

**Response to Examination in Public Panel Note 2 – Programming of
Development Areas
Area of Search L - North East Taunton**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to address those issues of concern detailed in the Examination in Public Panel Note 2, the proposed sustainable strategic urban extension to Taunton at Monkton Heathfield, as proposed in the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (Draft RSS), Policy SR21.
- 1.2 Paragraph 3 of Panel Note 2 poses a number of questions. Summarised below is our officer response to each of these questions.

(a) The expected start date.

It is anticipated that planning permission will be in place by the end of 2012, with commencement on site and first completions expected by the end of 2014 and mid 2015 respectively (para's 4.3 and 4.4).

(b) The broad development programme in term of dwellings per annum and any related assumptions on the number of developers expected to be involved.

In the first year of development the number of completions is likely to be 125, with this figure increasing year on year peaking at 400 dwellings per annum between 2021/2022 and 2024/2025, declining to 300 dwellings in the final year of the plan period (Table 4.1 para 4.5).

(c) the implications of any strategic infrastructure components for the programme.

Feasibility studies indicate that the implementation costs of the proposed sustainable urban extension, including all necessary infrastructure are achievable and deliverable (section 5).

- 1.3 Since publication of the Draft RSS, Taunton acquired 'Growth Point' status from the Department for Communities and Local Government. This provides further impetus and potential funding sources to investigate, address and overcome potential constraints to the growth of Taunton, including the urban extension. See New Growth Point Proposal for Taunton (August 2006).
- 1.4 The Panel's attention is also drawn to the fact that Taunton Vision, including the Urban Extension Study (UES), was presented with an RTP1 award for spatial plans in 2005. Furthermore, the technical component of the Taunton Joint Study Area (JSA) work was completed by Baker Associates (Taunton Sub Area Study – TSAS), and governed through a partner working-group led by Somerset County Council (SCC) and supported by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and Sedgemoor District Council. In May 2005 Oxford Brookes, on behalf of the South West Regional Assembly, conducted a detailed independent assessment of all of the JSA submissions. Overall the Taunton JSA work was classified as "a good technical appraisal of economic and housing scenarios". These pieces of work underpin the First Detailed

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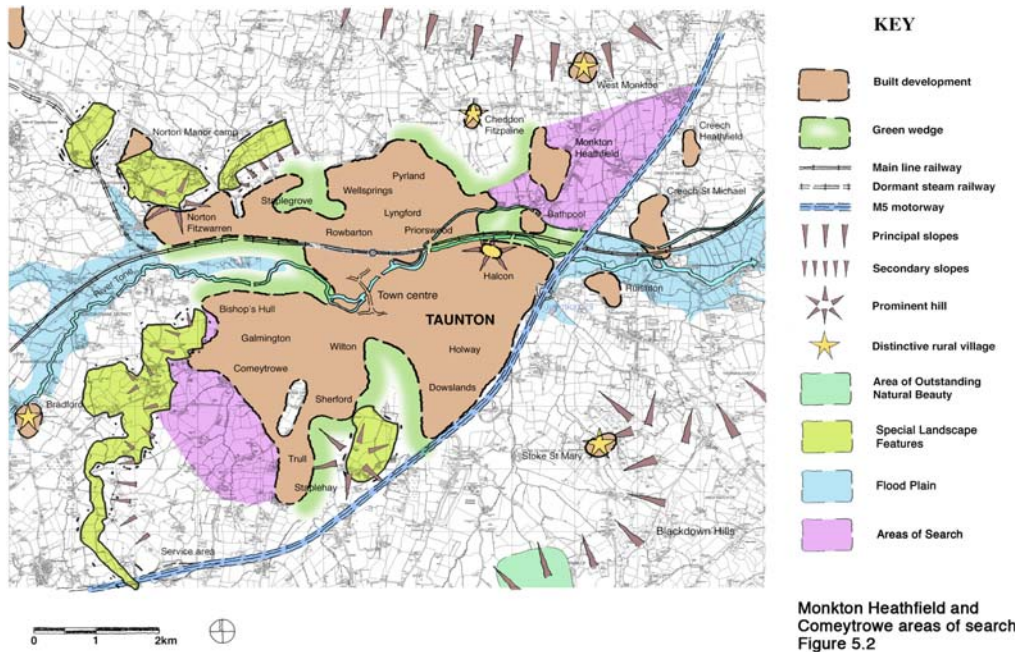
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Proposals recommending the proposed sustainable urban extension at Monkton Heathfield, and indicate the competence and technical robustness with which it was proposed.

2 Location of proposed sustainable urban extension

- 2.1 The site of the proposed sustainable urban extension is located to the northeast of the established built up area of Taunton, between Monkton Heathfield and the M5 motorway. The area of search is approximately four kilometres from the town centre of Taunton and has a site area of approximately 250 hectares, exclusive of the existing mixed-use allocation of 50 hectares in the adopted Taunton Deane Borough Council Local Plan. The location of the urban extension is depicted on the diagram below as the 'Area of Search' northeast of Taunton, extracted from the UES.

Diagram 2.1



Source: Taunton Urban Extension Study (November, 2004)

- 2.2 Both the UES and TSAS compared the Monkton Heathfield site to other potential sites for urban extensions on a number of indicators. Both studies concluded that Monkton Heathfield was the most sustainable.

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3 Scale and mix of the proposed urban extension

3.1 It is envisaged the urban extension at Monkton Heathfield will comprise the following (UES and TSAS):

- 3000-4000 dwellings¹;
- schools and community facilities;
- a local centre; and
- approximately 10-12 hectares of B1, B2 and B8 employment land.²

3.2 The sustainable strategic urban extension contained in Policy SR21 of the Draft RSS was first proposed in the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Alteration 2004. Accordingly, the broad location, form and scale of a sustainable urban extension at Monkton Heathfield as a development proposal has been in circulation for a number of years, and in that time garnering wide ranging support and acceptance.

3.3 In the context of progressing the RSS we have had ongoing discussions between the local and strategic authorities and the prospective developers of the urban extension have led to general agreement between all parties on the mix and scale of the urban extension.

4 Key lead in times and phasing of development

4.1 In the early years of the Draft RSS plan period the focus of development activity at Taunton will be in the existing urban area. This development will reflect the priorities outlined in Regional Planning Guidance 10, the adopted Local Plan and the Taunton Vision, which is soon to be incorporated into TDBC's Town Centre Area Action Plan (now in draft form). Development partners are already being pursued for the Firepool town centre site by the Project Taunton team, with OJEU contract notice (21254) in November 2006.

4.2 As town centre development progresses the existing adopted Local Plan allocation at Monkton Heathfield will come on stream (Application number 48/2005/072). Permission for this application is expected in mid-2007, with the first completions anticipated by the end of 2008, and the entire scheme completed by 2011/2012.

¹ The TSAS originally recommended that 4000 dwellings be developed at Monkton Heathfield, however subsequent studies have reduced the developable area in light of landscape and open space considerations. Nevertheless, the original 4000 dwellings were predicated on a site density of 40 dwellings per hectare, and the theoretical shortfall created by the reduced developable area could be overcome with increased site densities.

² The UES provided for 20-25 hectares of employment land, while the TSAS provided for 8 hectares, however the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) consider 12 hectares to be the minimum for a strategic employment site.

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- 4.3 Development of the sustainable strategic urban extension proposed by the Draft RSS will be guided to a large extent by the timescales associated with policy and plan preparation. These plans include not only adoption of the Draft RSS, but also TDBC’s Urban Extension Area Action Plan and Supplementary Planning Document pertaining to design and implementation of the sustainable urban extension (TDBC’s Local Development Scheme, 2006). On the basis of these considerations planning permission is expected to be in place by the end of 2012, with the anticipation that much of the pre-application and background work will be undertaken prior to formal adoption of the relevant Development Plan Documents (based on advice from the development consortium).
- 4.4 A period of 2 years between the granting of outline planning permission and commencement on site is considered adequate. Accordingly, development is expected to commence by the end of 2014, with the first completions six months later in mid 2015.

Table 4.1

	2006-11	2011-16	2016-21	2021-26	2026+
Brownfield/Urban Capacity Sites/Windfalls	2570	1460	520	205	
Existing Local Plan Allocated Urban Extension	800	100			
Draft RSS – Urban Extension		125	1475	1900	

Source: Development consortium and Taunton Deane Borough Council figures.

- 4.5 The build out rate per annum for the sustainable strategic urban extension is likely to be low at the beginning – about 125 dwellings in the first year, and there will be some overlap between the declining build out rate of the existing Local Plan allocation. Build out rates are likely to accelerate year on year to peak at approximately 400 dwellings per annum between 2021/2022 and 2024/2025, declining to approximately 300 dwellings in the final year of the plan period (development consortium figures).

5 Infrastructure provision

- 5.1 The sustainable urban extension is not dependent on the approval of any major schemes bids, or the establishment of a new motorway junction on the M5 (since the case has not been made to date).
- 5.2 Investigations undertaken as part of the Taunton Sub Area Study concluded that the relationship between overall implementation costs of the urban extension and overall land value is a favourable one, and the proposals deliverable (para 19.43, TSAS). These investigations

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considered the costs associated with transport infrastructure, education provision, open space, a community centre and library.

- 5.3 Investigation of the transport implications of the sustainable urban extension was aided by the Taunton Sub-Regional Transport (TSRT) model, which found the proposed urban extension to be sustainable and deliverable in transport terms. As part of an ongoing program of strategy development Somerset County Council have commissioned, with the support of Taunton Deane Borough Council, Sedgemoor District Council and the Highways Agency, the Taunton Transport Strategy Review 2 (TTSR2). Part of the work program for TTSR2 will see the upgrading of the TSRT model to 2006, providing the opportunity for further testing of the sustainable urban extension's transport implications.
- 5.4 Recent discussions with the Environment Agency have indicated that water supply is not a constraint for growth in the sub-area, including the proposed sustainable urban extension (para's 16.17, TSAS, and 5.15 New Growth Points Proposal).
- 5.5 There will however be a requirement for improvements to sewage infrastructure (para 6.29, UES), and there is an expectation that these improvements will be financed through developer contributions (para 5.10, Growth Points Proposal). Improvements to sewage infrastructure are also likely to have wider benefits, as many of the sewage systems in this area are already at capacity (UES).
- 5.6 Flooding does not present an obstacle to the development of a sustainable urban extension at Monkton Heathfield, as land liable to flooding was excluded from consideration. However, potential off-site impacts from surface water drainage do need to be mitigated (para 16.16, UES), and a strategic approach towards sustainable urban drainage will be required at the design stage. Nevertheless, this is a detailed design issue, and poses no threat to the deliverability of the sustainable urban extension at a strategic level.

6 HA objection to Draft RSS proposals

- 6.1 Following public consultation of the Draft RSS in summer 2006, the Highways Agency (HA) lodged an objection to the proposed Taunton and Bridgwater Spatial Strategy. It is understood that their key concern relates to an increase in use of the M5 between Bridgwater and Taunton for short journeys as a consequence of the development envisaged in the Taunton and Bridgwater Spatial Strategy (policies SR20 and SR21 of the Draft RSS).
- 6.2 One element of the TTSR2 program seeks to address the concerns of the HA and overturn their objection. Expectations are high in this regard, particularly in consideration of the urban extension's location adjacent to a major public transport link between Taunton and

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Bridgwater (the A38), and the intention to locate a Park and Ride facility within the urban extension. It is expected that the TTSR2 will illustrate the Monkton Heathfield urban extension is sustainable and deliverable in transport terms.

- 6.3 A road safety strategy for the A38 corridor is also soon to be commissioned, which should lead to further improvements along this alternative route to the M5.

7 Natural England

- 7.1 Hestercombe House is located to the northwest of the urban extension site and hosts an important colony of Lesser Horseshoe Bats. This has led to the designation of Hestercombe House as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In accordance with Regulation 48 of the 'Habitat Regulations' 1994, an Appropriate Assessment is required where development will directly or indirectly affect the integrity of an SAC.

- 7.2 Somerset County Council's Environment Officer has been consulted on the potential impact of the strategic urban extension on the Hestercombe House SAC. The extension may have some effect on the SAC, however Somerset County Council's Environment Officer is of the opinion that with the requisite appropriate mitigation works, including the establishment of a woodland buffer to the north of any development north of the A3259, negative effects will be eliminated and may in fact benefit Lesser Horseshoe Bats' habitat in the area. Nonetheless, the Appropriate Assessment will have to prove that such measures would work. Liaison with Natural England on this point is ongoing, and early indications are favourable.

8 Implications of the Office of National Statistics (ONS) revised household projections

- 8.1 The DCLG distribution, based on past trends, of the revised ONS household projections indicate an increase of 3,300 and 850 households per annum in Somerset as a whole and TDBC respectively, on top of that considered by the Draft RSS. Somerset County Council along with the Somerset district councils have commissioned Baker Associates to assess the implications of these projections.
- 8.2 Whilst the proposed sustainable urban extension was predicated on earlier figures, the increased level of demand for housing demonstrated by the ONS figures reinforces the need for housing development at Taunton.

9 Summary

- 9.1 Through strong partnership working between SCC, TDBC, SWRDA and the Environment Agency as part of the Taunton Vision, a

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significant amount of technical work has been undertaken to identify the appropriate location for a sustainable strategic urban extension to Taunton, culminating in the identification of land at Monkton Heathfield. Whilst further detailed work by each of the partners is presently underway on various town centre sites, reflecting a long term commitment by the partners to implement the vision, the broad location of Monkton Heathfield was found to be the most sustainable relative to alternative sites. Furthermore, feasibility studies have indicated that the sustainable urban extension is achievable in terms of all key infrastructure requirements and market deliverability.