land protected from built development, will include the settings of Naish Priory: Coker House and the North Coker conservation area.

Whilst the limit of the Yeovil urban extension may overlap the 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone', such areas that might lie within the urban extension but within the East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone will be dedicated as green space and strategic landscape areas.

East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone

An 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' is identified to the west of the Yeovil Urban Extension within which development that results in the coalescence of the settlement of East Coker & North Coker and / or adversely affects the setting of historic assets is precluded. Development, not representing built form, within the East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone may be acceptable as long as the coalescence of settlements is not caused as a result nor the setting of historic assets is adversely affected.

Officer Recommendation

That the LDF Project Management Board endorse:-

- (1) The Option 1 'East Coker & North Coker Buffer Zone' and consequent amendment Yeovil's proposals map
- (2) The Policy 'East Coker and North Coker Buffer Zone' and supporting text.
- (3) The Buffer Zone should be protected in its own right as a strategically important allocation of land not to be developed. Upon adoption of the NPPF and confirmation of Local Green Space designation, this designation should also be applied additionally to the Buffer Zone designation.