

Delivering 21st century sustainable transport in Yeovil

Summary report

May 2011



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1. Policy context and brief

- 1.1 South Somerset District Council has set out on a path to deliver an eco-village close to the heart of Yeovil as an exemplar to the larger sustainable urban extensions to take place subsequently. To deliver an eco-village, or subsequently some sustainable urban extensions, a critical element will be to change the approach to the provision of transport and accessibility. The overall aim needs to be one of reducing the need to travel and, in particular, reducing the reliance on the private car for many journeys. Without adopting this fundamental principle the developments cannot be “eco” or “sustainable”. Bringing about such a change is, however, one of the most difficult to deliver. It requires - changes of attitude and behaviour on the part of the whole community. This includes local authority officers and members, local residents and employees, transport operators, and businesses. Many other authorities in the UK and abroad are now seeking to “deliver sustainable transport” as an essential part of a package to combat growing problems of obesity and other health issues, respond to increasing social and economic disparities as fuel and transport costs rise, and reducing carbon and other emissions. Progress in the UK has mainly focused on urban areas but there is an urgent need to address the delivery of sustainable transport in more rural areas and especially medium sized towns serving a rural hinterland such as Yeovil.
- 1.2 South Somerset District Council, together with Somerset County Council and the wider community, has the opportunity to be at the leading edge of delivery of this objective. This summary report¹ highlights the key conclusions relevant to the deliverability of the transport objectives based on the information provided. It addresses the following aspects of the Client brief:
- Eco-town standards as defined in the Eco Towns Supplement to PPS1. The achievement of the eco town standard or better, as appropriate to this type of Brownfield site, is a central objective for the redevelopment of this area. Detailed proposals are required for investing the urban village with the qualities that will make it an exemplar project that will ‘achieve sustainability standards significantly above equivalent levels of development in existing towns’ and ‘encourage and enable residents to live within managed environmental limits and in a community that is resilient to climate change’.
 - Accessibility and connectivity – Good places are well connected. Establish opportunities for maximising connections and facilitating desire lines between the site and its surrounding areas. Establish movement frameworks for foot, cycle vehicles and public transport

¹ See Delivering 21st century sustainable transport in Yeovil – technical report, for more detail

and cater for the needs of refuse and service vehicles within the site. Show how streets, squares and open spaces and the pattern of movement for pedestrians and vehicles will be set out. Identify appropriate connections between the urban village site and the existing infrastructure, the town centre, the Country Park and urban extensions.

- Public Realm – The creation of quality, attractive, usable and legible public spaces is essential.
- Infrastructure – Set out the basis for the provision of utilities (waste, water & electricity) and other elements of infrastructure including transport, open space and education contributions and a new public square at the junction of the extended Mill Street.

1.3 The South Somerset Draft LDF Core Strategy 2010 re-establishes the principle of developing an eco-village (the Site) and sets out the requirement that 50% of all trips should be by non car modes as a target based on the objectives in the Eco-Towns Supplement to PPS1. It builds on the Yeovil UDF (2005) which identified the Site as a strategic location for change. Part of the task of this project is to assess how far the objective of *50% of all trips should be by non-car means* is deliverable for this Site and what actions are required to do so. Although the PPS1 and other related documents are to be rescinded by the Government this is on the basis those authorities, and the communities they serve, should establish their own objectives and targets for the places they want to create. Subject to the outcome of the public consultation on the Core Strategy, South Somerset has already established this. The approach has been strongly reinforced through the work of the LSP, on the Vision for Yeovil and the actions by South Somerset Together. The authority's Sustainable Community Strategy includes a series of strategic priorities that also reinforce the desire to deliver sustainable development i.e.:

- SP 13: support the development of integrated, low carbon infrastructure
- SP 22: all new development applies sustainable construction principals
- SP 28: year on year reduction in the district carbon footprint

The report by UWE on behalf of the LSP "Active and low carbon travel" published in August 2010 underlines what the Partnership seeks to achieve.

1.4 At both a local and national level there is therefore a strong policy foundation for positive action and a clear sense of direction. To achieve the vision will not be easy but can be done. It will depend on leadership, partnership and collaboration, taking risks and overcoming barriers. However, the longer term benefits of successful outcomes would be substantial for Yeovil.

2 Drivers for change

2.1 There are a considerable number of drivers for change other than the policy context highlighted above. What is clear from the work already undertaken by the District Council, County Council, Town Council, LSP and other key stakeholders, is there is dissatisfaction with the current transport situation and a desire for radical change – hence the aspiration for Yeovil to grow and to create sustainable neighbourhoods. Yeovil already faces a number of problems and without radical action these are likely to increase in both the short and longer term, for a range of reasons, unless tackled. As of today, the town has:

- Growing levels of car dependency for many journeys
- Inadequate public transport provision
- Concerns about the health implications of limited walking and cycling levels
- Air quality problems in the centre
- Social and economic problems resulting from the costs and availability of non car based transport

BUT a vision to grow substantially as a place and to change the way it is perceived economically and as a place to live

2.2 With the projected scale of growth in both homes and jobs these current problems will increase substantially unless tackled,. Action therefore needs to be taken prior to the growth beginning. It will take time for any action to produce results so time is of the essence if the situation is to be improved before deteriorating further under the pressure of growth. The public acceptability of the planned growth is also likely to demand improvements now. If this Site is to be the exemplar for further later developments it is essential that it establishes the benchmark. But the type of change needed cannot be achieved by looking at the Site in isolation. Rather it will be necessary for the actions to encompass the whole of Yeovil as a town otherwise the type and scale of change required will not occur. There is a need to:

- Reduce car dependence especially for short journeys and provide choice
- Reduce emissions
- Promote more active life styles
- Reduce the need to travel
- Reduce the requirements for expensive capital infrastructure
- Improve accessibility, mobility and reduce travel costs

2.3 There is now both evidence and considerable experience emerging of the substantial impact that an integrated and comprehensive approach to sustainable transport provision can achieve. Evidence from the Sustainable Towns project², for example, demonstrates the scale of change in people's behaviour and their travel patterns that can be achieved. The Transport Act 2008 has provided the opportunity to build wider Quality Bus Partnerships and establish very different arrangements for providing public transport. The first example in the country of the new form of partnership is evidenced by the innovative work being undertaken in St Alban's and the impact it has had. There are also other imperatives and drivers which provide real opportunities now to consider further changes. These include the considerably reduced level of capital funding available for highway schemes in the foreseeable future combined with their public unacceptability, the rapidly rising costs of fuel, the likelihood that without urgent action even the current limited bus network will be reduced or disappear, and the requirement to reduce carbon emissions locally and nationally to achieve the 2050 carbon reduction embodied in the Climate change Act 2008.

3 Facts and key perceptions

- 3.1 To assess the deliverability of the objectives identified and any actions needed it is essential to understand the current position and perceptions. Yeovil and the Site have many of the characteristics that will support the achievement of the requirements established. In terms of the town these are:
- The facilities required for everyday life are available within the town e.g. schools, health services, employment, shops, public transport hubs i.e. two stations and a bus station
 - Yeovil acts as a centre for the surrounding villages in terms of jobs and services
 - Half of those living in the town already work in Yeovil
 - Half of those living and working in Yeovil already travel to work without using a car
 - Walking and cycling journey to work trips are already important for those living and working in Yeovil
 - People living in the central wards of Yeovil are considerably less likely to use a car to travel to work – only 57% travelled by car in 2001
 - Employment locations, as well as schools, leisure and retail facilities, which create the majority of journeys, are relatively well located in places that facilitates access by non car means

² Delivering Sustainable Low Carbon Travel: An Essential Guide for Local Authorities DfT 2009

- 66% of Yeovil's working residents travelled under 5 km to work and 20% of the journeys to work in Yeovil are under 2 km
- Of the sites recently granted planning permission with low levels of parking, which are now occupied, approximately 50 % do not own a car and 60% did not experience parking problems near where they live; just over 40% of respondents said that they did not need to have a car because they lived in the town centre
- The Site has good access to the current cycle network

There are, however, key factors working in the opposite direction, e.g.:

- High levels of car ownership in the surrounding area
- The majority of journeys into Yeovil from outside the town are by car

- 3.2 In relation to the Site itself, it could not be much closer to the town centre and therefore to many of the facilities that people need to access. From the evidence of the census and subsequent surveys, both in Yeovil and elsewhere, there is an increased tendency for people living in these locations either not own a car or not to use their car as much. Such locations tend to generate more walking and cycling activity and more public transport use dependant on the occupiers and the level of provision. The Site is within 15 minutes walk of key facilities – shops, primary schools, health facilities, and leisure facilities to name but a few. The nature of the propensity to undertake journeys without a car will depend partly on the occupiers of the Site and the way it is designed. Making walking and cycling or access to public transport pleasant and easy, so people can get to where they need to go, will result in the majority not using a car, whether young, of working age or retired. It should therefore be possible to achieve a target of 50% of all journeys being by non-car modes by residents of the Site.
- 3.3 One of the key aspects of the Site which needs resolution at the earliest stage is the use of large parts of it for parking, both short and long stay. The Site currently provides 86 short stay, 128 short/medium and 203³ long stay parking spaces across five car parks including Peter street, South street, Park street, Box Factory and Stars Lane. Between them they produce an income of £419,100 (Y/E March 2010). The future nature, scale and location of all parking within the town centre needs resolution before any part of the site can be considered for release. It will be essential that the totality of public and private parking is considered, both on and off street, in terms of the current and future situation, to ensure that the provision and management of all parking is consistent with the viability and vitality of the town as well as allowing accessibility by all modes⁴. From the analysis undertaken on the information provided it would appear that short term parking

³ Mainly used for medium stay according to Car Parking Manager; figures based on information provided 2010

⁴ An analysis of car parking requirements is underway (May 2011) which should provide the basis of a comprehensive parking strategy

provision can be catered for by improvements in the management and operation of the current public and private parking provision without the parking spaces in the Site. This is not the case in respect of longer term or commuter spaces where there is likely to be a shortfall of about 200 spaces if Stars Lane car park is removed in a worst case scenario. It is likely that these would need to be replaced, subject to further information about current users⁵, but they could be located further from the town centre and still be capable of fulfilling current and future needs. A suitable site would need to be identified. There is also a need to assess and resolve the requirement for provision of parking for use during the evenings. In terms of income generation, improved operation and a different charging regime could potentially replace the income lost through the development of the Site. This whole subject area needs further analysis and better information prior to any final decisions being made on development. . Whatever the outcome from the current survey, it is clear from the information available that it will not be possible to combine on the Site both replacement public car parking, traditional car parking standards e.g. 1:1 or more, maximise the density of development, and create a residential environment that is designed around people rather than cars to encourage walking and cycling. The only potential way this may be possible is by providing parking underground but the access to this would be likely to conflict with the more pedestrian friendly design objective and create issues in terms of development viability.

- 3.4 The road network near the Site is currently designed primarily to meet the needs of the car. It creates a physiological barrier to movement across the area between the county park, the new development by the side of it and the town centre. This perception has also been raised to the north of the town centre in relation to residential developments and employment areas on this side of the town centre bypass. For walking to be attractive across the town, even given the current short journeys, these perceptions will need to change. From the information provided, congestion on the road network is limited, comparatively speaking, other than at some peak times. This could increase substantially with the growth proposed unless a robust approach to demand management is taken. Major investment in substantial new road infrastructure is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future given financial constraints so providing both existing and new residents, and workers, with other ways to travel will benefit all. The capacity of the road network also needs consideration in relation to parking levels: the higher the provision of parking spaces in developments and in car parks, the greater impact on the road network in terms of its capacity and efficiency. Providing for people to avoid car use when unnecessary can minimise this problem and provide space for those who do need it. High car ownership is a characteristic of this area but as evident elsewhere in the UK and abroad there can be substantial differences between ownership and use.

⁵ Car parking survey underway May 2011 which should clarify this position

3.5 Provision of public transport is limited and the perception of the availability and quality is poor. This is likely to worsen in the current financial climate. Although there are 2 stations in or near Yeovil, and many bus services, earlier work by UWE has highlighted the poor attitude towards them. The bus network as currently provided does not provide connections between key trip generators and attractors and many routes are subsidised. However, there are 5 routes that are self sustaining which provide a basis from which to develop. There is also limited connectivity between the modes within the town both in terms of access by a variety of modes and timetabling of services. As St Alban's Quality Bus Partnership has demonstrated these perceptions can change rapidly given a coherent and comprehensive approach to securing change.

4 Deliverability of the objectives

4.1 The wider objectives of reducing the need to travel, to use the car less and provide a choice in how to travel are clearly deliverable in Yeovil. It should be possible for the Site to achieve 50% of all trips by non car modes given the considerations above. To achieve this target, however, will require adopting a lower parking standard i.e. 0.5:1 or a maximum of 0.75:1; ensuring the design of the development is focused on pedestrian movement; and implementing the full range of sustainable transport measures not only on Site but across the town. It will be essential that the approach taken is not seen as “antic car” but is correctly interpreted as providing choice and supporting people to change their behaviour in ways that they currently may wish to but for a variety of reasons cannot conveniently be achieved.

4.2 As highlighted, delivery of the authority and LSP aims for this Site and the town will require action not only in respect of the Site itself but before, or at least concurrently, an integrated approach to responding to people's travel needs, their attitudes, perceptions and options across all Yeovil. This will require action in partnership by many parties: local authority members and officers, operators, businesses, services and residents. Securing action by a wide range of people in a coherent integrated way will be difficult and demand a different way of operating. Yeovil, and the relevant authorities, already have a well established partnership arrangement in South Somerset Together and have the agreed Vision for Yeovil together with its delivery plans. The community has already been party to discussions on these issues and the policy framework nationally and locally supports the approach proposed. The groundwork has been done: the focus should now be on increasing understanding, ownership and delivery of the solutions; overcoming the barriers to the radical change in approach needed and securing action – *moving from talking to walking the walk!*

4.3 The deliverability of the action plan for sustainable transport will depend on the following:

- Commitment from all key parties and setting up the appropriate delivery arrangements
- Leadership
- Programme and project management as well as governance arrangements including securing an agreed action plan
- Collaborative action
- Innovation and creativity
- Risk taking

4.4 At the Site level, the design of buildings, spaces and access arrangements will need to reduce the focus on the presence of the car but highlight walking, cycling and use of public transport. Parking standards should not be as high as the norm in the authority. As previously provided elsewhere in the town centre, where standards as low as 0.3:1 spaces per dwelling have been applied, parking standards should average out at approximately 0.5:1 spaces per dwelling across the Site. The survey evidence locally, as well as national information, reinforces that this is acceptable and deliverable on town centre sites. The use of the car will be less due to the location and this is clearly evident in practice in Yeovil as highlighted in paragraph 3.1. In addition, the marketing can ensure that occupiers choose to live on the Site knowing that it is designed to provide high quality access without the need for a car. This will suit many – a choice not currently available – e.g. those on restricted incomes including families or retired, those looking for a different life style or those who work nearby. Design of the buildings on the Site to attract these types of occupiers will be important. Personalised travel marketing and a travel plan should be required and the Site marketed as a step change in approach – different and better. It should look radically different and be high quality. Provision should be made for working from home in terms of accommodation and internet access, easy access provided to cycles, and parking separated from the residential unit as well as for other uses.

4.5 From the experience in the UK and elsewhere, alongside better provision and marketing, controlling parking has been found to be critical. Road space and parking, rather like water, are currently not perceived as having a value in the same way as for example electricity. Their availability has a cost and this needs to be more explicit and valued so that real choices can be made. The purchase of parking spaces should be separated from the cost of accommodation to reinforce the real cost of parking. In order to ensure that this overall approach happens in practice it will be necessary to restrict the number of parking spaces available across the Site, provide for some flexibility for different units and not be allocate them specifically to individual dwellings but provide shared spaces. Consideration to sharing spaces between residential and other uses is also appropriate. Charging for parking separately to any rent or purchase of units should be implemented and on an annual basis to support further changes in lifestyle. Accessible provision for cycles should be made either in each unit or, to allow more than one cycle per unit, it could be in nearby cycle storage facilities.

- 4.6 Above the Site level, to achieve the change in behaviour that is being sought, it will be necessary to consider alterations to provide greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists across Yeovil. This may make some journeys by car a little less convenient but it would not have serious consequences for levels of congestion which are not significant in this part of the town. Also at this level, a comprehensive campaign is needed to convince people to think about how they travel, make them aware of the current options, at the same time as improving the walking and cycling permeability and the provision of a quality public transport network. Developing the new networks will require partnership working across operators, trip generators and authorities. A new comprehensive parking strategy is required which complements the desire to encourage walking, cycling and use of public transport whilst enhancing the viability and vitality of the town. Delivery of the aims of the Site necessitates relocation of the current long/medium term parking provision. Short term parking should not need to be replaced on Site.
- 4.7 Availability of resources for transport, both capital and revenue, will be critical to deliverability and it will be essential to exploit all opportunities and think beyond the Site. In terms of funding it will be essential to combine resources from all relevant public sectors and from the private sector. The use of a partnership approach across all sectors will provide the opportunity to pool resources and think creatively about all potential funding streams. All the evidence indicates that this approach is more likely to be successful in the current restricted financial climate to any public sector bids. Utilising the “place based” budgeting approach in relation to the public sector could allow access to health, education, employment and local government funds for both revenue and capital. There is also the potential of the Regional Funding Allocations, the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, the Integrated Transport and Highways Maintenance Block as well as other public funding routes as the current public funding arrangements become clearer. A clear distinction needs to be made as to what are costs attributable to the Site development costs and what are required to deliver the wider aims of sustainable transport in Yeovil. To ensure the delivery of an “exemplar” will necessitate flexibility in approach and not a standard planning application and section 106 arrangements.
- 4.8 Opportunities for providing the range of funding required also exist through better development and use of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the development of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan as part of the LDF, via other section 106 agreements seeking travel plans and use of e.g. the New Homes Bonus. The maximum use of an effective travel planning process could also resource – the provision of expertise, improved facilities and services, better information collection and evaluation, and increase understanding and ownership of the whole approach. From activities elsewhere in the country public transport operators are increasingly interested in participating in enhancing the whole experience and will support improvements when part of a wider strategy and partnership. They, together with local employers and

services, could also assist in providing resources to implement the action plan. It will be for the partnership body established as one of the initial actions suggested to develop the action plan, relevant funding sources, phasing and priorities. This body could benefit from an independent chairman.

5. Recommendations and actions

- 5.1 Many people and organisations claim to be committed to delivering development which is more sustainable in transport terms. However, when the implications of this are then set out, for example in terms of parking standards, there is frequently resistance to making the changes necessary. The reality is that if sustainable access is to be achieved development cannot be delivered in the same formats that have been promoted in the last 20-30 years. The attitudes of those building and purchasing new homes need to change as does that of those who will be negotiating schemes with developers and making recommendations through the planning process. Our strong recommendation is that Yeovil is extremely well placed to initiate this process and demonstrate the benefits of it in a rural area undergoing substantial change. By doing so it will be more effectively equipping the town for the future than if the status quo is maintained. Unless transport is tackled, which is the key to sustainable development, an exemplar eco-village will not be realised.
- 5.2 Making changes will require strong consistent political leadership. It needs those who will be prepared to make decisions that may be unpopular in the short term because they are convinced that they will deliver long term benefits. If the urban village is to be an exemplar it will need to think big, to think beyond the Site itself and work to seek the support of all sections of the community. It will involve doing things differently and being prepared to take risks. This will feel particularly difficult in the present climate of scarce resources and a weak housing market. It will therefore be very important to set out clear goals and objectives and ensure consistency in moving towards delivery.
- 5.3 The list below highlights some key actions and recommendations derived from above. More detail is available in the full technical report. They assume that the authorities and communities wish to promote a sustainable village where no more than 50% of all journeys are by car as this is clearly achievable given the evaluation of the information provided. The focus is therefore on how. The actions identified relate to the different authorities and agencies relevant as well as looking at the different spatial levels. Achieving sustainable transport cannot happen at the Site level alone. The different actions need to be taken consistently and coherently, and cover the full range, at the following spatial levels:
- Yeovil and its catchment area
 - Yeovil town

- Yeovil town centre
- The Site
- The individual property unit or home

5.4 If - sustainable transport is to be realised in Yeovil; become “the norm” where practical thereby facilitating more effective car movement where it is necessary; this Site is to be the “exemplar”; it will be important to:

- Fully understand the existing car parking situation and develop an effective car parking strategy to secure the viability of the town centre whilst removing or minimising public car parking on Site so as to allow the Site to focus on a quality pedestrian environment and relocating long/medium term parking so it is more distant from the town centre at a site to be identified by the Council
- Establish new car parking standards for the Site that average 0.5:1 or maximum 0.75:1 and are consistent with the needs of a town centre site and current demand as evidenced by the survey of recent new developments within the town and the census
- Separate car parking from residential and other units both physically and in pricing policy to highlight the cost of parking as well as minimising its impact visually on the Site to increase the psychological pressure in favour of walking and cycling and create the quality residential environment
- Establish a new style Quality Bus Partnership independently chaired to include the relevant local authorities, operators, major employers, key academic/educational facilities, hospital/health providers and other key stakeholders to lead and drive delivery of the action plan as well as source funding
- Through a Quality Bus Partnership look to improve the provision and perception of the bus network including frequency, routing, costs, viability, information, ticketing etc.
- Research the opportunities for funding for the development and delivery of sustainable transport through innovation and exploiting a combination of opportunities as highlighted
- Design out the need for a car by providing effective alternatives which are easily reached and used across Yeovil town simultaneously with specific action on the Site
- Establish an effective car sharing scheme, car club and travel planning process across Yeovil in the context of the Quality Bus Partnership
- Ensure that the Site has substantial distinctiveness and is not the norm in terms of its layout and design
- Maintain the principles around sustainable transport throughout the design, negotiation and marketing highlighting the strengths and benefits

- Redesign the local highway network and junctions so that the perception is changed for being primarily for use by cars moving at speed to one where people walking or cycling feel comfortable
- Design all homes and other uses to promote the use of cycles or walking rather than the car by:
 - Providing cycle facilities for all potential users in the home or close by which are secure
 - Provide real time information via broadband facilities
 - Instigate personalised travel planning as part of marketing
 - Provide for home deliveries in a secure area
 - Provide for the opportunity to charge electric vehicles on site
- Consider the phasing of development in relation to the resolution of the wider approach to parking and the ability to improve the perception of sustainable transport modes
- Link the marketing of the Sites to the launch of a sustainable transport campaign in Yeovil