

South Somerset District Council: Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Independent Examination, May 2013

South Somerset District Council Hearing Statement

Issue 6

Yeovil Sustainable Urban Extension

April 2013

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Question 6.1

Is the vision for growth and change in this area appropriate and justified, including in relation to national guidance and local needs, and in terms of economic, social and environmental impact? Have matters of highway safety, biodiversity, flood risk, noise, light pollution and topography/landscape been properly addressed?

- 1.1 The need for an urban extension to Yeovil was proposed in the early stages of preparing the local plan [CD2], reflecting the intentions of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which stated that 5,000 dwellings should be built in an area of search around the edge of the town [CD6b, policy HMA13]. Following the intention to revoke RSSs, the draft Core Strategy (incorporating preferred options) reduced the scale of the urban extension to 3,700 dwellings [CD1] as a more appropriate figure to meet the development needs of Yeovil and the wider area in an environmentally acceptable manner. In considering consultation responses, and updated evidence, the urban extension was reduced to 2,500 dwellings and 8 ha of 'B use' employment land, with the intention that 1,565 dwellings and 5 ha of employment land would be delivered in the local plan period [CD3b, M89, and M95-96].
- 1.2 The justification for the overall scale of growth at Yeovil is set out in the local plan strategy [CD3a, chapter 4]. Alternative approaches for the distribution of growth at Yeovil compared to elsewhere in the District were considered, but an approach to direct 50% of the growth at Yeovil and 50% elsewhere in the district is seen as the most sustainable as this has the most economic benefits (including the retention of around a 50% jobs share at Yeovil reflecting its past performance), enables the best potential to access services and facilities, and helps to meet housing need where it is greatest [CD16a, para 5.5.2 – 5.5.7].
- 1.3 Although the majority of new development at Yeovil is proposed in the existing urban area, a sustainable urban extension (SUE) is required in order to deliver the economic led approach set out in the strategy [CD3a, chapter 4] and to meet objectively assessed development needs with acceptable impacts, consistent with the national presumption in favour of sustainable development.¹ The scale of the SUE has been informed by an assessment which indicates a theoretical potential capacity of 5,876 dwellings in the urban framework, necessitating 1,565 dwellings to be delivered in the sustainable urban extension [CD3b, M85-86, M89, M95] to be consistent with the strategy of around 50% of development at Yeovil, and 50% elsewhere in the District. The requirement for employment land ('B uses') has been calculated based upon the intention to provide one job opportunity per dwelling in the SUE [CD11, para 4.12]. The intention for a total of 2,500 dwellings and 8 ha of 'B use' employment land in the SUE is to create a more sustainable community, making local access to a range of jobs, shops, community facilities/services, and sustainable travel links more deliverable [CD16a, para 6.3.2].

¹ National Planning Policy Framework, para 14.

- 1.4 At the preferred options stage [CD1], it was intended that the urban extension would follow 'eco town' principles. However, following a refocus of national guidance that encourages Garden Cities principles (NPPF, para 52), the Council consider it more appropriate to aspire to these [CD117, PMB14, 'NPPF report and recommendations'].
- 1.5 This strategy is consistent with national policy which states that the supply of new homes can sometimes be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as extensions to towns that follow the principles of Garden Cities (NPPF, para 52). Other relevant aspects of the NPPF that support the strategy of an urban extension to Yeovil include promoting mixed-use developments (para 17, 37-38); and ensuring developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised (para 34).
- 1.6 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has been carried out alongside preparation of the local plan, and has considered various options for the scale and location of the SUE. The constraints mapping exercise that informed the SA is explained in the local plan [CD3, para 5.26 – 5.32] and supporting evidence [CD115, Project Management Board workshops 3 and 4]. The SA process has highlighted the likely economic, social and environmental effects of the proposal and reasonable alternatives, and recommended mitigation measures as a consequence [CD16a, c – appendix 5, d, and e]. Initially, options for locating the SUE were considered all around the edge of Yeovil. Options to the north were not preferred mainly due to adverse highways and landscape impact, greater distance to the town centre, and a lack of evidence that the land was deliverable, leaving three options to the east, south (preferred option), and south west of the town for public consultation [CD1; CD16a, para 5.4.15 – 18].
- 1.7 The reduction in the scale of the SUE meant that options were again considered for potential locations in preparing the Proposed Submission Local Plan [CD16a, para 5.5.10 – 5.5.14]. An option to the north west was reconsidered given the large number of comments advocating this area in public consultation [CD1], but it did not perform well against most of the SA objectives. The main disadvantages were its greater distance to the town centre giving less potential to access the range of jobs, shops and facilities there, and less potential for sustainable travel; and some significant environmental concerns including adverse landscape impact [CD68o – u], impact on the setting of Montacute House Historic Park and Garden and Thorne Coffin Conservation Area, a Scheduled Ancient Monument [CD104], and European Protected Species [CD65 and 72]. A 'multi-site' option was also considered, incorporating four parcels of land to the north west, north east, east and south/south west of Yeovil. The smaller scale of development proposed at each of these options means less potential to support the range of community facilities and services, and sustainable travel links required to create a sustainable community, with also less potential for decentralised and low carbon energy generation. The cumulative landscape effects are also likely to be more adverse.
- 1.8 The location that performed best in the SA is to the south and west of Yeovil [CD16a, para 6.3.2; CD16c, Appendix 5]. There is robust evidence to indicate that the scale of

growth in the plan period can be delivered in the proposed location [Responses to the CD3; CD45; CD30 para 8.31-32; CD3b, M76]. Its relatively close proximity to the town centre offers good access to a range of existing services, facilities and employment, with potential to travel more sustainably including access to Yeovil Junction train station. This location is also near to the biggest employer in the town – AgustaWestland. In terms of environmental effects, the impact on the peripheral landscape of Yeovil is less to the south and west [CD68 o – u]; the historic environment has capacity for development, although there are designated heritage assets that will require conserving and enhancing through mitigation [CD16a, figure 6.2; CD16c – Appendix 5, page 24], such as listed buildings, North Coker Conservation Area, Barwick Historic Park and Garden, and a Roman Villa [CD104]. Although there may be negative impacts on biodiversity, mitigation measures can make these acceptable [CD16a, figure 6.2]. The introduction of a buffer zone between the SUE and East and North Coker is one measure to protect historic assets in this area, set out in Policy YV3 [CD3]. The loss of best and most versatile agricultural land cannot be mitigated, but this is present all around the edge of Yeovil making it impossible to avoid in meeting the development needs of the area [CD135a – g].

- 1.9 The Council’s response to the ‘Initial issues of concern to the Inspector’ also contain detail on selecting the location of the SUE (para 4.1, 5.1, 5.2).
- 1.10 As highlighted above, the ‘economies of scale’ associated with 2,500 dwellings should ensure a range of services and facilities can be provided ‘on site’, and offers greater support for sustainable travel links (discussed further in the response to question 6.5). The development of one larger urban extension would also increase the potential for a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of social and community infrastructure, along with employment and retail provision within the development itself. There should be social benefits through the provision of additional housing (including helping to meet affordable housing need), improving health and well being, and reducing social exclusion. Development in general will support the economy, including the specific provision of ‘B use’ employment land within the SUE. Some negative effects upon the environment have been identified as highlighted above, and mitigation recommended as necessary [CD16a, para 6.3.2, figure 6.2; CD16, Appendix 5]. These mitigation measures include the provision of a buffer zone [CD3, para 5.50 – 53 and Policy YV3], and the commitment for the development to achieve the highest viable sustainability objectives [CD3b, para 5.40 – 47 and Policy YV2].
- 1.11 The specific matters set out in the second part of question 6.1 are answered in the following paragraphs.

Highway safety

- 1.12 Extensive work on traffic modelling has been carried out to consider the potential impact on the highway network of development at various options around Yeovil [CD94 – 99a]. Although the modelling indicates limited difference between the location options in terms of traffic impact, the preferred location to the south and west offers the best potential for sustainable travel. This view is supported by the Highways Agency [CD99a]. These studies included an initial assessment of the highway infrastructure requirements that would be required to deliver the SUE, along with cost estimates.

This information is developed in the Report on Infrastructure Planning, which outlines the junction improvements necessary to ensure the SUE can be accessed in a safe manner [CD36, Appendix 1].

- 1.13 The emerging Yeovil Transport Strategy Review 2 will consider the impact upon highway safety and delivering the necessary improvements to the transport infrastructure in delivering the SUE in further detail. This work will be 'formalised' and developed in preparation of the forthcoming Yeovil SUE Area Action Plan (AAP). In addition, the impact upon highways safety will be a key consideration through the development management process (in line with Policy TA5 in CD3).

Biodiversity

- 1.14 The SA considers impact on biodiversity for the various options for the SUE [CD16a – e]. There are no statutory biodiversity designations in the direction of growth for the SUE. Evidence indicates that European Protected Species are present around the town, with the location of the SUE being home to species of bats [CD65; CD72]. Appropriate mitigation measures are explained in the local plan [CD3, para 5.47] and included in Policy YV2 and YV3, reflecting the findings of the Habitats Regulations Assessment [CD8 and 8a]. Evidence also suggests that a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species (Sandy Stilt Puffball) is present in the vicinity of Red House [CD103, para 5.42] – the AAP will ensure appropriate mitigation to minimise this impact [CD103, page 68 – 69]. The intention for 40% green space and a net gain in local biodiversity at the SUE [CD3, para 5.40 and 5.43] will also help to ensure that biodiversity is conserved and enhanced, consistent with national policy (NPPF, para 109, 114, 117).

Flood risk

- 1.15 The direction of growth for the SUE is located entirely within Flood Zone 1, so has a low risk of fluvial flooding [CD70a and b²]. The SA report does highlight surface water flooding as a potential impact of new development [CD16a, figure 6.2 and c – Appendix 7] and recommends mitigation as a result through the incorporation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS), which has been included in Policy EQ1. The forthcoming AAP will include further detail on dealing with surface water drainage, as will any future planning application. This approach is consistent with national policy (NPPF, para 100).

Noise

- 1.16 The potential for increased noise pollution as a result of new development is highlighted in the SA report as a negative effect [CD16c – Appendix 5]. The encouragement of high quality design should mitigate this effect [CD16a, figure 6.2], which was included in Policy EQ2 [CD3]. In addition, Policy EQ7 seeks to limit noise development [CD3]. Further detail on noise issues will be considered in preparing the AAP, and any subsequent planning application, in line with the NPPF (para 123).

Light pollution

² Latest extent of flood zones also checked on Environment Agency website (on 26.03.13) which still identified the area as Flood Zone 1.

- 1.17 The potential for increased light pollution is identified in the SA report as a negative effect that requires mitigation [CD16c – Appendix 5]. High quality design is included in Policy EQ2, and Policy EQ7 seeks to limit light pollution to acceptable levels [CD3]. The impact of light pollution will also be considered in further detail when preparing the AAP and subsequent planning applications. This approach accords with national guidance (NPPF, para 125).

Topography/landscape

- 1.18 Evidence indicates that much of the peripheral landscape of Yeovil is sensitive to additional built development [CD68o – u]. The location of the SUE is within the largest area of moderate-high landscape capacity to accommodate built development, so is considered to be generally acceptable in terms of landscape impact. The incorporation of high quality design standards (Policy EQ2), reducing housing densities in more sensitive locations, and the retention of valuable landscape features within the enhanced open space provision (40% of the area of the SUE should be open space), are all highlighted as measures to reduce the impact upon the landscape [CD16a, figure 6.2]. The forthcoming AAP will contain further detail on addressing these matters, such as the potential to meaningfully accommodate valuable landscape features including historic hedge lines and specimen trees. The Council consider that this is consistent with national guidance (NPPF, para 109).
- 1.19 Topography was also considered in preparing the evidence on landscape impact, and areas of steep gradient were identified and avoided in locating new development [CD68s].

Question 6.2

Have the implications of this level of growth for local infrastructure, services and facilities been assessed and appropriately taken into account? Is it clear what infrastructure will be provided and to what timetable?

- 2.1 Evidence on infrastructure requirements at Yeovil was prepared early on in the plan preparation process, but this was based upon the scale of 5,000 dwellings that was being proposed at the time [CD105]. The ‘Report on Infrastructure Planning in South Somerset’ [CD36] considers the infrastructure needs of the SUE based upon the PSSSLP [CD3] provision of 2,500 dwellings and 11.5 ha of ‘B use’ employment land in the direction of growth to the south and west of Yeovil. This study used information from the various service providers in order to come to an informed view [CD36, para 2.7 – 9]. Overall, there are no overriding infrastructure issues that would prevent growth of the SUE coming forward, but the cost of providing the required infrastructure will be an issue, reflected in the proposal for a lower Community Infrastructure Levy at the SUE [CD117, PMB14, ‘IDP report’].
- 2.2 Using this evidence, the PSSSLP contains an overview of the infrastructure requirements for the SUE [CD3, para 5.38 – 40]. The infrastructure that is indicated as being ‘critical’ to enable development to proceed primarily concerns highways improvements, specifically relating to roundabouts and a new junction with the A30. Alterations to overhead British Telecom lines are also a ‘critical’ requirement.

- 2.3 Some infrastructure is seen as ‘necessary’ in order to deliver the SUE; this relates to education (two primary schools and a secondary school), a new 4 court sports hall, a household waste recycling facility, and open space.
- 2.4 Policy YV2 [CD3b, M95] contains the infrastructure requirements relating to education and health. Policy YV6 indicates the measures that will be necessary to deliver sustainable travel, and local plan makes clear that further detail on highways improvements will be included in the forthcoming AAP [CD3, para 5.39].
- 2.5 In addition, the Councils’ strategic approach to ensure appropriate infrastructure delivery is explained in the PSSSLP, supported by Policy SS6 [CD3, para 4.105 – 119 and CD3b M78, M79].
- 2.6 An indication of the timetable for providing the infrastructure identified above is included in the Infrastructure Planning report [CD36, Appendix 1]. This outlines that a new junction with the A30 and alterations to the BT overhead line would be required 2016 – 2020. Improvements to Keyford roundabout and the creation of Placket Lane roundabout should be built 2021 – 2025. A new primary school, household waste recycling facility and open space provision should be delivered 2016 – 2020; with the other primary school, the secondary school, new sports hall, and additional open space being phased for delivery 2021 – 2025. As previously explained, the forthcoming AAP will contain further detail on the infrastructure requirements and the timetable. The Infrastructure Plan is also subject to regular review so that the requirements, costs and funding are as accurate as possible [CD36, para 2.9].

Question 6.3

Why is a neighbourhood centre (as referred to in paragraph 8.111) not in Policy YV2 as a requirement?

- 3.1 The Council consider that, for completeness and consistency, the neighbourhood centre required as part of the Yeovil SUE (referred to in paragraph 8.111) should be added to Policy YV2. Therefore, a **minor modification** should be made to the plan, as set out in the table below.

Ref	Page	Policy / para no.	Minor Modification
M6.1	76	Policy YV2	Under the bullet point ‘a health centre’, insert another bullet point stating ‘a neighbourhood centre’.

Question 6.4

What will be the status of the buffer zone? Would it be sufficient to meet the stated objective of ‘protecting’ East and North Coker? Will heritage assets be afforded appropriate protection?

- 4.1 The supporting text to Policy YV3 outlines that the buffer zone should be designated as Local Green Space, consistent with the NPPF paras 76 – 78 [CD3, para 5.52]. The

Council are recommending a **minor modification** to clarify this ‘status’ by amending the title of Policy YV3 as set out in the following table.

Ref	Page	Policy / para no.	Minor Modification
M6.2	78	Policy YV3	Amend the title to state ‘East Coker and North Coker Buffer Zone – Local Green Space designation’

- 4.2 The Council consider that the buffer zone is sufficient to protect East and North Coker. The local plan clearly precludes development that results in coalescence with East and North Coker and/or adversely affects historic assets [CD3, para 5.50 – 53, Policy YV2 and inset map 15]. Therefore, the buffer zone provides a defined boundary to Yeovil’s growth to the south and west of the urban extension, ensuring that key landscape and historic features beyond this edge are not compromised.
- 4.3 The delineation of the buffer zone used historic environment and landscape evidence that identifies historic sites, outlines their settings, and considers landscape sensitivity [CD104; CD68o – u]. A more detailed survey was subsequently undertaken to establish the settings of some of the key heritage assets in the vicinity in further detail, thus establishing the area of the buffer zone [CD118, PMB10 report ‘Urban extension and built development limit’].
- 4.4 The provision of a buffer zone for this area will be a strategic gap that should:
- protect the setting and separate identity of East and North Coker, and avoid coalescence with Yeovil;
 - retain the existing settlement pattern by maintaining the openness of land; and
 - retain the physical and psychological benefits of having open land near to where people live.
- 4.5 In order to achieve these objectives, in some instances the Council are justified in drawing the buffer zone wider than protection of the historic or natural environment designations [CD118, PMB10 report ‘Urban extension and built development limit’].
- 4.6 The Council considers that the East and North Coker buffer zone explained above will provide for the protection of the setting of heritage assets within it. As regards other heritage assets in the vicinity of the proposed SUE, the Council will, as part of the AAP, make detailed assessments of their settings to ensure appropriate protection will be built into master plan. The Council considers that heritage assets will therefore be afforded appropriate protection. Evidence on the value of the historic environment [CD104] has been key in determining the location of the SUE as outlined in the SA report [CD16a para 5.4.18, 5.5.10 – 18, 6.3.2, and CD16c – Appendix 5 and 7]. The importance of the historic environment in and around the location of the SUE was considered by PMB [CD115, PMB 3 and 4], and is highlighted in the local plan [CD3b, M92 and M94], and further detail will be contained in the forthcoming AAP.
- 4.7 The impact of development upon the Roman Villa north of Dunnock’s Lane, a Scheduled Monument, in the direction of growth for the SUE has been raised as a particular issue (by English Heritage in their response to the Proposed Submission Local Plan [CD3]). It was always the intention of the Council to avoid development on

this site [CD115, PMB4 'Re-appraisal' report section 5 and 'sketch master plan'], using historic environment evidence as the starting point in defining its setting [CD104], ahead of the more detailed work to come in preparing the AAP. Nonetheless, the Council has sought to resolve objections relating to the impact upon heritage assets through minor modifications to the local plan which highlight their importance [CD3b, M92 and M94].

- 4.8 In addition, specialist advice from the Council's Conservation team and the Senior Historic Environment Officer at Somerset County Council has been sought in order to address concerns relating to the Roman Villa north of Dunnock's Lane and potential archaeology in the direction of growth. This has further considered the heritage assets and how the Council's approach relates to the NPPF and English Heritage guidance, including a statement on archaeological issues in the area [CD13, Appendix 2b]. This additional work has vindicated the Council's approach in addressing this issue, clarifying that the evidence is consistent with the NPPF and English Heritage guidance, and outlining that the setting issues concerning the Roman Villa have been adequately highlighted for the direction of growth, with the commitment for further, more detailed assessment as part of the AAP [CD13, Appendix 2b, page 92 – 96]. The chronology of this issue and the Council's approach is summarised in CD13, section 3.5.
- 4.9 In addition, any future proposals will be considered against Policy EQ3 [CD3a] and the NPPF through the development management process, which also ensure appropriate protection will be given to heritage assets.

Question 6.5

How can the Council be confident that the sustainable travel options would be secured, and secured in a timely fashion so that the needs of the first residents would be met?

- 5.1 The SUE provides an opportunity to plan in and deliver sustainable transport infrastructure prior to the commencement of development and the onset of occupancy. The ability to include designed in footpaths, cycleways, bus priority measures and well thought out parking provision at the master planning stage will be more cost effective than attempting to construct as an 'ad-on afterthought'. It proactively enables and encourages a choice of mode from the start rather than attempts to change established travel habits. That in turn has the potential to significantly reduce costs of otherwise needed 'traditional' highway infrastructure.
- 5.2 Many of the services/facilities will be within the SUE itself and easily accessible on foot or by bicycle. There are also opportunities to create walking and cycling links to the town centre and Yeovil Country Park. The proximity of the national and regional cycle network (N26 and R30) gives further opportunities for longer journeys by bicycle including leisure and interchange with rail. A traffic free environment in the immediate vicinity and good car park design will mean an increased likelihood of walking or cycling as a first choice; yet enable use of the car where no alternative exists.

- 5.3 The Yeovil Sustainable Urban Extension AAP is set to commence now be adopted by 2015 [CD27]. This will enable more detailed policies to be produced prior to the anticipated start on the extension in 2017/18.
- 5.4 The bus will also be a valuable tool in attaining the target of at least 50% of travel by sustainable means. In many instances this means the provision of a new bespoke bus service right from the start. However the SUE has the benefit of being able to link with existing bus routes that have capacity, paradoxically because some of the existing buses are not fully utilised. This means that the routes can be easily enhanced through short working (i.e. a vehicle that's currently on layover [not used] during an infrequent service can be used to undertake 'short journeys' between the SUE and the town centre), redirected (especially for the longer through journeys) or additional journeys (notably short workings earlier or later in the day using an existing vehicle becomes viable). This has the advantage of being easier to deliver from the outset at less cost, as the bus routes are already in place. Simultaneously this system will deliver improvements and connections to the existing networks, which in turn will provide the overall critical mass to produce a commercially viable service.
- 5.5 SSDC is the joint lead partner with the Yarlinton Housing Group on a transport focus group. This focus group has been set up through the strategic partnership 'South Somerset Together' (SST) to deliver improved transport and accessibility throughout the district. One aspect of this work is to provide a framework for a bus network in Yeovil and this will include options for the SUE. The latter will include opportunities for enhancing existing bus routes, with the opportunities for linking with travel plan initiatives with key stakeholders both new and existing within the town. The draft framework is due to be presented to the SST Assembly in September 2013.
- 5.6 The Council is currently working with the County Council on the Yeovil Transport Strategy Review 2. This will consider the feasibility of park & bus, which differs from conventional Park & Ride (P&R) in that it utilises existing bus routes serving a car park (usually smaller than standalone P&R) rather than the conventional bespoke bus. A full cost benefit analysis will need to be carried out, but the increased patronage delivered by Park & Bus could enhance the frequency of the bus route and deliver benefits in terms of modal shift for the town as a whole.
- 5.7 All of the above means that the information and guidance should be in place prior to detailed consents for development and sustainable travel matters, either inherent within the designing of the extension or to be applied (such as support for bus routes). The expectation is that more positive economic circumstances will be prevalent when dealing with applications for development in consideration of which to seek and secure Section 106 agreements on bus support. These negotiations cannot be gainsaid at this time. In the event of this Council adopting a CIL as currently sought that has identified sustainable travel to be brought forward through CIL contributions then the Local Development Scheme [CD27] clearly demonstrates that the levy should be in place prior to commencement of development of the extension.