EXECUTIVE

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE TO BE HELD IN THE PRINCIPAL COMMITTEE ROOM,THE DEANE HOUSE, BELVEDERE ROAD, TAUNTON ON TUESDAY 22ND MARCH 2005 AT 18:15.

AGENDA

1. Apologies

2. Minutes

3. Public Question Time

4. To consider the Council's response to the Taunton Sub Area Strategy (report to follow)

G P DYKE
Member Services Manager

The Deane House
Belvedere Road
TAUNTON
Somerset

TA1 1HE

14 March 2005

Executive Members:-

Councillor Bishop (Planning and Transportation)
Councillor Mrs Bradley (Leisure, Arts and Culture)
Councillor Cavill (Economic Development, Property and Tourism)
Councillor Edwards (Environmental Policy and Services)
Councillor Garner (Housing Services)
Councillor Hall (Corporate Resources)
Councillor Leighton (Communications)
Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris (Community Leadership)
Councillor Williams - Leader of the Council

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL ARE ESPECIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND THIS MEETING

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion. Lift access to the main committee room on the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is a time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions

An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, please contact Greg Dyke on:

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Website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk (Council, Executive, Review Board & Review Panel Agenda, Reports and Minutes are available on the Website)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2

Executive - **9 March 2005**

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Cavill, Edwards, Garner, Hall and Leighton

Officers: Ms J Wishlade (Strategic Director - Operations), Ms S Adam (Head of Resources), Mr P Carter (Financial Services Manager), Mr T Noall (Head of Development), Mr R Willoughby-Foster (Forward Plan Manager), Mr R Mitchinson (Senior Policy Officer) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Bowrah, Henley, Phillips, Watson and Wedderkopp.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

16. Apologies

Councillors Hall and Mrs Lewin Harris.

17. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 9 February 2005 were taken as read and were signed.

18. Public Question Time

Alan Debenham asked how much revenue had been lost whilst certain parking meters in the town centre were out of action.

Councillor Williams explained that the machines were out of action because the appropriate spares were not readily available. The amount of revenue lost was not known, but he would provide Mr Debenham with a written answer.

19. Review of Public Conveniences

Submitted report, previously circulated, regarding the implementation of the outcome of the Review of Public Conveniences.

Executive Councillor Mark Edwards had previously endorsed the recommendation of the Health and Leisure Review Panel to carry out a series of investments and disinvestments in public conveniences. The principle behind the decision was to use funds raised from the sale of some sites to improve the quality of the remaining facilities and generate ongoing revenue savings.

Details were submitted of the report considered by Health and Leisure Review Panel, however, a number of changes had subsequently occurred that now needed to be considered.

There was consensus amongst the North Taunton Councillors that fitting out the shell of a public convenience, built as part of the Surestart project was not part of the solution. Research was therefore being carried out on the provision of a community facility within existing premises in the vicinity of Priorswood Place. The forecasted costs of developing the Vivary Hub had increased and for supervised toilets to be provided this project required further financial assistance.

Tenders had been received for the rebuilding of North Street Car Park toilets in Wellington. These were however, in excess of the current budget allocation.

The revised potential financial costs and benefits of the Review, after taking these factors into account, were considered.

RESOLVED that the changes that had occurred since submission of the report to the Health and Leisure Review Panel be noted and Council be recommended that the implementation plan and necessary changes to the approved capital programme be agreed.

20. Treasury Management and Investments Strategy for 2005/2006

Reported that the Council was required to consider an annual Treasury Management Strategy. The key points of the 2005/06 Strategy were as follows:

- This year's documentation incorporated the annual investment strategy.
- External borrowing remained relatively static at £19.5m, with average costs reducing due to refinancing. The possibility existed for further reductions in 2005/06.
- Return on investments up from 3.85% last year, to 4.21% currently. Expectation of small reduction on 2005/2006 or no change.
- Uncertainty over precise timing of peak and then decline in short term interest rates, but consensus was downward expectation.
- Borrowing/refinancing and investment strategy based on seeking out favourable (temporary) movements in interest rates due to market reaction to economic data.
- Summaries on Prudential Indicators, economic data and approach to investments submitted with the report.

The Council had customarily considered an annual Treasury Strategy Statement under the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management. The 2003 Prudential Code for Capital Finance in local authorities had introduced new requirements for the manner in which capital spending plans were to be considered and approved, and in conjunction with this, the development of an integrated Treasury Management Strategy.

The Prudential Code required the Council to set a number of Prudential Indicators over the forthcoming three-year period. The suggested strategy for 2005/06 in respect of the following aspects of the Treasury Management function was based upon the Treasury Officer's views on interest rates, supplemented with market forecasts provided by the Council's Treasury Advisor. The strategy covered the current treasury position, prospects for interest rates, the borrowing strategy, the investment strategy and the Prudential Indicators.

RESOLVED that the proposed Treasury Management Strategy, as outlined in the report, be agreed.

21. Internal Audit Partnership

Reported that this Council, together with South Somerset District Council and Mendip District Council, had proposed the creation of a partnership to operate their Internal Audit Services. This would bring significant benefits to all partners in terms of quality, sustainability and resources. The partnership was to be formed using the Joint Committee model outlined in Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. Provided that all necessary steps could be concluded on time it was proposed that Taunton Deane and South Somerset would establish an Internal Audit Partnership with effect from 1 April 2005. It was further proposed that Mendip join the partnership on the expiration of their current contract with Capita on 1 July 2005.

Detailed consideration was given to the principles of how the partnership would operate. The report had also been considered by the Council's Corporate Governance Committee who had recommended that the proposals be agreed.

There were clear advantages to entering into an Internal Audit Partnership including quality, sustainability and resource issues.

RESOLVED that:

1. An Internal Audit Partnership (initially between Taunton Deane Borough Council, South Somerset District Council, and Mendip District Council) be established under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.

2. The Internal Audit Partnership commence on 4 April 2005 between Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council, with Mendip District Council joining on 1 July 2005.

3. The initial contribution of £20,000 be found from existing approved budgets and be repaid over five years.

4. The final agreement of the Partnership Business Plan, host authority arrangements, legal agreement and working practices be delegated to the Head of Resources (subject to the Partnership demonstrating a break-even position within 5 years).

5. Two Councillors be appointed as representatives of this Council on the Partnership Oversight Board. The Members Services Manager to liaise with the Group Leaders on the most appropriate method of filling these posts.

6. Council be recommended that the arrangements outlined above be confirmed.

22. ODPM Consultation Paper on Three-Year Revenue and Capital Settlements

Reported that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had issued a consultation paper which set out proposals for three-year revenue and capital settlements. The system was due for implementation from 2006/07 with a view to announcing local authority finance settlements for 2006/07 and 2007/08 during 2005. The report outlined the proposals, and set out proposed responses to the consultation paper.

RESOLVED that the proposals in the consultation paper be noted and the Head of Resources respond in accordance with the details contained in the report on behalf of the Council.

23. The Local Development Framework - The Local Development Scheme

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) was a public statement of the Local Planning Authority's three year programme for the intended preparation and delivery of its Local Development Documents (LDDs) which formed part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF itself would provide a folder of interrelated documents setting out overall spatial planning strategy for the Borough to period up until 2021.

The Local Planning Authority was required to submit its LDS to the Secretary of State before 28 March 2005. Details of the Council's LDS were submitted.

RESOLVED that the Local Development Scheme be approved and formally submitted to the Secretary of State (represented by The Government Office for the South West) for consideration and approval.

24. Taunton Sub Area Strategy

Following a special meeting of the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel held on 3 March 2005 it was reported that it was felt that the future regional strategy for the Taunton area should be based on:

- The continued role of Taunton within the region as a PUA;

- The level of growth should be based on the employment prospects, not housing, and the economic potential is considered to be closer to the RPG10 level rather than RPG10 + 50%;

- The roles of Bridgwater and Wellington are complementary to Taunton. The three towns are closely spaced in the M5 corridor with a combined population of 110,000, acting as a mini-conurbation;

- It is essential that Bridgwater and Wellington maintain their role and function, with balanced growth of homes and jobs, maximising the opportunities for regeneration, development to fund necessary infrastructure and economic diversification;

- Both Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe are suitable locations for urban extensions in the longer term;

- Although Monkton Heathfield is the most sustainable and would build on the proposals in the local plan, it can be argued that the differences between it and Comeytrowe are marginal;

- Smaller developments around the town will be necessary to deliver Outer Distributor Roads and radical improvements to the public transport services will be required to reduce the growth in congestion, and

- Development to the east of the Motorway would be divorced from the town and should be resisted.

Submitted letter from Wellington Town Council asking that specific reference be made in the Strategy to the Longforth farm proposals. This would then give clear and unequivocal baking to the scheme.

Also reported that a special meeting of the Executive had been arranged to take place on 22 March 2005 to discuss further the Taunton Sub Area Strategy document before it was presented to the Regional Assembly.

RESOLVED that the bullet points set out above be agreed subject to the addition of the following:

"That Taunton Deane Borough Council supports a mixed use scheme for Longforth Farm, Wellington to include the relief road for Wellington."

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm.)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE, SPECIAL MEETING – 22 MARCH 2005

REPORT OF THE FORWARD PLAN MANAGER

TAUNTON SUB AREA STUDY
(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Bishop)

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider the Council's response to the Taunton Sub Area Study (TSAS) final report.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 The future regional strategy for the Taunton area should sustainable and based on:

- The continued role of Taunton within the region as a PUA or other equivalent designation as a regional centre in accordance with the Vision for Taunton;
- To implement in full the regeneration proposals of the UDF to expand the town centre to embrace the river Tone, providing new commercial, retail and cultural opportunities and supporting new educational and health facilities;
- The level of growth should be based on the employment prospects, with housing provision in balance, reflecting a continuation of the RPG10 level of growth to maintain the existing high level of self-containment;
- Higher growth scenarios are not desirable, achievable or sustainable;
- The roles of Bridgwater and Wellington are complementary to Taunton;
- It is essential that Bridgwater and Wellington maintain their role and function, with balanced growth of homes and jobs, maximising the opportunities for regeneration, development to fund necessary infrastructure and economic diversification – in this regard a mixed use scheme at Longforth Farm including a northern relief road would support the complementary role of Wellington;
- Both Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe are suitable locations for urban extensions in the longer term;
- To integrate enhanced transport infrastructure and services with development in order to achieve and maintain high accessibility, high quality public transport and greater reliance on walking and cycling;
- Smaller developments around the edge of the town will be sustainable and help deliver outer distributor roads and meet local needs, and
- Development to the east of the Motorway would be divorced from the town and should be resisted.

3.0 **BACKGROUND**

3.1 In September 2001 the Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10) designated Taunton as a Principal Urban Area (PUA), one of eleven in the region.

3.2 In response to its PUA status the Vision for Taunton was produced in October 2002 in partnership by TDBC, SCC and the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA). In March 2003 the partners then commissioned consultants to carry out three studies: an Urban Design Framework (UDF) for the town centre; an Urban Extension Study (UES) for Taunton; and Taunton Transport Strategy Review (TTSR). These studies were completed last autumn and reported to Executive on 8 December 2004.

3.3 The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) is preparing a Regional Spatial Strategy for the period up to 2026 (RSS) to replace RPG10 to 2016. During September to November SWRA consulted on 'Possible Development Strategies for the Region'.

3.4 To inform the emerging RSS strategy SWRA have commissioned studies for each of the PUAs to test three alternative scenarios up to 2026: (1) RPG10 rate; (2) RPG10 + 25%; and (3) RPG10 + 50%. In November 2004 the SWRA commissioned a joint study of the Taunton PUA. Somerset County Council has retained Baker Associates to carry out the TSAS.

3.5 For Taunton these scenarios equated broadly to (1) an additional 15,000 homes between 2001 and 2026, (2) an additional 18,000 homes and (3) an additional 20,000 homes. These scales of growth formed the basis for testing four strategy options for Taunton. There were two options at the low growth scale, (1a) focusing development to the south of Taunton and (1b) to the north. The remaining two options were at the highest growth scale. Option (2a) included development both to the north and south of Taunton. Option (2b) concentrated growth to the east of the M5 motorway in the Henlade area.

3.6 Public consultation was carried out on the four strategy options during January and February this year. The consultation period and scope was constrained by the imposed timescales for the study from the SWRA. Nevertheless, important views from the community were received with some 400 responses and around 80 people attended 4 workshops. Over 100 attended the special meeting of the TDBC SPTED Review Panel on 3 March at St. Andrews Hall and the Executive agreed the Council's response on 9 March 2005.

3.7 The summary of the Borough Council's response was that the future regional strategy for the Taunton area should be based on:

- The continued role of Taunton within the region as a PUA;

- The level of growth should be based on the employment prospects, not housing, and the economic potential is considered to be closer to the RPG10 level rather than RPG10 + 50%;
- The roles of Bridgwater and Wellington are complementary to Taunton. The three towns are closely spaced in the M5 corridor with a combined population of 110,000, acting as a mini-conurbation;
- It is essential that Bridgwater and Wellington maintain their role and function, with balanced growth of homes and jobs, maximising the opportunities for regeneration, development to fund necessary infrastructure and economic diversification – in this regard a mixed use scheme at Longforth Farm including a northern relief road would support the complementary role of Wellington;
- Both Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe are suitable locations for urban extensions in the longer term;
- Although Monkton Heathfield is the most sustainable and would build on the proposals in the local plan, it can be argued that the differences between it and Comeytrowe are marginal;
- Smaller developments around the town will be necessary to deliver Outer Distributor Roads and radical improvements to the public transport services will be required to reduce the growth in congestion, and
- Development to the east of the Motorway would be divorced from the town and must be resisted.

4.0 TAUNTON SUB AREA STUDY

4.1 The work in this study for the RSS builds on previous studies by:

- Taking the objectives developed for the Taunton Vision
- Accepting the UDF for the regeneration of Taunton town centre as a starting point and a base for assessing the need for Greenfield extensions to the urban area
- Using the baseline work for the UDF, UES and TTSR.

Taunton's role and function

4.2 Taunton is the county town of Somerset and is an important regional centre providing a high order of commercial, cultural, health and education services to a wide hinterland. Because of the considerable distances to other centres such as Exeter and Bristol, it is vital that Taunton maintains its position in serving the catchment area needs. The mixed-use regeneration of the key UDF town centre sites will promote the regional role of Taunton. The work on the Vision for Taunton has shown a strong consensus that in order for the town to maintain its role within the region and to continue to rejuvenate itself, it will need to grow.

The role of Bridgwater and Wellington

4.3 In employment terms Taunton is more self sufficient than Bridgwater, and Wellington displays dormitory characteristics. Mutual relationships exist between Taunton and Bridgwater for work, but the town centres perform different roles. Taunton is larger, has a greater retail offer and records higher rates of expenditure than Bridgwater which has a high incidence of value retailing. Further enhancement of the retail offer in Taunton is unlikely to contribute to further deterioration of Bridgwater and the type of retail opportunities (particularly larger national multiples) seeking to locate to Taunton are unlikely to be attracted to Bridgwater. Taunton needs to improve the environmental quality and retail offer to maintain its position in relation to Bristol and Exeter. A future strategy for Bridgwater should seek to maintain the important role it plays for its local catchment.

Economic potential

4.4 A strategic objective for forward planning is to balance the amount of housing in an area with job opportunities. Taunton enjoys a very good balance and has a high level of self containment with over 80% living and working in the town. The report contains a thorough sectoral analysis of the economy in arriving at an assessment of future potential for growth. The job growth forecast for the Taunton Travel to Work Area (TTWA) is an additional 15,075 jobs. If past rates of distribution are to continue, 81% of this growth (12,265) is expected to be in Taunton. This forecast confers with that done by Roger Tym and Partners as part of the UDF and UES and other research on behalf of the councils.

4.5 The area has low unemployment, high economic activity and has experienced strong recent growth. Over the period 2001 – 2026 Taunton's sectoral growth in jobs is forecast to be 4,000 in distribution, 1050 in hotels, 3,000 in business services, 2,100 in education, 1,650 in health and 2,750 in other services. The report flags up that growth in Taunton may be being inhibited by employment land supply constraints. Between 1995 and 2002 Taunton took less than a quarter of the area's growth in employment, while Bridgwater took a third. Wellington also took more than its share.

4.6 The overall picture of Taunton and Bridgwater is of neighbouring economies with complementary strengths to some extent, but which are also in competition for inward investment. Taunton will build on its considerable strengths as a service centre, both for business and the resident population. It can do this by improving its office accommodation, expanding its retail offer, entertainment and leisure facilities and attracting more creative industries. Taunton should hold on to the technology-based activities it already has and seek to attract more. As the population grows, so will the demand for education and health services.

4.7 The economic forecasts have erred on the side of caution, not least because the study is forecasting over a very long period. In order to respond to the needs of new employment opportunities, there is a need for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. There is also a need to address the exodus of young, skilled people for higher education who do not return. There is a recognised need to address employment land supply issues and cross town accessibility constraints to maintain competitiveness and ensure the maximum economic potential of Taunton and the wider sub-area in the future.

4.8 Bridgwater has a more difficult growth trajectory, as it needs to correct more imbalances in its employment structure. However, its relative success in attracting employment in communications and health services bodes well for diversification away from low skill distribution and manufacturing sector jobs.

Demand for Housing

4.9 Taking an economic led approach, and with the aim of matching jobs with additional homes, a total of 15,075 jobs in the Taunton TTWA equates to a Taunton Deane dwelling requirement of 13,870. Taunton Deane shares a similar geographical area as the TTWA. Assuming that unemployment is unlikely to fall any further and that net in-commuting remains at 2001 levels, this will lead to an increase in economically active population from 56,257 in 2001 to 72,130 in 2026, and an increase in the total population of Taunton Deane from 102,299 to 131,163 in 2026. This translates into an additional 17,061 additional households in Taunton Deane between 2001 and 2026.

4.10 On the basis of past rates of employment growth, 81% of growth in the TTWA will be created in Taunton. In the interests of promoting balanced job and housing growth and knowing that there is already a good balance in the town, this would create demand for an additional 13,870 dwellings in Taunton between 2001 and 2026.

Maximising urban potential

4.11 National planning policy requires that brownfield sites are identified and used before greenfield sites. Maximising urban potential for housing is the most sustainable strategy. The projected housing supply from the completions since 2001, sites under construction, with planning permission, Local Plan allocations, UDF sites and other windfall sites within the urban area up to 2026 is a total of 6,840 dwellings.

4.12 In relation to the RPG10 baseline of 15,100 dwellings between 2001 and 2026, this leaves a residual requirement of 8,250 dwellings to be provided on greenfield urban extension sites.

Housing Delivery

4.13 The study examines the operation of the housing market and the implications for delivery. There are practical limits to the annual completions on any site. A mix of sites is needed to deliver the required numbers of homes. It concludes that option 1a focusing south of Taunton is not deliverable because there are too few sites, and the high growth options 2a and 2b would not be capable of being delivered by the market. Option 1b north of Taunton would provide sufficient sites for market delivery.

Environmental Implications

4.14 The UES examined environmental constraints in detail. The floodplain of the river Tone is the main strategic constraint. The national landscape designations of the Quantocks AONB and the Blackdown Hills AONB are sufficiently distant from the potential urban extensions to be adversely affected. However, local landscape designations in the form of Green Wedges and Special Landscape Features have been carefully considered in the assessment of options.

4.15 National biodiversity resources such as Ancient Woodland and SSSIs will be unaffected. No county wildlife sites are affected, but legally protected species are scattered around the urban fringe. Taunton is surrounded by high grade agricultural land, but in the interests of other sustainability considerations, this factor is now given less weight than previously. Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe have the greatest potential for major urban extensions, but there are opportunities for smaller extensions elsewhere around the edge of the town.

Transport Implications

4.16 The development options have been modelled and appraised in transport terms. Although option 1a south of Taunton has the merit of being closer to the town centre, option 1b north of Taunton performs better in terms of minimising congestion on critical links and junctions, facilitating modal shift to public transport, improving strategic access to West Somerset, achieving air quality targets and minimising infrastructure costs. For these reasons option 1b is the preferred development location in transport terms.

Waste Management

4.17 Additional landfill capacity is required by 2012 regardless of the future development strategy for Taunton. The future growth scenarios for Taunton are not critical to this issue. However, further growth will increase waste from Taunton and the policy is to deal with waste close to the source and to maximise recycling, composting and create new smaller facilities.

Culture, Health and Education

4.18 The cultural offer in Taunton does require improvement. A barrier to further growth is the small scale and under-resourced nature of the main buildings housing cultural provision in the town. There is potential for development in this sector with plans for a new theatre, library, museum/records office and county cricket ground capable of hosting international games. The County Council have £3 million in the forward capital programme linked to a heritage lottery bid to create a Cultural Centre of Excellence as a key element of the Cultural Quarter identified in the UDF.

4.19 The cultural sector is seen to be an important contributor to many threads of regional policy, through its role in economic development and employment growth, including its links with the knowledge economy and innovation. The UDF proposals for cultural, leisure and sporting activities will benefit both the economy of the area and also promote the regeneration of the waterfront, social inclusion and participation.

4.20 Tangier and the cultural quarter is strategically positioned to benefit from links to the expansion of health facilities at Musgrove Park Hospital with the provision of specialist cardiac and oncology treatment, and also to higher education at Somerset College of Arts and Technology (SCAT) which has plans to become a regional centre of excellence for sustainable construction focussed around the new 'Genesis' centre and a small number of business incubation units attached to the campus. This SCAT based facility will link to a larger and commercially provided business incubation centre of 60-70 units to be provided at Tangier.

Strategic Sustainability Appraisal (SSA)

4.21 The report includes an SSA as required by the SWRA to assist in meeting the requirements set by legislation for the RSS. The regional methodology uses six 'headline objectives' to assess the sustainability of options. The conclusions of the SSA concur with the overall findings of the study.

4.22 The preferred strategy suggest that the lower growth scenario should be the basis for the strategy. In terms of the lower growth options, whilst option 1b does have the edge, the case for one option proceeding to development whilst the other is dismissed is not overwhelmingly clear and strong.

Consultation

4.23 There were over 400 public responses and most were opposed to the growth options put forward. An extension east of the M5 was the least favoured option. Option 1b to the north was the most favoured. The Vivary Green Wedge is held in higher esteem than the northern green wedges.

The preferred development strategy

4.24 The study concludes that the strategy should be:

- To seek the implementation of the UDF proposals for the regeneration of Taunton town centre
- To promote a large and well planned urban extension at Monkton Heathfield
- To use other opportunities around the edge of the town to provide outer relief roads through smaller extensions to the urban area
- Through this combination of development opportunities to bring on stream new commercial, residential, retail and cultural opportunities, and new education and health facilities consistent with an enhanced regional role for Taunton acting in close and complementary functional relationship with Bridgwater and Wellington
- In the longer term, around 2020 on current indications, though informed by progress in the meantime, to get under way with a further substantial extension at Comeytrowe
- To integrate enhanced transport infrastructure and services with land use changes in order to achieve and maintain high accessibility through

- integration, with an emphasis on high quality public transport, and on achieving greater reliance on walking and cycling
- To seek the highest performance from all public and private investment according to the objectives of greater sustainability.

5.0 **COMMENTS**

5.1 There has been much justifiable public criticism about the inadequate time available for public consultation on such an important matter as the long term strategy for the Taunton sub area. This has been an inevitable consequence of the tight timetable for the preparation of the RSS and the deadline set for the completion of the sub area studies for PUAs.

5.2 It is considered that in view of the depth of the economic analysis, more could have been said about the roles of Bridgwater and Wellington in particular.

5.3 The strategy founded on the principles of sustainability is commended:

- to base the future level of growth on the economic potential for new jobs and then to balance this with the provision of homes;
- to endorse the Vision for Taunton and ensure that Taunton plays an important role in the region as a commercial, cultural and service centre;
- to regenerate and expand the town centre, putting the river at the heart;
- to minimise the use of greenfield land, ensuring that urban extensions are sustainable community developments with all the necessary infrastructure;
- to enable Bridgwater and Wellington to maintain their roles and complementary functional relationships with Taunton.

6.0 **CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

6.1 The TSAS is been prepared to inform the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and Taunton Deane Local Development Framework. It will influence whether Taunton continues to play an important strategic role in the region as a PUA. As such it assists with delivering the Vision for Taunton, the Borough Council's top corporate priority. It guides longer term economic investment, land use planning and the development of the transport network. It takes account of environmental conservation, contributes towards developing safer and stronger communities, and facilitates the development of healthier lifestyles.

7.0 **CONCLUSIONS**

7.1 The future regional strategy for the Taunton area should sustainable and based on:

- The continued role of Taunton within the region as a PUA or other equivalent designation as a regional centre in accordance with the Vision for Taunton;

- To implement in full the regeneration proposals of the UDF to expand the town centre to embrace the river Tone, providing new commercial, retail and cultural opportunities and supporting new educational and health facilities;
- The level of growth should be based on the employment prospects, with housing provision in balance, reflecting a continuation of the RPG10 level of growth to maintain the existing high level of self-containment;
- Higher growth scenarios are not desirable, achievable or sustainable;
- The roles of Bridgwater and Wellington are complementary to Taunton;
- It is essential that Bridgwater and Wellington maintain their role and function, with balanced growth of homes and jobs, maximising the opportunities for regeneration, development to fund necessary infrastructure and economic diversification – in this regard a mixed use scheme at Longforth Farm including a northern relief road would support the complementary role of Wellington;
- Both Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe are suitable locations for urban extensions in the longer term;
- To integrate enhanced transport infrastructure and services with development in order to achieve and maintain high accessibility, high quality public transport and greater reliance on walking and cycling;
- Smaller developments around the edge of the town will be sustainable and help deliver outer distributor roads and meet local needs, and
- Development to the east of the Motorway would be divorced from the town and should be resisted.

Background Papers
The following documents have informed the content of this report:

- Taunton Urban Extension Study November 2004
- Taunton Deane Local Plan
- Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Alteration 1996-2011 Deposit Draft - June 2004
- Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10) September 2001
- A regional centre of excellence for the 21st century – what should Taunton be like in 2026? (TSAS consultation leaflet)
- Taunton Sub Area Study Final Report March 2005
- Taunton Sub Area Study Summary March 2005

CONTACT OFFICER:
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Summary

Introduction

S1 A strategy is being prepared for Taunton and the surrounding area to submit to the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) as part of the formulation of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West. The strategy is required by the SWRA and is being developed by Somerset County Council working with its partners and a Steering Group, and assisted by planning consultants Baker Associates and transport consultants, Halcrow and Atkins.

S2 The development of the strategy builds on a great deal of work that has already been done by the Taunton Vision Commission comprising a group led by Councillors from Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council. This led to the production of the 'Taunton Vision' in 2002, and of technical studies to produce an Urban Design Framework for Taunton, an Urban Extension Study and the Taunton Transport Strategy Review

S3 Further work has been needed however, because the SWRA has requested that specified growth levels be tested that are higher than was previously considered for the Taunton Vision.

S4 This is a summary of the report submitted to the County Council and the Steering Group on the work undertaken for the development of the strategy by the consultants. The report takes on board the outcomes from a stage of public consultation that has been undertaken on options for the spatial strategy.

Objectives

S5 The strategy is intended to fulfil objectives for the Sub Area. The Taunton Vision work concluded that:

"our vision for 2025 is of a continually rejuvenating Taunton, acknowledged nationally as a leading exemplar of a ***21st century market town****".*

S6 The Taunton Vision further defined this as meaning a town that has a role as a major regional centre. Taunton is already identified as a Principal Urban Area (one of 11 in the region) in the current regional planning guidance, RPG10. In the review of this as RSS10, the aim is to retain the recognition of the town as of similar regional status, however the principal settlements in the region come to be described. These cities and towns are likely to be the focus of investment in infrastructure concomitant with them providing the core of the region's economic growth and accommodating a high proportion of the region's additional population and housing provision.

Area addressed by the strategy

S7 The strategy is primarily concerned with Taunton, but recognises the functional relationships with Bridgwater and Wellington, towns which are also being addressed in other pieces of work being undertaken to inform the RSS.

S8 Taunton already provides a good supply of jobs for the working age population, although closer analysis shows that in and out commuting persist. This is inevitable as people search out job opportunities to suit their skills that may not be available in their place of residence. A future strategy for Taunton should seek to maintain a good balance between employment and the working age population.

S9 Reciprocal relationships exist between Bridgwater and Taunton for work purposes, though Taunton is more self sufficient than Bridgwater. Wellington displays dormitory settlement characteristics. Taunton town centre is larger, has a greater retail offer and records higher rates of expenditure than Bridgwater. There is some competition because of their proximity, and there is competition for spending from the catchment area from Bristol and Exeter. The most recent examination of shopping centres throughout the country places Taunton at number 76 in a national ranking of shopping centres, with Bridgwater at number 270 and Wellington at 829.

S10 The relative prosperity of the Taunton masks areas of deprivation that are ranked in the worst 20% deprived wards nationally. A future strategy of growth with an emphasis on the existing urban area and on targeted, community based regeneration ought to assist in overcoming deprivation. Similarly if the town is to extend, locating new development close to these wards and achieving good connectivity could improve accessibility to employment opportunities and to better education, recreation and health facilities for the existing as well as the new population.

Levels of growth

S11 The SWRA has asked the Sub Area study to examine three levels of growth for Taunton for the period up to 2026. These growth levels are expressed as housing numbers for Taunton for the period up to 2026, although the increase in population has implications for employment and the economy, and the additional housing would need to be matched with open space, with retail, health and education facilities, and with transport infrastructure and services.

S12 The number of dwellings associated with each level of growth is presented below.

Growth level	Total dwellings provision 2001-2026	Average annual rate of development (dpa)
Growth level 1 - continuing to deliver RPG10 rates of housing provision	15,100	604
Growth level 2 - increasing the RPG requirement for Taunton by 25%	17,725	709
Growth level 3 - increasing the RPG requirement for Taunton by 50%	20,350	814

Investigations undertaken

S13 The levels of growth set out by the SWRA are for testing so that the SWRA has comparable information on the implications of dealing with different levels of growth from each of the Study Areas. The Taunton Sub Area is not yet being told what level of provision is to be made for development – this will come in the RSS and the RSS will in part be influenced by the Sub Area strategy put forward by the Steering Group.

S14 The development of the emerging preferred strategy has been informed by:

- identifying what level of economic growth appears to be achievable within the Sub Area by 2026, and from the number of jobs in the area in that period, identifying the housing requirement according to the numerical and structural changes in the population

- identifying how much development (using housing numbers as the measure) could be accommodated satisfactorily within the existing urban area of Taunton, and so identifying how many dwellings will need to be accommodated beyond the current urban edge at some time during the period to 2026

- identifying locations where, according to the examination of environmental constraints (areas at risk of flooding, agricultural land, landscape character and the effect on the character of the settlement), extensions to the urban area could be accommodated, and estimating the level of development that could be provided in these locations

- investigating the scope for delivering different levels of housing supply to come forward through the normal operation of the housing market and according to different permutations of possible development locations

- investigating the transport implications of new development in different locations and to different scales, including the consideration of new roads and additional public transport services.

Developing options

S15 To make the process reasonably manageable and particularly for the purpose of conducting a process of consultation on what the strategy might look like, a number of options have been described presenting different ways in which different levels of development could be accommodated in and around Taunton. Four options have been set out, with two development distributions related to each of the lowest and highest of the three growth scenarios from the SWRA, as follows.

Scenario 1 – continuation of RPG10

- Option 1a: development to the south of the town (about 7,250 dwellings)

  Option 1a includes a strategic urban extension at Comeytrowe (6000 – 6500 dwellings) as well a small extension at the Vivary Green Wedge (500 – 1000 dwellings). A concentration of development in the south could serve to support the development of a southern outer distributor road to improve access across the south of the town, and this has been included in the option.

- Option 1b: development to the north of the town (about 7,250 dwellings)

  Option 1b comprises a number of extensions across the north of the town developed in conjunction with a northern outer distributor road, improving access across Taunton and beyond into West Somerset. This includes land at Monkton Heathfield (4000 dwellings) and land at Staplegrove and Pyrland (about 3000 dwellings).

Scenario 3 – high growth

- option 2a: development to the north and south of the town (about 12,500 dwellings)

  This spatial option combines 1a and 1b, with the onus on Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe, reducing pressure on the northern fringes at Staplegrove and Pyrland. This comprises east Vivary Green Wedge (500 – 1000 dwellings), Comeytrowe (6000-6500), Staplegrove (1000), Pyrland (1000), Monkton Heathfield (3300)

- option 2b: development to the east of the motorway (about 12,500 dwellings)

All 12,500 residual housing development requirements would be met on a large scale extension to the east of the motorway, with the expectation that a self-sufficient extension was developed.

S16 It is expected that about 1000 dwellings will come forward from smaller scale urban extensions, taking advantage of existing infrastructure and facilities, and which may have locational advantages in terms of proximity and accessibility to the town centre. For instance, there is potential in the vicinity of Bishops Hull and Norton Fitzwarren which could materialise in the Local Development Framework.

S17 These options formed the basis for the consultation carried out for the Taunton Sub-Area Study.

Towards a strategy for the sub area

S18 A preferred strategy is emerging from the consideration of the different forms of investigation and assessment included in the process. The implications of each of these contributory factors can be summarised as follows.

S19 From the examination of **economic potential**, the number of additional jobs that are likely to come forward in the period up to 2026 is 12,256. This growth in economic activity will bring about an increase in the population of the Sub Area. With changes in the structure of the population too, this means a requirement for an additional 13,870 dwellings in and around Taunton, taking account of the dwellings for which provision is already made. This is around the level of growth provided for by options 1a and 1b in addition to the provision arising from the UDF.

S20 However, the economic work indicates that there will not be the level of economic activity in the period being examined to support a population that would require the level of housing provision associated with options 2a and 2b. If provision were made for development on this scale, there is the possibility is that the demand for the housing would not arise and the market would not provide it. The associated infrastructure provision would be undermined, as well as some of the planning objectives of incorporating this level and distribution of development in the spatial strategy. The alternative possibility is that more housing would come to be developed than was consistent with the level of jobs in the town, with consequently greater levels of travel from Taunton to other locations for the purposes of employment.

S21 The overall picture is of two neighbouring economies with complementary strengths to some extent, but which are also in competition for inward investment and business growth generally. This is probably a healthy situation and the temptation to strive for a simplistic solution, whereby certain sectors are allocated to towns, should be avoided. In any case, the market will ignore any such strictures.

S22 Clearly Taunton will want to build on its considerable strengths as a service centre, both for businesses and the resident population. And it can do this by improving its office accommodation, expanding its retail offer, developing more entertainment and leisure facilities, and attracting more of the creative industries. At the same time, Taunton will certainly want to hold on to the technology-based manufacturing companies that it already has, and perhaps seek to attract more. As its population continues to grow, so will the demand for education and health services.

S23 Bridgwater has a more difficult growth trajectory, as it needs to correct more imbalances in its employment structure. It also need to improve its educational performance and the skills of its resident population if it is to attract more knowledge-based activities. However, its relative success in attracting additional employment in communications services and health services, performing better than Taunton's in both sectors, bodes well for diversification away from low-skill distribution and manufacturing sector jobs. In the retail sector, Bridgwater will have to differentiate its offer from that of Taunton, and will also face strong competition in terms of leisure and entertainment activities.

S24 With both towns seeking to build on their strengths and overcome structural weaknesses, it might be the case that competition between them will increase. In that situation, the town that can make employment land of the right quality available more easily could well have an advantage.

S25 The analysis of the town centres of Taunton and Bridgwater has shown that they perform different roles. Taunton town centre is larger, has a greater retail offer and records higher rates of expenditure than Bridgwater which has a high incidence of value retailing.

S26 To some extent there is competition between the centres, because Taunton includes Bridgwater in its retail catchment area. However, because of their different roles, further enhancement of the retail offer in Taunton, whilst unlikely to support Bridgwater's retail diversification, is unlikely to contribute to further deterioration either and the type of retail opportunities (particularly larger national multiples) seeking to locate in Taunton and unlikely to be attracted to Bridgwater.

S27 Given the competition from other centres and the leakage from Taunton, Taunton needs to improve the environmental quality and retail offer in the town centre. Whilst this is not expected to benefit Bridgwater's town centre, if successful would help to reduce leakage out of the sub-area, and potentially shortening travelling distances for some shopping trips to centres such as Bristol further away. Further boost to the quality and range of shopping opportunities and to the shopping experience in Taunton will benefit residents across the sub-area.

S28 From the consideration of the **deliverability of housing** through normal market activity, it also appears that the levels of growth associated with the higher growth scenarios and hence options 2a and 2b would not be deliverable. The annual rates at which the industry could expect to bring forward housing are more consistent with development taking place up to 2026 to the scale provided for by options 1a and 1b.

S29 Two further points are to be noted here however:

- an important factor in the examination of market deliverability is the number of different sites bringing forward housing at any time, and in this respect option 1b, or a further slight variation on 1b, is preferable to option 1a

- though the study is concerned with growth levels to 2026, it is reasonable to assume that change in Taunton will not stop at that time. How development needs could be provided for thereafter may be a proper consideration in deciding on the preferred development locations and the phasing of their use.

S30 From the consideration of the **environmental implications** of the different development locations identified it appears that whilst each will meant the loss of undeveloped land, there is relatively little to distinguish the different locations able to accommodate substantial levels of development on the basis of significant environmental effects. Taunton is surrounded by high quality agricultural land, though between the two main locations associated with options 1a and 1b, 1b (involving development at Monkton Heathfield), is the poorer option with the loss of more of the better grade of agricultural land. Option1b (involving development at Monkton Heathfield), is also considered to be the poorer option in terms of the adverse effect that the development would have on landscape character.

S31 From the consideration of **transport issues**, with the implications of the additional travel and taking account of providing the type of infrastructure likely to be required to facilitate the development, option 1a has merit by involving development closer to the existing centre of Taunton with its concentration of employment, services and facilities. It appears however that it would be easier to make provision for a higher level of the trips arising to be made by public transport if the development took place according to option1b. This is considered to be the more important issue for the long term, favouring option 1b. On three of the other four objectives used in the transport appraisal (minimising congestion on critical links and junctions, improving access to West Somerset and assisting with the achievement of air quality targets) option 1b performs better than option 1a. The costs of the infrastructure requirements that would be required for the development to take place are likely to be higher under option 1b however, by about 10%.

S32 The responses to the **consultation process** influence the choice of a future strategy too. The majority of those responding to the consultation on the possible options for the strategy for submission to the SWRA objected to growth at Taunton, though the earlier consultation as part of the Taunton Vision did provide support for continued growth of the town. It is possible to conclude that the lower growth scenario and hence options 1a and 1b would be preferable to the higher growth scenario and options 2a and 2b. The wish for Taunton to stay as it is must also be given due regard. Of the two main locations for urban extension there was more support expressed for Monckton Heathfield than Comeytrowe with the relative benefits in relieving town centre congestion from the former a factor reported. Concerns about the environmental implications of some of the other (albeit smaller) development locations within the options were also expressed.

S33 The report has examined many other issues, including the provision of health and education facilities necessary for the quality of life of existing and additional residents alike, cultural improvements that should arise or be sought as part of growth, and the management of waste. Though these are all important issues, the conclusion is that these matters will be addressed as part of any chosen strategy, but are not determinative of the scale and distribution of development as expressed in the options.

S34 The report has also included a **strategic sustainability appraisal** as required by SWRA to assist in meeting the requirements set by legislation for the RSS. This has reported on the environmental, economic and social implications of the options as far as is possible for strategic matters such as are already being considered. The regional methodology uses six ‘headline objectives’ to assess the sustainability of alternatives that might be included in the strategy, and these together with the findings of the SSA in relation to the lower growth options considered in the work are as set out in the schedule.

Headline objective from the SSA methodology	**Finding of the SSA in relation to the spatial options for the lower growth scenario**
1 Improve health	Option 1b would be the most sustainable because of: • the good cycle and footpath access to the town centre • the development creating new services and facilities close to the most deprived wards

2 Support communities that meet peoples' needs	Option 1b would be the most sustainable because of: • the good public transport, cycle and footpath access to the town centre and hence SCAT and town centre schools • the development creating new services and facilities close to the most deprived wards
3 Develop the economy in ways that meet peoples' needs	Option 1b would be the most sustainable because of: • the good public transport, cycle and footpath access to the town centre and hence employment opportunities • the development creating new opportunities close to the most deprived wards
4 Provide access to meet peoples' needs with least damage to communities and the environment	Option 1b would be the most sustainable because of: • the good public transport, cycle and footpath access to the town centre and hence employment opportunities • the opportunity with the development to create a northern outer distributor road relieving town centre congestion and improving access to West Somerset
5 Maintain and improve environmental quality and assets	Option 1a would be the most sustainable because of: • the loss of less higher quality agricultural land • the lower adverse impact on landscape character
6 Minimise consumption of natural resources	Option 1b would be the most sustainable by this criterion, primarily because of the transport considerations already noted

S35 The conclusions of the SSA on the options concur with the overall findings of the work.

S36 This summary of the factors influencing the choice of option to take forward into **the preferred strategy** suggests that the lower growth scenario should be taken as the basis for the strategy, but in terms of development distribution, whilst **option 1b does have the edge**, the case for one option proceeding to development whilst the other is entirely dismissed is not overwhelmingly clear and strong.

S37 This does leave a further matter for consideration, and this is whether only one of the main locations for an urban extension should be included within the preferred strategy, or whether two should be pursued.

S38 The arguments for proceeding with only one of the major urban extensions examined in the options include:

- the clarity of the strategy and the ability to focus on the delivery of what will be a complex project, and one that needs to be successfully implemented for the future of Taunton

- the greater likelihood of the external funding for the required strategic infrastructure being forthcoming, and less risk of major development being committed without the required infrastructure taking place

- the ability to maximise the efficiency of developer contributions in delivering community benefits.

S39 The arguments for the more or less simultaneous start on two urban extensions include:

- the greater choice of development sites available to purchasers and investors, increasing the prospect of delivering the amount of development required in the period of the RSS

- the sense of getting underway with a strategy that will hold good over the very long term, something that is consistent with achieving greater sustainability.

S40 On these points, the conclusion is that the strategy should proceed with one of the large urban extensions, and this should be sited at Monckton Heathfield, but development at Comeytrowe should still be considered as part of the longer term future of Taunton, with development beginning to feature in the latter stages of the period considered by the RSS.

S41 The **preferred development strategy** commended to the Steering Group therefore is:

- to seek the implementation of the proposals from the Urban Development Framework in full, maximising the opportunities for high quality development to replace underuse in the urban area, and to make the most of the River Tone as a setting for new activity with substantial development at Tangiers, Firepool and elsewhere

- to promote a large and well planned extension to the existing urban area using land at Monckton Heathfield, managing the phasing and form of the development to provide choice and opportunity while complementing rather than undermining the regenerative effort in the existing urban area

- to use other opportunities around the edge of the town to provide more development opportunities through smaller extension to the urban area

- through this combination of development areas, to bring on stream new commercial, residential, retail and cultural opportunities, and new education and health facilities consistent with an enhanced regional role for Taunton acting in a close and complementary functional relationship with Bridgwater and Wellington

- in the longer term, around 2020 on current indications, though informed by progress in the meantime, to get under way with a further substantial extension at Comeytrowe

- to integrate enhanced transport infrastructure and services with land use changes in order to achieve and maintain high accessibility through integration, with an emphasis on high quality public transport, and on achieving greater reliance on walking and cycling

- to seek the highest performance from all public and private investment according to the objectives of greater sustainability.

S42 The material put forward in the full submission for the Taunton Sub Area Study demonstrates that this strategy is desirable, and since it also is demonstrably deliverable, the strategy is commended to the SWRA for inclusion within the RSS for the South West.

16 March 2005

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

Taunton Sub Area Study

Final Report

BAKER ASSOCIATES

Contents

Preface

A strategy is being prepared for Taunton and the surrounding area to submit to the SWRA as part of the formulation of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West. The strategy has been developed by Somerset County Council working with its partners and a Steering Group, and assisted by planning consultants Baker Associates.

This is the final report of Baker Associates on the work undertaken so far for the development of the strategy for the Taunton and Somerset Sub Area. The report incorporates work undertaken by other consultants for the SWRDA, County and Borough Councils (primarily Terence O'Rourke on planning and Halcrow and Atkins on transport matters) and by the County Council itself. The report has also taken on board the outcomes from a stage of public consultation.

1 Introduction

Introduction

1.1 A strategy is being prepared for Taunton and the surrounding area to submit to the SWRA as part of the formulation of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West. The strategy is being developed by Somerset County Council working with its partners and a Steering Group, and the responsible bodies have been assisted by planning and transport consultants.

1.2 The Steering Group includes representatives of:

- Somerset County Council
- Taunton Deane Borough Council
- Sedgemoor District Council
- South West Regional Development Agency
- Environment Agency
- Highways Agency
- Somerset College of Arts and Technology
- Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority
- North Taunton Partnership.

1.3 The Steering Group is supported by an officer group comprising officers from the local authorities, the SWRA and Government Office South West.

Report

1.4 This report:

- explains the approach being taken to provide what is required by the study brief prepared by the Regional Assembly

- sets out the findings of the technical work

- explains the options that the Steering Group have considered for the overall growth and distribution that the strategy will need to address, and on which consultation has been undertaken

- provides the findings from the consultation

- explains the evaluation process that has been followed

- provides the results of the Strategic Sustainability Assessment (SSA) required by SWRA to assist in the development and presentation of the RSS

- develops the form that the preferred spatial strategy might take.

1.5 The Report is in three parts and 18 sections, as follows:

Part A Purpose and process, including:

- the purpose of the study – section 2
- the approach being taken and the intended form of outputs – section 3

Part B Developing options, including:

- objectives for the study area – section 4
- an explanation of the functional analysis of settlements and of the relationships between Taunton and the neighbouring settlements of Wellington and Bridgwater – section 5
- a review of the potential for economic development in the sub area – section 6
- consideration of the potential for accommodating further development within the urban area of Taunton – section 7
- examination of the opportunities for locating further development beyond the current urban area of Taunton, and combining these spatial distribution possibilities with economic development scenarios to identify some illustrative options – section 8

Part C Towards the preferred strategy, including:

- an explanation of the approach to testing the options – section 9
- views on how achievable the economic development scenarios are likely to be – section 10
- an investigation of the potential for the housing levels in the options to be delivered – section 11
- examination of the transport implications of the development options – section 12
- consideration of the waste management requirements of the additional development – section 13
- investigation of the relationship of the scenarios with cultural, health and education needs – section 14
- an explanation of the requirement for the strategic sustainability assessment and of the findings from the assessment – section 15
- summary of environmental implications - section 16
- a description of the consultation undertaken on the scenarios and of the responses – section 17
- development of preferred strategy for Taunton and consideration of its impact on Wellington and Bridgwater – section 18
- initial consideration of what will be needed as an implementation plan for the preferred strategy – section 19.

2 Purpose of the work

Purpose

2.1 SWRA is seeking to inform the preparation of the RSS by receiving advice and proposals for strategic areas within the region prepared by representatives of those areas in consultation with stakeholders and the community. Under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the work is being done on behalf of the SWRA by the relevant strategic planning authorities working with partners.

2.2 The Regional Assembly has identified the requirements from each of the Joint Study Areas, in a Brief issued in March 2004 and in a further letter dated 20 October 2004. Whilst the Taunton Sub-Area Study was not commissioned until November 2004 and did not form part of the original six Joint Study Areas[1], guidance in the original March brief is still relevant. The Joint Study Area (JSA) brief contains the statement that:

The Assembly will expect to see a ***Strategic Vision*** *for the city-region setting out a long term sense of direction for the core PUA and its role in the wider 'city region' area and its relationships with other areas and settlements. This needs to be a long term outward looking view of the city region from which strategic objectives can be derived.*

2.3 It is clear that the purpose of the work by each of the JSAs is to influence and inform an appropriate spatial strategy for the future of the study area. The Steering Group needs to put forward its preferred spatial strategy to seek to influence the content of the RSS in order that the RSS makes a contribution to the successful implementation of the sub area strategy.

2.4 The second document from the SWRA on 20 October 2004, provides further details on how the work is to be undertaken and what outputs are expected, as well as providing a general update. The letter sets out the various matters that are to be addressed in the work and hence dealt with by the preferred strategy, and it includes in the list of matters to be considered:

- the assessment of economic potential
- environment
- waste
- culture, health and education
- transport modelling and options testing.

2.5 Part of the identification of an appropriate strategy for the study area will be the identification of the development requirement as part of an integrated approach to the delivery of the strategy. The SWRA letter deals with this issue, and in particular places a specific requirement upon the JSAs to test certain levels of growth, expressed in terms of housing provision and related to the benchmark of the provision targets included in RPG10, with different

[1] The original six JSAs include West of England, Swindon, Gloucester/Cheltenham, South East Dorset, Exeter, and Plymouth.

percentage increases and delivery trajectories. By this approach the SWRA will have comparable material from each of the sub areas as well as material on the implications of various levels of growth being required by Government for instance.

2.6 The scenarios from the SWRA's figures and the way that these have been used in the study, and how they relate to options for a spatial strategy in particular are explained further in the next section of the report.

2.7 The Steering Group has not treated the growth levels identified by the SWRA as levels of development that the area is required to accommodate, but has sought a level of development that can be supported by economic growth and a strategy that is sustainable and deliverable.

What is the study area?

2.8 The area for which a strategy is required from the Steering Group needs some explanation.

2.9 The work is producing a strategy for Taunton performing as a PUA therefore, something already in the RPG and something that Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council want to take forward, working with the wider Steering Group.

2.10 SWRA is clear that the SAS should focus on Taunton, and should extend this to other settlements only where there is an interrelationship with Taunton. The appendix to the partnership arrangements between SWRA and SCC 2004/05 note that this should take account of relationships with Bridgwater and Wellington in particular. This same paper also advises that in considering future potential, the SAS needs to take account of Taunton's position between Exeter and the West of England, for which separate sub-area studies are underway.

2.11 It is not a strategy for other significant towns in Somerset such as Yeovil and some other South Somerset and Mendip towns, or for smaller settlements and the rural parts. The SWRA has commissioned research into the roles of settlements to examine significant towns that have not been considered in the SASs, and to inform how the RSS should provide for these places. It is expected that this will cover Yeovil and Bridgwater, but not necessarily smaller towns within the County.

3 Approach

Introduction

3.1 The sub area study is led by the need for the Steering Group to be able to suggest an appropriate strategy for the sub area, with whatever that means in terms of a development requirement identified as part of an integrated approach to the delivery of the strategy.

3.2 This section explains the process by which the work has been done leading to the proposal of a spatial strategy.

3.3 The overall process has been one of:

- drawing heavily on the technical and consultation work already done for the future of Taunton, for the development of the Taunton Vision and for the deposit Joint Structure Plan Alteration (2004)

- taking the growth scenarios provided by SWRA as a reference position for all of the option development and testing work

- establishing objectives to assist in putting forward proposals for consideration and for their evaluation

- identifying what level of economic growth arrears to be achievable within the Sub Area by 2026, and from the number of jobs in the area in that period, identifying the housing requirement according to the numerical and structural changes in the population

- identifying how much development (using housing numbers as the measure) could be accommodated within the existing urban area of Taunton, and so identifying how many dwellings will need to be accommodated beyond the current urban edge, in the form of urban extensions

- identifying locations where according to the examination of environmental constraints (areas at risk of flooding, agricultural land, landscape character, the effect on the character of the settlement) extensions to the urban area could be accommodated, and estimating the level of development that could be provided in these locations

- setting out a number of options for the way that different levels of development could be located in relation to the present pattern of development in Taunton

- carrying out consultation on these options through stakeholder workshops and by inviting comment on the way forward with the distribution of a consultation document

- investigating the scope for different levels of housing supply to come forward and according to different permutations of possible development locations.

- investigating the transport implications of new development in different locations and to different scales, including the consideration of new roads and additional public transport services

- drawing on the consultation response and the findings from the technical investigations to put forward proposals on the form of the preferred strategy.

3.4 Parts of this process are further explained here, and parts are the subject of subsequent sections of the report.

Building on what has been done before

3.5 Taunton is identified in the current regional planning guidance (RPG10) as a Principal Urban Area (PUA). The designation is both description – with recognition of the regional role and significance of Taunton – and policy, with the PUAs intended to be the focus for the majority of future development.

3.6 As part of the work in taking forward the Taunton Vision (commented on further in section 4 of the report), a great deal of work has been undertaken by and on behalf of Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council. The Urban Design Framework (UDF) looked at how additional development could take place within Taunton, to accommodate more and better commercial space and employment provision as well as housing and cultural and leisure facilities, while bringing brownfield or under-utilised land into use and creating a more coherent framework for development decisions leading to a more attractive and vibrant town.

3.7 The Urban Extension Study (UES) has looked at how development needed for Taunton that could not be accommodated in Taunton could be provided in the form of sustainable urban extensions to the town with new infrastructure and a mix of different types of activity accommodated in a planned way.

3.8 A review of the Taunton Transport Strategy (published in 2000) formed an integral element of the UDF and the UES research to ensure that the proposals in the UDF/UES were achievable and deliverable in transport terms. In March 2004, the transport proposals in the Taunton Transport Strategy Review (TTSR) were put out to consultation, followed by a further period of consultation into the ‘Third Way’ in October 2004. The findings are discussed later in section 12 of the report.

3.9 It is a very important point that a great deal of consultation has accompanied the development of the ideas for the UDF and UES, and the Steering Group has been concerned that the work on the preferred strategy for the RSS draws on what has emerged and is seen to be following on from this work rather than ‘starting again’.

3.10 The present work will use a great deal from this previous work by:

- taking the objectives developed for the Taunton Vision, together with what is required to be done for the RSS process, as the basis for developing and evaluating options in putting forward a preferred strategy

- taking the material from the UDF work in particular as a base for considering what will need to be accommodated beyond the present boundaries of Taunton

- using the considerable evidence base assembled for the work, such as on the environmental issues affecting the consideration of urban extensions.

Growth scenarios

3.11 The SWRA require each of the JSAs to test specified growth levels. The letter from the SWRA (20 October 2004) sets figures for housing numbers for testing at up to 50% above current RPG10 figures (interpreted to the study area by the most recent development plan work). The reason for needing to understand what would be needed to achieve this level of growth acceleration, and the implications of doing so, is given as the relationship with the sustainable communities submission to Government from the region.

3.12 The SWRA has asked the Sub Area Study to examine three growth scenarios for Taunton for the period up to 2026. These scenarios are based on housing numbers for Taunton for the period up to 2026. These scenarios are based on housing numbers, although this will have consequences for the size of the population, hence creating new demands for other uses such as retail, health, education, open space, transport infrastructure. The there scenarios are as follows.

(1) the town continuing to deliver RPG10 rates of housing provision (based on an assumption of 600 dwellings per annum)

(2) increasing the RPG requirement for Taunton by 25%

(3) increasing the RPG requirement for Taunton by 50%.

3.13 The Regional Assembly consider RPG10 to seek a requirement for Taunton of about 700 dwellings per annum. However, housing completion rates in the last 3 years have been much lower than this and it is unlikely that this rate of housing supply will change very much in the period to 2007 because of the time it will take for large housing schemes to be assembled and developed.

3.14 Therefore, RPG10's provision for Taunton is considered to be 300 dwellings per annum (dpa) to 2007 and 700 dpa 2007 - 2026. This averages out at just over 600 dwellings per annum for the period 2001 - 2026. This is the base rate the study will test in scenario 1.

3.15 In scenario 1, the rate of the provision is kept the same throughout the 25 year period.

3.16 In scenarios 2 and 3, the rate of provision of 700 dwellings per annum is increased by 25% and 50 % respectively from 2011 onwards. This means that after 2011, annual rates are increased to 875 dpa and 1050 dpa for scenario 2 and scenario 3 respectively.

3.17 In each of the three scenarios, the rate of provision for the period 2001 to 2011 is 300 dwellings to 2007, and 700 dwellings between 2007 and 2011 (for reasons described in paragraph 3.13). This equates to 460 dwellings per annum between 2001 and 2011.

3.18 The total number of dwellings associated with each scenario with each scenario is presented below.

	Total dwellings provision 2001-2026	Average annual rate of development (dpa)
Scenario 1	15,100	604
Scenario 2	17,725	709
Scenario 3	20,350	814

Figure 3.1 scenarios for testing

Options

3.19 At the core of this work has been the development of a set of options that illustrate the range of possible spatial distributions of development and different levels of development. The report will examine what is achievable in economic development terms for the period being considered, and the subsequent increase in the numbers of households that would be needed if the economic potential is achieved. The levels of development derived in this way (ie economic led) are compared with the levels that SWRA require the sub area study to examine.

3.20 The options are described in section 8 of the report.

Strategic Sustainability Assessment

3.21 The process involves the development of options for the possible strategy, which are consulted on, and the evaluation of these options. It is noted that an approach which incorporates the explicit consideration of alternatives has resonance with the requirement for the study to assist the SWRA in meeting the requirements of the SEA Directive in its preparation of the RSS. It is a requirement of the SEA Directive and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, that an environmental report on the RSS is produced. The environmental report for the RSS is required to:

'identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of:

(a) implementing the plan or programme

(b) reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme.'

4 Objectives for the study area

Introduction

4.1 An appreciation of the existing set of objectives for Taunton is an important starting point for any future strategy for the town. The main source for this is the Taunton Vision[2].

A Vision for Taunton

4.2 In 2002 the Taunton Vision was produced by the Taunton Vision Commission (TVC) comprising a group led by Councillors from Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council. This set out to develop a vision for the town to 2025 to inform future decisions affecting Taunton. A number of public meetings were held and written representations also invited and the Vision is considered to reflect the views of a wide range of participants.

4.3 The Taunton Vision work concluded that:

"our vision for 2025 is of a continually rejuvenating Taunton, acknowledged nationally as a leading exemplar of a ***21st century market town".***

4.4 This is further defined in the Vision as a town that has a role as a major regional centre comprising the following attributes:

- having an excellent choice of retail, cultural and sporting facilities
- being a centre of excellence for health and further education
- maximising its economic potential, and in particular to become more of a focus for knowledge based industry
- a place which is able to retain its indigenous population, particularly young people who tend to move away
- maintaining its distinctive and valued market town character
- a combination of the above to create the type of place that people will choose to live, work, invest and visit.

4.5 A key finding that emerged from the vision work was a strong sense of Taunton being at the end of an era and there being a real willingness amongst stakeholders to make a step change in moving the town forward into the 21st century.

Taunton Urban Design Framework

4.6 During 2003, the community was consulted on proposals for the regeneration of the town that led to the production of an Urban Design Framework for Taunton town centre. The level of engagement was extensive comprising:

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[2] Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council (September 2002) *Taunton Vision Commission* (available at *www.taunton-vision.co.uk).*

- stakeholder presentations and workshops to gain an appreciation of the wide ranging issues
- informal workshops and meetings with local groups, businesses and landowners, as well as local cultural and health stakeholders
- youth forum, whereby local youth groups were invited to comment on proposals
- nine day public exhibition
- questionnaire
- website explaining the UDF study and proposals, with the opportunity to fill in an on-line questionnaire.

4.7 The main strategic issues that came out of the key stakeholders events and the questionnaire survey were that:

- there was a feeling of unfulfilled potential and lost opportunities in the town
- Taunton should seek to improve its retail status and to compete with the on-going improvements in Bristol and Exeter
- Taunton's residents should benefit from the town's future growth (as opposed to Bristol or Exeter)
- proposals to redevelop the four key areas of Firepool, Tangier, High Street and the Cricket Ground were favourably received
- there is potential to widen Taunton's economic base and become more of a focus for knowledge based industries
- regeneration in the town centre should give priority to enhancing the key cultural attractions - leisure should not be neglected
- housing growth would continue at Taunton, with the proviso that housing is in balance with job opportunities and is accompanied by infrastructure improvements
- almost half of respondents supported the principle of an urban extension of about 4000 dwellings in the long term, with 20% opposing.

4.8 Over the last 2 years, including in response to this study, there have been a number of opportunities for key stakeholders and the local community to express a view about the future of Taunton. There appears to be a strong consensus amongst the business community, environmental and local community groups and councillors, that in order for the town to remain a strong sub-regional centre and to continue to rejuvenate itself, that it will need to grow. Having said this, the consultation undertaken for this study has taken this a step further in identifying possible areas of search for urban extensions to enable a growth strategy. Many individuals, particularly who live close to the urban extensions proposed for testing in this study were less supportive of growth than previous public involvement would suggest. This is probably because the consultation attracted a lot of responses from those who did not want to see change close to where they live.

4.9 Four stakeholder events held specifically to discuss appropriate growth levels for Taunton were broadly supportive of the lower growth scenarios. A number of workshop attendees felt that the deliverability of very high levels of growth (scenario 3) were questionable and community and environmental groups were unsure about the adverse impacts of this level of growth on the character of the town. Further discussion on this is set out in section 16 on consultation.

5 Settlement function and inter-settlement relationships

Introduction

5.1 Research has been carried out to identify the role of Taunton in the sub-area. As required in the SWRA brief, functional relationships with neighbouring settlements Bridgwater and Wellington have also been considered, with a view to illuminating what the future impacts of a development strategy for Taunton may have on these two towns. This analysis has assisted in understanding the baseline position for Taunton that will influence the future strategy for the town.

Taunton's role and function

5.2 Taunton is a historic market town and important regional centre, providing comparison and convenience retailing, leisure, employment, and high order health and education services to a wide hinterland.

5.3 Taunton has developed a successful local economy, and draws its particular strength from its location. It benefits from a strategic mid-point position in the South West, in close proximity to the motorway network and within a 2 hour train journey of London and the South East. The airports of Bristol and Exeter are within a 45 minute drive of the town. The high quality environment of Somerset is held up as a very important asset in attracting inward investment as well as an expanding labour force to the area. Residents report that the most positive aspect of life in Somerset is its high quality environment[3].

5.4 Taunton has two further education colleges, three public schools and provides an extensive range of health provision including secondary health services at Musgrove Park Hospital.

5.5 For retail uses, Taunton has an extensive catchment area but is restricted to the south by the competing centre of Exeter, and to the north by Bristol, Bath and Weston-Super-Mare.

5.6 The town centre is healthy and contains a core of national multiple retailers providing the main shopping attractions in the town. In 1999, a retail capacity study[4] for Taunton Deane concluded Taunton town centre to be trading at a realistic level for a centre of its size, function and catchment area characteristics.

5.7 The 1999 retail capacity study is being updated and more recent information confirms that Taunton is the most successful retail centre in Somerset. In an index of 1,672 centres across Great Britain, Taunton is ranked at 76, behind Exeter (39) and Bristol (23), but above Yeovil (128), Bridgwater (270) and Wellington (829)[5]. In terms of its performance, it is notable that its ranking has been improving. In the period 2001/2 - 2003/4, Taunton's ranking increased, compared with Exeter, Bridgwater and Wellington whose ranking fell over the same period.

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[3] Prism Research LTD (2001) *Somerset Economic Assessment 2001*
[4] CB Hillier Parker (1999) *Taunton Deane Retail Capacity Study*
[5] Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (2005) *Taunton Deane Retail Capacity Study draft report* - (data source - Management Horizons' Europe UK Shopping Index 2003/04).

5.8 Other indicators of the performance of the town are gauged by vacancy rates. It is noted that Taunton town centre's vacant shop unit rates at 3.5% are well below the national average (8.1%), and demand for retail floorspace exceeds supply. As at 2003, there were approximately 63 requirements from national retailers for retail space in Taunton, compared with 129 in Bristol and 102 in Exeter[6].

5.9 Relatively low rental yields[7] (6% in 2004) and relatively high retail rents (£1399 for Prime Zone A in 2004) for Taunton also demonstrate the attractiveness of the town centre for future investment, which is a key indicator for its potential to reinforce its position as an important regional centre.

5.10 The presence of national multiple retailers coupled with the very strong demand from other national retailers to locate in the town, demonstrates considerable potential for Taunton to increase its retail floorspace and maintain its position relative to Bristol and Exeter. 30,000 square metres of retail development is identified in the masterplans for the town centre UDF sites, with the potential to go some way to expanding the retail offer of the town.

5.11 The leisure economy in the town has experienced some development in recent years and there has been an increase in the number of restaurants and pubs in the centre of Taunton. However, the range of leisure opportunities are limited and the evening economy is lacking in diversity.

5.12 There tends to be a strong positive relationship between population size and the demand generated for shopping and leisure facilities. An increase in the population of Taunton is expected to have a positive effect on increasing its retail and leisure offer, with the potential to reduce leakage to other centres and promote further self containment. Because of the considerable distances to other centres such as Exeter and Bristol, it is vital that Taunton at least maintains its position in serving the catchment area needs. The regeneration of the key UDF town centre sites will make considerable advances towards promoting further promoting the role of Taunton as a regional shopping centre.

Employment density

5.13 Historically, Taunton Deane has enjoyed a very good balance between the working age population and number of jobs. In 2001, the job density for Taunton Deane was 0.97. This means that there is almost one job for each working age resident of the District. Focusing on the town itself, there is also a perfect match, with 0.99 jobs per working age resident.

5.14 Bridgwater also has a high job density (0.92). Conversely, Wellington has a low job density at 0.60, with the expectation that there will be a dependency on other settlements for work.

Travel to work analysis

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[6] TOR (2003) *Taunton UDF Baseline Report*.

[7] Low rental yields indicate a relatively lower financial risk and better return from the income from shopping rents.

5.15 The 2001 census provides ward to ward travel to work data. This enables an understanding of work travel patterns to and from Taunton, and also of commuting relationships with Bridgwater and Wellington.

5.16 77% of those of working age living in Taunton work in the town. Of the 6735 that commute out, the majority are to Bridgwater (17%) and to South Somerset towns (15%). The remainder are fairly evenly spread in all directions. Taking account of its size, there is a fairly large number of commuting trips to Wellington (7%), reflecting some of the employment opportunities that are available in Wellington. Out-commuting from Taunton to Weston Super Mare and beyond is fairly small at 5%, and to Exeter, 5%. This is presented in figure 5.1.

5.17 Taunton experiences a net influx of commuting, with about 16,554 trips being made into the town for work. The main origins of these trips are South Somerset towns (13%), Wellington (9%) Bridgwater (7%), and West Somerset (6%) - see figure 5.2

5.18 The travel to work analysis for the SWRA[8] reports that Bridgwater is less self-contained with 68% of the working age population working in the town and Wellington, even less so at 48%.

Relationships with Bridgwater and Wellington

5.19 Despite there being a close match in the employment available for each working age person in Taunton and Bridgwater, out-commuting is still prevalent. Job density is a crude form of measurement and does not take account of qualitative issues such as the types of job opportunities, pay, or the availability of advanced positions that affect how far people are prepared to travel for work. Simply having work opportunities available to the population does not mean that they will take them up. Travel to work data is a much more accurate measure of assessing self containment.

5.20 There is a mutual relationship between Bridgwater and Taunton for work, facilitated by the M5, although greater numbers of people commute into Taunton. Wellington looks very strongly to Taunton for employment, although there are a number of counter trips from Taunton to Wellington.

5.21 The south west regional hierarchy of towns identifies Bridgwater and Taunton in the same category, ie as 'Regional Towns'[9]. However, their market position (hence their role) is quite different. Compared with other regional towns across the country Taunton has an average performance, defined an 'average regional centre' and Bridgwater a 'value regional centre', reflecting the higher incidence of budget retailers in Bridgwater. This demonstrates that the towns have come to perform quite different roles. The high incidence of discount retailers in Bridgwater is partly a reflection of socio-economic circumstances, and the spending power of the catchment area. Sedgemoor's average gross weekly earnings of £425 are below Taunton Deane's (£446) and a regional average of (£448).

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[8] South West Observatory for SWRA (2004) *Travel to Work and Urban Areas of the South West Region – draft report.*
[9] CACI for SWRA (2004) *Baseline Retail Assessment of the Regional / Sub-Regional Centres in the South West – draft report*.

5.22 Despite the relatively lower performance of Bridgwater town centre compared with Taunton, it is noted that the town centre has a small number of vacant outlets and demand exceeds supply.

5.23 Wellington is a small market town with a convenience and local comparison function. It has a large representation of independent retailers, but does contain some national multiples. Given its proximity, Wellington looks mainly to Taunton for comparison goods and further growth of Taunton is not expected to change this situation. Wellington town centre will need to continue to satisfy local comparison shopping demands.

5.24 A survey looking at the draw of Taunton town centre from wards in Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and West Somerset districts confirmed the level of attraction to the town's shopping facilities from neighbouring Bridgwater and Wellington. This found that 61% of Bridgwater's residents and 82% of Wellington's residents shop in Taunton for comparison goods[10], reflecting the importance of Taunton as a retail centre to a wide catchment area.

Summary

5.25 Both Taunton and Bridgwater enjoy a healthy supply of jobs for the working age population, although closer analysis shows that in and out commuting persist. This is inevitable as people search out job opportunities to suit their skills that may not be available in their place of residence. Nevertheless, a future strategy for Taunton should seek to maintain a good balance between employment and the working age population.

5.26 In employment terms, Taunton is more self sufficient that Bridgwater, and Wellington displays dormitory settlement characteristics. Mutual relationships exist between Bridgwater and Taunton for work.

5.27 The analysis of the town centres of Taunton and Bridgwater has shown that they perform different roles. Taunton town centre is larger, has a greater retail offer and records higher rates of expenditure than Bridgwater which has a high incidence of value retailing.

5.28 To some extent there is competition between the centres, because Taunton includes Bridgwater in its retail catchment area. However, because of their different roles, further enhancement of the retail offer in Taunton, whilst unlikely to support Bridgwater's retail diversification, is unlikely to contribute to further deterioration either and the type of retail opportunities (particularly larger national multiples) seeking to locate in Taunton and unlikely to be attracted to Bridgwater.

5.29 Given the competition from other centres and the leakage from Taunton, Taunton needs to improve the environmental quality and retail offer in the town centre. Whilst this is not expected to benefit Bridgwater's town centre, if successful would help to reduce leakage out of the sub-area, and potentially shortening travelling distances for some shopping trips to centres such as Bristol further away. Further boost to the quality and range of shopping opportunities and to the shopping experience in Taunton will benefit residents across the sub-area.

[10] CB Hillier Parker (1999) *Taunton Deane Retail Capacity Study*

5.30 Given the distances to Exeter and Bristol, and the wide catchment area Taunton serves, it is vital that Taunton continues to satisfy these needs, and promotes the variety and quality of retail provision, for the benefit of Taunton, Wellington and Bridgwater residents and the wider rural area as a whole.

5.31 Bridgwater is an important centre in its own right, serving the town and the surrounding rural area. A future strategy for Bridgwater should seek to maintain the important role that it plays for its local catchment, and as a minimum should seek to maintain its ranking and performance.

6 Economic potential

Introduction

6.1 The future economic performance of Taunton and its wider area will have direct implications for population change and subsequently, the creation of new households. A strategic objective for forward planning has always been to attempt to balance the amount of housing in an area with job opportunities. Any future strategy for Taunton will need to consider the effect of future economic performance on this relationship.

6.2 This section of the report considers the economic situation of Taunton, both now and in the future. This assessment is based on three main components:

- a series of consultations with key individuals to provide contextual information, ideas and views on the strengths and weaknesses of the Taunton and neighbouring economies

- analysis of recent trends, particularly employment data

- analysis of other recent economic assessment work that has been carried out for the county of Somerset and for Taunton.

6.3 In making our assessment, we have been greatly assisted by information from the following organisations:

- Economic Development Department, Taunton Deane Borough Council
- Regeneration Directorate, Sedgemoor District Council
- Taunton Town Centre Management
- Express Park Limited.

6.4 Our assessment has also been informed by a number of studies as follows:

- Spatial Dynamics Final Report
- The Regional Economic Strategy for the South West (2003-2012)
- Travel to Work and Urban Areas in the South West (Draft Report)
- The Somerset Economic Strategy (draft) 2004
- Taunton UDF Appendix – Economic Assessment (2003).

Economic potential of delivering the vision

6.5 Taunton Deane district is characterised by low unemployment at just 1.3% of the working age population in 2003, and exceptionally high economic activity - almost 90% of the working age population in 2003 were working. Qualifications held by Taunton Deane residents are relatively good and the percentage of those employed with NVQ4+ qualifications compare similarly with national and regional rates. However, there is a concern that in order to respond to the needs of new industry and to support continued economic vitality of the town, there is a need for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce[11]. There is also a need to address the exodus of young, skilled people for higher education who tend not to return.

[11] Learning and Skills Council Somerset (2002) *Somerset's statement of learning and skills needs.*

6.6 Taunton Deane's economy has experienced strong growth over the decade 1991 – 2001. The economic assessment of Taunton for the Taunton Urban Design Framework[12] concluded that the overall picture is of a relatively healthy and robust economy but a lack of dynamism exists.

6.7 A more detailed analysis of employment trends and of the performance of the various economic sectors in Taunton and Bridgwater is presented below. Travel to Work Areas (TTWA) provide a better measure of the local economies of towns, and therefore, the first part of the analysis focuses on TTWAs. The Taunton TTWA is presented in figure 6.1.

Recent employment trends by TTWAs 1991 – 2001

6.8 Looking first at total employment, there was substantial employment growth during the decade in Taunton, performing fairly closely with the regional average, and well above the national average.

	Job growth	Job growth (%)
Taunton TTWA	7,824	18.2
Bridgwater TTWA	5,081	19.0
SW Region	328,200	18.8
Great Britain	3,124,062	14.1

Figure 6.2 Employment growth 1991 - 2001

6.9 In the Taunton TTWA, the main growth sectors were other services (including personal services, creative industries, voluntary sector), distribution, hotels and catering, business services, education and health. Manufacturing employment in Taunton did increase by a small amount, contrary to national and regional trends. Employment declined in utilities, construction, transport and communications, financial services and public administration.

	Job growth	Job growth (%)
Other services	1,414	120.9
Hotels & catering	1,206	46.9
Business services	1,480	33.8
Education	1,198	31.2
Distribution	2,185	27.6
Manufacturing	954	23.6
Health services	756	10.1

Figure 6.3 Taunton employment growth sectors 1991 - 2001

6.10 Turning to Bridgwater, in percentage terms, table 6.2 shows that the economy of Bridgwater performed slightly better than Taunton. In terms of absolute numbers, Taunton TTWA is bigger, with a total employment of 50,802 in 2001 and gained more jobs than Bridgwater TTWA, which is about two thirds of its size.

[12] TOR and RTP - *Economic Assessment - Taunton Urban Design Framework Appendix* (2003)

6.11 Bridgwater's growth sectors are set out in the table below.

	No. of additional jobs	No. of additional jobs (%)
Public administration	750	131.3
Health services	1,715	88.5
Distribution	2,029	43.9
Education	890	43.7
Transport & communications	504	35.8
Other services	321	30.7
Business services	263	12.8
Hotels & catering	327	11.4

Figure 6.4 Bridgwater employment growth sectors 1991 - 2001

6.12 Employment in the Bridgwater TTWA declined in manufacturing, utilities, construction, and financial services.

6.13 A full set of 1991 - 2001 employment change data is found in figure E1, appendix 1.

Comparing economic performance in Taunton and Bridgwater with regional and national trends

6.14 These sectoral figures need to be assessed against regional and national totals. Small sectors have been excluded from this analysis. A full breakdown of this analysis can be found in figure E1, appendix 1.

Manufacturing

6.15 Manufacturing employment declined nationally (by 13.7%) but employment in the South West was stable over the decade. Against this background, Bridgwater has lost a significant amount of "traditional", low value-added manufacturing employment (-11.6%) whereas Taunton has gained a significant amount of relatively high-tech engineering and pharmaceutical employment (+23.6%). This is interesting because Bridgwater is "supposed" to be the industrial town and Taunton the service centre. If the trends of the last decade were to continue, Taunton TTWA would have more manufacturing employment than Bridgwater TTWA by the year 2008.

Distribution

6.16 There has been significant employment growth nationally in the distribution sector and even more so in the South West during the decade, in both wholesale and retail distribution (+24.6% in the South West as a whole). Distribution is a large sector in Bridgwater because of inward investment by transportation, logistics, and wholesale distribution companies. This accounted for 6,651 jobs in the town in 2001. Growth over the decade was 43.9%. In Taunton this sector is even larger (10,093 jobs in 2001) but includes a higher proportion of retailing. Growth over the decade was lower, at 27.6%.

Hotels and catering

6.17 Again, this sector has seen significant growth nationally (+17.6%) but this is already a very large sector in the South West (almost 160,000 jobs in 2001), so the growth rate in the region was a relatively modest 5.6%. In Taunton there has been considerable inward investment in hotels, particularly related to the M5. The past decade saw employment in this sector grow by over 1,200 jobs or 46.9%. Growth in Bridgwater was more modest at 11.4% (and only 327 jobs).

Transport and communications

6.18 This has been another growth sector nationally and regionally, with the most dynamic growth coming from telecommunications development. Nationally employment grew by 11.3% over the decade, whereas in the South West the growth rate was significantly higher at 18%. It might be expected that Taunton would have benefited from this but in fact employment fell in this sector by 9% over the last decade. This is probably a conflation of employment decline in some traditional transportation sectors, and only modest growth in telecommunications. Bridgwater fared much better, with employment growth of 35.8% (over 500 jobs) so that the total employment in this sector (1,903) is approaching Taunton's total (2,291).

Financial services

6.19 This was the boom sector of the 1980's but this has long since peaked. Employment nationally in this sector grew only slightly over the decade, and in the South West, employment actually fell by 3%. Taunton managed to attract inward investment in this sector in the 1980's but employment has declined slightly since 1991. In Bridgwater this sector is very small and also declining.

Business services

6.20 Due to out-sourcing and the growth of the information society, increasing use of consultants and professional services of all kinds, this sector is currently the most dynamic nationally and regionally, approaching 60% employment growth over the decade. Employment growth has tended to be greatest in the larger cities and therefore, Taunton's 33.8% growth (1,480 jobs) is a very creditable performance for a market town and service centre. Bridgwater's growth was much more modest at 12.8% and the sector is relatively small in this town.

Public administration

6.21 Employment in central and local government and their agencies has been in decline for some time both nationally and regionally. In the South West as a whole, employment declined by 11.0% over the decade. This is a very large sector in Taunton (over 4,500 jobs) which experienced a very slight decline of 1.6% over the decade. In Bridgwater, this is a relatively small sector but one which saw significant growth during the decade (by 131.3% or 750 jobs), albeit from a very low base.

Education

6.22 Employment in the education sector has also been growing strongly nationally, and even more so, regionally, as the imperatives of the knowledge economy drive more resources into this sector. Growth in the South West over the decade was a massive 44%. In Taunton, where this sector is already well developed, the growth rate was more modest at 31.2% (1,198 jobs). In Bridgwater employment in this sector is less but the growth rate was higher at 43.7% (890 jobs) which may indicate some catching-up is taking place.

Health and social services

6.23 This is another growth sector nationally, driven in part by increased demands from an aging population, and also by increased investment in health service provision. Nationally, employment in this sector grew by 15.3% over the decade, and by rather more (19.4%) in the South West with its relatively ageing population. Employment growth in Taunton was a relatively modest 10.1% but this sector is already very well developed in Taunton with over 8,200 employees. In Bridgwater the growth in employment has been very significant (88.5% or 1,715 jobs) and this sector saw the biggest number of new jobs of any sector apart from distribution.

Other services

6.24 This sector is a bit of a mix of personal services and the voluntary sector, but does also include some key growth sectors, particularly the creative industries (visual and performing arts, some publishing, music etc). Employment grew nationally by 39.7% over the decade, and by slightly more in the South West region. This sector also tends to be located disproportionately in the larger cities, and is relatively small in both Taunton and Bridgwater, especially the latter. However, employment in this sector is growing strongly in Taunton (by 120.9% from a low base) but by less than the regional average in Bridgwater (30.7%).

Bridgwater and Taunton - competition or complementary?

6.25 The overall picture is of two neighbouring economies with complementary strengths to some extent, but which are also in competition for inward investment and business growth generally. This is probably a healthy situation and the temptation to strive for a simplistic solution, whereby certain sectors are allocated to towns, should be avoided. In any case, the market will ignore any such strictures.

6.26 Clearly Taunton will want to build on its considerable strengths as a service centre, both for businesses and the resident population. And it can do this by improving its office accommodation, expanding its retail offer, developing more entertainment and leisure facilities, and attracting more of the creative industries. At the same time, Taunton will certainly want to hold on to the technology-based manufacturing companies that it already has, and perhaps seek to attract more. As its population continues to grow, so will the demand for education and health services.

6.27 Bridgwater has a more difficult growth trajectory, as it needs to correct more imbalances in its employment structure. It also need to improve its educational performance and the skills of its resident population if it is to attract more knowledge-based activities. However, its relative success in attracting additional employment in communications services and health services, performing better than Taunton's in both sectors, bodes well for diversification away from low-skill distribution and manufacturing sector jobs. In the retail sector, Bridgwater will have to differentiate its offer from that of Taunton, and will also face strong competition in terms of leisure and entertainment activities.

6.28 With both towns seeking to build on their strengths and overcome structural weaknesses, it might be the case that competition between them will increase. In that situation, the town that can make employment land of the right quality available more easily could well have an advantage.

Analysis by main towns: 1995-2002

6.29 The previous sections have examined the performance of the local economies as based on their travel to work areas. The following statistics are based on a comparison of the urban wards of the main towns[13] and surrounding rural areas in Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane, which adds a useful additional perspective on relative rates of employment growth.

6.30 In terms of growth in total employment, the league tables are interesting. Figure E2, appendix 1 shows these statistics in full. Taking the highest first, this is summarised as follows:

	Job growth	Job growth (%)
Axbridge/Cheddar	575	24.2
Rural areas in Sedgemoor	1,343	23.9
Rural areas in Taunton Deane	822	22.8
Wellington	657	17.9
Bridgwater	3,026	17.7
Highbridge & Burnham	530	10.6
Taunton	2,054	5.5

Figure 6.5 Growth in employment by ward 1995 - 2002

6.31 The higher percentage growth rates in the rural areas and smaller towns are partly a function of the smaller baseline numbers but this does not explain the relative dynamism of Bridgwater compared to Taunton.

6.32 Closer analysis of the ward data shows that significant growth has taken place in Blackdown and Neroche wards, which are on the M5 corridor but related to Taunton. In these two wards, this amounts to an increase of over 400 jobs which would put up the Taunton total somewhat. However, most of the growth in the rural parts of Taunton Deane has been in the small towns of Wiveliscombe and Milverton.

6.33 A similar phenomena has been operating in the rural parts of Sedgemoor, but to a greater extent. Rural wards along the M5 corridor and around the edge

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[13] Taunton wards as at 1995: Bishop's Hull, Corneytrowe, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove, Fairwater, Halcon, Holway, Lyngford, Manor, Priory and Wilton, Pyrland, Rowbarton, Trinity, Trull and West Monkton wards. Since 1995, ward boundaries have been reviewed. Bridgwater wards: Central, Eastover, Hamp, North Petherton, Pawlett and Puriton, Quantock, Sandford, Sydenham, and Victoria wards.

of Bridgwater have seen employment increase by more than 1,000 jobs. Employment in rural coastal areas (Berrow) appears to have declined.

6.34 Whilst over a slightly different time period, this analysis supports the findings of the previous section and raises the question as to whether employment in Taunton has in fact been constrained. It may be that some growth that might have gone to Taunton may have gone to neighbouring towns or rural wards. Wellington for example seems to have faired reasonably well, as has Highbridge and Burnham and these towns are perceived to be depressed areas.

6.35 Looking at the district totals, between 1995 and 2002, employment in Taunton Deane only increased by 7.9% (3,533 jobs), whereas in Sedgemoor the increase was 18.6% (5,474 jobs).

Sectoral growth patterns in the main towns 1995 - 2002

6.36 Looking at each of these five main town in turn, the sectoral growth patterns are interesting. In Taunton, the main growth sectors were distribution, hotels and catering and business services - as was found in the 1991 – 2001 TTWA analysis.

6.37 In Bridgwater, the main growth sectors were transport and communications and public sector services, with slight growth in distribution, hotels and catering. Some of the growth in distribution, hotels and catering evident within the TTWA has clearly gone to other towns such as Highbridge or to rural wards along the M5 corridor. Manufacturing employment within Bridgwater declined significantly as noted previously.

6.38 In Wellington the main growth sectors were distribution, hotels and catering, public services and other services, though manufacturing employment also increased slightly. Employment declined in financial and business services and transport and communications.

6.39 In Highbridge and Burnham the pattern was similar to Wellington except that manufacturing employment declined slightly. In Axbridge and Cheddar which are more closely linked to the North Somerset economy, there was substantial growth in all sectors except financial and business services, and transport and communications.

6.40 Again, the overall picture is one of complementary town economies, with the smaller towns and some rural areas (but not all) showing more employment growth than might perhaps have been expected. Whether this is due simply to motorway sprawl, edge of town developments, or to the availability of employment land is not totally clear at this stage.

Taunton future economic growth scenarios

6.41 The trends analysis above has shown that employment in the Taunton TTWA grew by 18.2 over the decade 1991-2001 (an increase of just over 7,800 jobs). The percentage and actual figures for Taunton Deane District were very similar (18.6% and around 7,350 jobs). These growth percentages were also in line with the averages for Somerset and the region.

6.42 If recent trends were to continue, then the Taunton area could expect to gain an additional 20,000 jobs by 2026. However, most forecasters and commentators are reluctant to assume that past trends will continue, and have taken a more cautious view. However, there is no evidence from our consultations of any immediate slow down in demand, although there are concerns that supply-side constraints (in particular, the availability of employment land in the right location and of the right quality) may restrict growth in the future in and around Taunton.

6.43 Our approach to scenario-building has therefore been to closely reflect past trends in projecting the period 2001-2011, then to adopt lower growth rates. Specifically, the sectoral growth rates we have adopted are as follows:

Manufacturing

6.44 Employment declines by 10% (500 jobs) to 2011 then stabilises. This reflects the desire of the local authority to hold onto its advanced manufacturing sector but allows for some downsizing.

Construction

6.45 Employment increases by 500 up to 2026 to reflect increased construction activity, particularly in housebuilding.

Distribution

6.46 Employment increases at the rate of 22% which is slightly below trend for the first decade to 2011, then the rate of increase drops to around 10%, giving a total increase of 4,000 jobs by 2026. This allows for Taunton's continued expansion as a retailing and distribution centre for a wide area but assumes at some point there will be a falling off in growth in this sector.

Hotels and catering

6.47 There has been a large recent expansion in hotel and catering employment and we have assumed that this will continue but not as rapidly. We have allowed for an additional 600 jobs in the period to 2011 and a further 450 jobs thereafter.

Transport and communications

6.48 Employment declined slightly in this sector in Taunton and there was some evidence that jobs might be transferring to Bridgwater. Nationally this sector is not expected to grow significantly in future so we have assumed no overall growth. Some activities will probably downsize while others, particularly in telecommunications, will take on new employees.

Financial services

6.49 Employment also declined slightly in this sector in Taunton over the decade and downsizing has become a feature of some activities in this sector, so again we have assumed no overall growth.

Business services

6.50 This sector is predicted to grow significantly nationally and has been growing very rapidly in Taunton. We have allowed for this trend to continue to 2011 (an increase of 25% or 1,500 jobs), followed by a further increase of 1,500 jobs in the following decade and a half.

Public administration

6.51 Employment in this sector is declining nationally, and this is reflected in Taunton to an extent. However, the town has managed to hold onto most of its employment in what is one of the larger sectors. The only growth is likely to come from Government relocations, and as Taunton has performed quite well in this regard and is considered as a suitable location we have allowed for an increase of 500 jobs in the second period.

Education

6.52 This is expected to continue being a growth sector, driven by the demands of the information economy and the need for better lifetime skill development. Employment has grown rapidly in Taunton and we have allowed for this to continue to 2011 (an increase of 20% or 1,000 jobs), with a slower increase thereafter. This allows for the planned expansion and development of the further education sector, amongst other things.

Health

6.53 Employment in this sector is also rising, driven by increased demand for health services (from an ageing population) and increased investment in healthcare provision. Employment has not grown as rapidly in Taunton recently as in some neighbouring areas, but we have allowed for trend growth to continue with an additional 750 jobs to 2011 and 900 to 2026.

Other services

6.54 This very mixed sector has been growing rapidly in Taunton and we have allowed for this to continue to 2011, followed by rather slower growth.

6.55 The net result of these assumptions is shown below in terms of sectoral job gain to 2011 and 2026 and presented graphically in figure 6.7. The full table of results can be found in figure E3, appendix 1.

sector	**Growth 2001-11**	**Growth 2011 - 26**	**Growth 2001-26**
Manufacturing	- 500	0	- 500
Construction	+ 200	+ 300	+ 500
Distribution	+2,200	+1,800	+ 4,000
Hotels etc	+ 600	+ 450	+ 1,050
Trans/Comm	0	0	0
Financial	0	0	0
Business	+1,500	+ 1,500	+ 3,000
Admin	0	+ 500	+ 500
Education	+ 1,000	+ 1,125	+ 2,125
Health	+750	+ 900	+ 1,650
Other services	+1,250	+ 1,500	+ 2,750
total	**+ 7,000**	**+ 8,075**	**+ 15,075**

Figure 6.6 Taunton TTWA employment projections 2001 - 2026

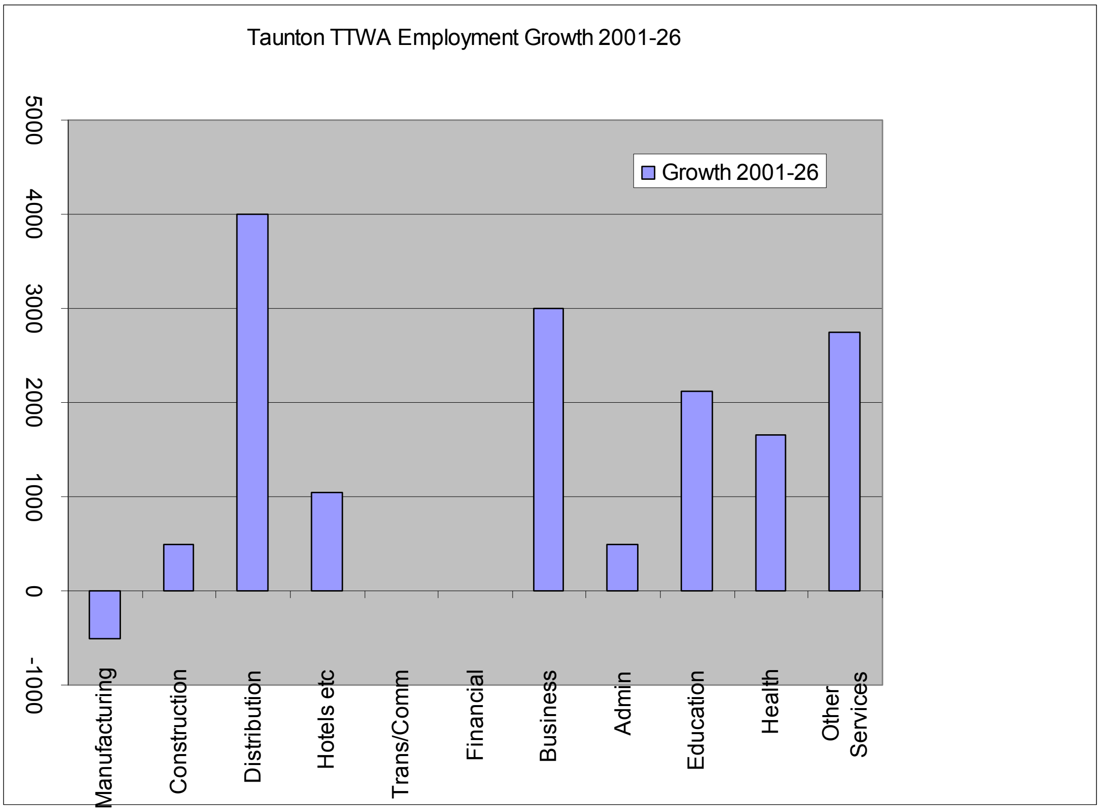


Figure 6.7- Taunton TTWA employment growth 2001-26

6.56 This gain of 15,075[14] jobs by 2026 is equivalent to a growth rate of 30% over the 25-year period. Broken down by decades, the growth rate is 14% during the first decade, and almost 10% in the second decade, and pro rata for 2021-2026. These rates represents a considerable slowing down from the previous decade, although the net gain in number of jobs between 2001 and 2011 (7,000) is not far below the previous decade's gain of 7,800.

Distributing job growth around the area

6.57 The town (based on ward) level analysis has shown that employment since 1995 has been increasing more rapidly outside Taunton than within it. This supports the view expressed during the consultations that growth may be being inhibited in Taunton itself by land supply constraints. A noticeable recent development has been the rapid growth of business parks near the motorway junction at Wellington (Chelston) and at Bridgwater.

6.58 Figure 6.8 shows how recent employment growth has been distributed. While Taunton accounted for over 80% of the District's employment in 2002, it only

[14] The total of 12,550 additional jobs to 2021 compares quite closely to the employment driven higher growth scenario in the 'RTP Taunton Vision Economic Assessment'. The main difference is that the RTP figure of 12,500 includes the self-employed (estimated at 7,300). So our total employment gain over the 20 years is approximately 13% higher than RTP's assessment.

took 58% of the District's growth since 1995. Smaller settlements like Wellington took far more than their share of growth and while this growth is small in absolute numbers it is not insignificant and does not include recent increases post-2002.

Sedgemore:	**1995-2002 % growth**	**Growth in no. of jobs**	**Propn of district (%)**	**Propn of area (%)**	**Propn of district growth (%)**	**Propn of area growth (%)**
Bridgwater	17.7	3,026	57.8	25.0	55.3	33.6
Highbridge & Burnham	10.6	530	15.2	6.6	9.7	5.9
Axbridge & Cheddar	24.2	575	8.1	3.5	10.5	6.4
Rural areas	23.9	1,343	19.0	8.2	24.5	14.9
Total	**18.6**	**5,474**	**100.0**	**43.3**	**100.0**	**60.8**
Taunton Deane:						
Taunton	5.5	2,054	81.3	46.1	58.14	22.8
Wellington	17.9	657	9.5	5.4	18.60	7.3
Rural areas	22.8	822	9.2	5.2	23.27	9.1
Total	**7.9**	**3,533**	**100.0**	**56.7**	**100.00**	**39.2**
Total both districts	**11.9**	**9,007**		**100.0**		**100.0**

Figure 6.8 Share of employment growth 1995 – 2002 (employment – 000s)

Employment (000's)	***Employment growth scenario a***	***Employment growth scenario b***	***Employment growth scenario c***	***Employment growth scenario d***
Sedgemoor:				
Bridgwater				
Highbridge & Burnham				
Axbridge & Cheddar				
Rural areas				
Total		**10,251**		**14,388**
Taunton Deane:				
Taunton	12,256	10,914	8,764	5,399
Wellington	1,432	1,278	2,803	1,727
Rural areas	1,387	1,231	3,507	2,161
Total	**15,075**	**13,424**	**15,075**	**9,287**
Total both districts		**23,675**		**23,675**

Figure 6.9 projected share of employment according to 4 trend based scenarios

6.59 Looking at both districts together, Taunton took less than a quarter of the area's growth, while Bridgwater took a third. These figures suggest it may be hard to accommodate 15,075 additional jobs within the Taunton TTWA area up to 2026, let alone within Taunton.

6.60 Using the data in figure 6.8, we can develop a number of different scenarios for the distribution of employment growth up to 2026 (presented in figure 6.8). Under employment growth scenario a, Taunton maintains its share of employment (as a proportion of the District total) and gains 12,250 jobs. Under employment growth scenario b Taunton maintains its share of the area employment (as a proportion of both District totals) and gains just over 10,900 jobs. Under employment growth scenario c, Taunton maintains its share of the growth of employment in the District but loses market share overall to other locations within Taunton Deane; the result is a gain of just over 8,750 jobs. Under employment growth scenario d, Taunton only manages to maintain its share of the growth of employment in the area and gets an additional 5,400 jobs. Under this scenario a good deal of the growth is diverted to neighbouring Sedgemoor as well as to other towns within Taunton Deane.

6.61 These scenarios are illustrative rather than indicative. For some sectors, Bridgwater would be an alternative location, for others this is less likely. It all depends on the exact location of the employment site. With new business parks being developed outside Bridgwater, the proposed developments at North Petherton, and the expansion of Taunton at Monkton Heathfield, the tendency for the two towns' employment zones to approach each other appears to be intensifying.

6.62 If the realisation of a PUA status and a strong economy is the imperative for Taunton, then a future strategy for the town would need to examine land supply issues that some have raised as a constraint.

Employment land requirements

6.63 As the previous analysis has shown, if Taunton performs as it has in the past, it will attract 81% of employment growth in the Taunton TTWA. Assuming this is even across employment sectors, this equates to the creation of 3100 jobs in business, public administration and other services sectors requiring office space[15]. Working to an employment density of 20 square metres per employee, this equates to a need for 62,000 square metres of office space. The UDF identified potential for about 60,000 square metres of office space as part of the masterplans prepared for Firepool, the Cricket Ground and Tangier. Whilst this would appear to fall short, it is marginal to require additional office space in the extension. Besides which, there will be some variance in the actual land use outputs, compared with the masterplan proposals.

6.64 There is therefore sufficient potential within the town centre to satisfy long term office based (Use Class B1 a) needs. On this basis, in the interests of promoting accessibility to employment land from across Taunton and concentrating high trip generating office units in accessible locations, employment provision for office space will come forward in the town centre.

6.65 The 'other services' sector comprises other community, social and personal service activities. The existing composition of this sector in Taunton comprises 12% 'activities of membership organisations' (requiring office uses and allowance is made in para 6.63), 21% recreational and cultural activities, sewage and refuse disposal etc 25%, sporting activities 17%, and other service activities (eg, hairdressing, funeral activities, and washing and dry

[15] Taunton TTWA employment forecast to 2026 for financial, business and public administration is 3500 + 330 jobs (ie 12%) of 'other services' sector uses that are likely to require office space. 81% of 3830 jobs = 3100 office based jobs for Taunton town.

cleaning), 26%. It is expected that the recreational and cultural uses will come forward in the town centre, particularly on the Tangier and Cricket Club UDF sites. Other service activities which respond to localised demands (such as hairdressers, funeral directors etc) are expected to come forward in the local/district centres of the urban extensions. The demand for the provision of sporting activities as part of the extension is something that would need to be worked up with the developer. Nevertheless, some additional provision of new sporting and fitness facilities is included in the redevelopment of the Cricket Club.

6.66 Employment in the transport and communication and distribution sectors require good access to the strategic road network and therefore employment land for B8 purposes could be developed as part of an urban extension. 490 jobs are forecast in Taunton for the period to 2026, with a land requirement of about 6 hectares[16].

6.67 Overall manufacturing as a sector is predicted to decline in Taunton. However, this masks subtle changes that have been taking place in the sector in the past. It is expected that if these past trends continue, future changes will include some loss of traditional low value added manufacturing activity, with some increase in advanced manufacturing employment in sub-sectors such as hi-tech engineering and pharmaceuticals.

6.68 This will have consequences for future employment land needs. Sites currently taken up by traditional manufacturing may become surplus and will not necessarily be suitable for advanced manufacturing which tends to require a different type of location, often with good access to the strategic road network, and a high quality environment. The soon to be adopted Taunton Deane Local Plan allocates 16 hectares of employment land at Monkton Heathfield which should go some way to addressing immediate needs.

6.69 In addition to existing provision, the RTP Economic Assessment made an allowance for B2 (manufacturing) uses of 25% of B8 provision. This amounted to about 2 hectares for B2 uses. Using the same assumption for this study, 25% of 6 hectares (for B8), also amounts to 2 hectares for B2 uses. Adding this to the 6 hectares for B8 uses leads to a total requirement of 8 hectares for B2 and B8 uses in Taunton that would be required as part of a sustainable urban extension. This is slightly higher than the RTP assessment which recommended provision be made for 8 hectares for B1 and B8 uses for the Borough as a whole.

Employment use	Future land use requirements
B1	62,000 sq m (town centre UDF)
B2/B8	8 ha (urban extension)

Figure 6.9 – summary of B use class requirements

6.70 For the purposes of the LDF, a detailed qualitative assessment of employment land, particularly for B1 and B2 uses is required to determine a

[16] The employment sector referred to as 'distribution' throughout this report also comprises retail trade and repair of motor vehicles etc. Wholesale and distribution comprises 15% of this sector in Taunton. Therefore of the 4000 additional jobs predicted to arise in the 'distribution' sector, 81.3% will be attracted to Taunton, of which only 15% will require B8 premises. Assuming an employment density of 45 sq m per worker, single storey development and a plot ratio of 35%, the land requirement for B8 is about 6 ha.

more accurate indication of future employment land requirements, compared with the quality and diversity of existing employment land. This assessment may identify that in order to provide for more choice, that this figure of 8 hectares should be higher.

6.71 Aside from B use class needs, some education, health, retail and 'other service' based employment will arise in the urban extensions locations as new schools, health facilities, local shopping and other recreation and community uses are developed. However, the main focus for office, cultural, retail and leisure employment will be the town centre, in the implementation of the UDF. Considerable increases in jobs in the health and education sectors will also take place at Musgrove Park, the regeneration of Firepool (for new healthcare surgeries), as well as existing further education colleges within the town.

Socio-economic profile

Population

6.72 Figure E4 (appendix 1) shows that the population structure in Taunton is almost identical in composition to the District. Given that population projections are only available by district, a mainly district based analysis is presented below.

6.73 Between 1991 and 2001, the population of Taunton Deane grew by 9%, and the town of Taunton (14 wards) by 7.9%. This is as a result of net in-migration. As at 2001, this brought the population for Taunton Deane to 102,299, and 63,536 for Taunton. Taunton has experienced faster population growth than the region (6.9%) and Great Britain (7.1%). Exeter and Bristol saw 13.2% and 1.2% respectively over the same decade.

6.74 Somerset County Council's population projections to 2026, forecast an increase of 16,700 people, to a total population of 119,200. This rise of 17.3% (see figure A4) compares fairly closely with the South West Regional Assembly's net migration scenario that reflects longer term past trends (figure A5). Migration rates into Taunton Deane have increased to a greater degree in more recent years and the SWRA short term net migration scenario suggest that if recent trends continue, the population of Taunton Deane could rise by as much as 27,688 people (27%) to a total population of 125,723.

6.75 Compared with the national situation, the age profile of Taunton and Taunton Deane comprises a larger proportion of 50 – 54 year olds and over 65s, and fewer 20 – 39 year olds. The neighbouring PUAs of Bristol and Exeter have a larger proportion of younger people.

6.76 The Somerset County Council projections for Taunton Deane forecast that there will be changes in the make-up of the population age structure. These include:

- very minor increases in most younger age categories, but most pronounced in the 20 – 24 and 25 – 29 age group.
- decreases in the 45 – 54 age group

- significant increases in the over 55s, and particularly pronounced in the over 85s

6.77 On the whole, the population will continue to age, however the proportion of working age residents is expected to stay fairly constant. In 2026, about 60% of the total population in Taunton Deane is expected to be of working age, compared with 59% at 2001.

Households

6.78 The number of households in Taunton Deane has risen by 14.8% in the period 1991 – 2001, at a higher rate than the region (12.1% change). This is much higher than the population change rates, evidence that household size has been decreasing and therefore, more households are required per resident population. Over this same period, Taunton Deane experienced much higher rates of single person households formation (31.6%), compared with 27.3% regionally. The SWRA forecast that household size in Taunton Deane will decrease from 2.27 in 2001, to 2.18 persons per household by 2026.

Deprivation

6.79 The Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that the wards of Comeytrowe, Taunton Holway, Bishops Hull, Trull and West Monkton are the least deprived in Taunton. Taunton Halcon is in the 10% most deprived and Taunton Lyngford is in the 20% most deprived wards nationally against a number of indicators, including employment, health, income and child poverty.

Summary

6.80 Taunton and Bridgwater have both experienced high rates of employment growth over the last decade, mirroring regional trends. Closer analysis of Taunton suggests that these rates are expected to continue, albeit at slightly lower rates after 2011. This confers with other research recently undertaken for Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

6.81 The job growth forecast for the Taunton TTWA is an additional 15,075 jobs. If past rates of distribution are to continue, 81% of this growth (12,256 jobs) are expected to be attracted to the town of Taunton.

6.82 Due to net in-migration, the population in Taunton has increased at rates above the regional average. This is evidence that the town is a popular place to live. Forecasts predict that the population of Taunton will continue to increase, although at slightly lower rates (0.65% per annum), compared with rates between 1991 – 2001 (0.79% per annum).

6.83 Household size is getting smaller, and so any future strategy for the town will need to make provision for smaller house types, and more households per resident of the population.

6.84 The relative prosperity of the town masks areas of deprivation that are ranked in the worst 20% deprived wards nationally. The future strategy could seek to divert new development close to these wards with the intention of improving accessibility and opportunities for better education, recreation and health facilities arising from provision made as part of an urban extension.

7 Maximising urban potential

7.1 National planning policy requires that brownfield opportunities are identified and other things being equal, used before greenfield sites. Therefore it is appropriate that the study reflect the amount of development that is expected to come forward within the Taunton urban area, before it considers the need for greenfield urban extensions.

7.2 In order to calculate the scale of urban extensions associated with the three growth scenarios, housing completions, dwellings under construction, and planning commitments (including planning consents and housing land allocations) and estimated future housing supply must be subtracted from the overall housing requirement. Under current planning policy, this amounts to a supply of 6839 homes within the urban area of Taunton to 2026. This is presented below:

Completions 2001 - 2004	under construction	Planning permission	Local plan allocations without consent	Large known windfalls without consent	Estimated small site contribution 2004 - 2026	Total supply 2001 - 2026
795	153	429	2470	1650	1342	**6839**

Figure 7.1 Taunton housing land supply 2001 - 2026

7.3 In addition to what is already being built, and current Local Plan housing allocations, other housing development will take place in the future, from a combination of sources, such as small undeveloped plots, intensification of existing housing, or redeveloping land that is currently used for something else, for example, an office or a retail unit.

7.4 This study has examined the work previously undertaken for Taunton Deane Borough Council on the potential for further housing to come forward within the boundaries of the existing urban area[17]. The urban capacity study (UCS) estimates housing potential to 2011. Some of the sites identified in the UCS have since been allocated in the Local Plan, but those that remain undeveloped are included in the large known windfalls column in figure 7.1. To this number, we have added the housing potential identified to exist on the collection of Taunton UDF sites[18]. Small site windfalls have also been factored in, reflecting past rates of completions on previously developed land within the urban area.

7.5 Our view however is that this cannot provide a definite answer, because not all of the housing that may come forward can be identified and measured. This is because the TSAS is related to the period of the RSS, and it is simply impossible to predict what is going to happen in 25 years time – developments taking place now could not have been predicted 25 years ago.

7.6 This situation is not unusual, and is the best information we have at this point in time. Offsetting the 6839 dwellings supply against the three scenarios, the

[17] Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (2001) *Taunton Deane Urban Capacity Study*
[18] Firepool, Tangier, cricket club and High Street

scale of urban extensions associated with scenarios 1 – 3 are 8,250, 10,900 and 13,500 dwellings respectively.

	Total housing requirement	Residual housing requirement (rounded to nearest 50)
Scenario 1	15,100	8250
Scenario 2	17,725	10,900
Scenario 3	20,350	13,500

Figure 7.2 – residual housing requirement

7.7 Urban capacity studies tend to look forward 10 – 15 years, with reviews taking place about every 5 years. The Taunton Deane urban capacity study is already under review, with the results anticipated in August 2005. Taunton has a relatively prosperous housing market, and it is expected that the urban potential will comprise at least as many homes identified in the current urban capacity study, but that at this time, the future potential to 2026 cannot be predicted with any accuracy. The urban potential that materialises will have to be monitored and reviewed annually, with appropriate management and phasing arrangements put in place.

Taunton Urban Design Framework

7.8 In order to respond to Taunton's Priority Urban Area status and to ensure the delivery of high levels of growth, Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and the South West Development Agency commissioned an urban design framework for the town. This focused on the potential of previously developed land within town centre, focusing on four main areas of change offering the greatest scope for redevelopment including:

- Firepool
- Cricket Club/Safeway
- Tangier
- High Street.

7.9 At the same time, the UDF sought to consider improved linkages between these sites and around the town centre generally. These findings were used to inform proposals set out in the Taunton Transport Strategy Review.

7.10 The principles taken from the Taunton Vision that have guided the UDF strategy include:

- expanding the town centre
- extending the range of facilities to retain and attract young people and businesses
- realising the town's potential for new employment and maximising the potential for town centre living
- respecting the character of Taunton, enhancing its unique features and putting the river at the heart of the town centre
- maximising the potential for sustainable travel.

7.11 In examining development options for the four strategic town centre regeneration sites, for the UDF, a series of masterplans were drawn up. The main components of these masterplans are discussed below[19].

Firepool

7.12 Firepool comprises about 40 hectares of underused land, about half of which is vacant or undeveloped. The site encapsulates the railway station and therefore has high quality sustainable access. With its riverside location and good access, the site has the potential to be developed as a distinctive business location, but also incorporating a mix of other uses such as apartments, a bus interchange, heath care facilities, bars and restaurants. This site is considered to be key to changing the market perception of Taunton as a place to live and work.

Cricket Club/Safeway

7.13 Enlargement of the County Cricket Ground is necessary to enable it to host international matches. Redevelopment of the cricket ground and adjacent land could bring forward other uses such as new offices and apartments, with pubs, restaurants and specialist shopping taking advantage of the riverfront.

Tangier and cultural core

7.14 Tangier is an existing employment area with the potential to be redeveloped for small businesses, creative industries, and new cultural attractions including a new theatre, workshops, outdoor events space, a cinema, art gallery, a new museum, library and the reinstatement of a music venue . Apartments, restaurants, flexible office space and an extension of retail floorspace also form part of the design proposals.

High Street

7.15 New retail floorspace that will appeal to major national retailers will be concentrated at High Street – with a vision of a pedestrian friendly environment. The design proposals also incorporate living over the shop (LOTs) and a new bus station.

7.16 In **summary**, the UDF sites could deliver:

- 2,500 townhouses and apartments, of which 100 dwellings at Firepool and 100 dwellings at Tangier are allocated in the emerging Taunton Deane Local Plan
- 75,000 sqm of employment
- 60,000sqm of retail, hotel and conference facilities
- international cricket ground
- theatre and 3 screen cinema
- new library and cultural centre of excellence
- new bus station
- enhanced rail station and bus interchange
- 2,200 public parking spaces

[19] The UDF, including maps and design proposals can be found in full at www.taunton-vision.co.uk

- a network of cycle routes
- new footbridges
- over 2km of enhanced riverfront
- a new marina
- 35,000 sqm of new public spaces
- enhanced flood protection.

7.17 A feasibility study into these proposals recognise that given their scale and comprehensive nature, the public sector will need to lead on the implementation of the UDF.

7.18 A dedicated delivery team of five staff is to be in place by the Summer of 2005 to set in train these proposals. The feasibility study suggest that a large proportion of the outputs can be delivered by 2011, although, the completion of Tangier is not expected until 2012, and for Firepool, 2017 at the earliest. These are extensive areas, covering land in multiple ownerships, some of which are occupied and may require compulsory purchase.

7.19 The UDF is considered to be fundamental to rejuvenating the centre of Taunton and modernising its image as an attractive regional centre in which to live and for business. The delivery of the proposals in the UDF for Firepool, Tangier, the Cricket Ground and High Street form a major component of the immediate strategy for Taunton to 2011 and beyond to 2017. This is already partly addressed in the emerging Local Plan and will be the imperative for the Local Development Framework.

Taunton Transport Strategy Review

7.20 The Taunton Transport Strategy Review formed an integral part of the UDF/UES research. The Taunton Transport Strategy was published in March 2000, and to inform the content of Urban Design Framework/UES and the Local Transport Plan 2, Somerset County Council, in consultation with the Borough Council and SWRDA, commissioned the Taunton Transport Strategy Review (TTSR). The objectives of the TTSR are to:

- compile a baseline review of transport conditions
- review the existing transport strategy and its performance against the LTP objectives
- be integral with the production of the UDF/UES
- identify and assess performance of preferred strategy to support future aspirations for Taunton.

7.21 The preferred strategy includes proposals for the primary highway network, the town centre, public transport, parking, walking and cycling and travel plans and awareness raising. In summary, the main proposals in the TTSR comprise:

- a northern inner relief road connecting Wellington Road to Bridge Street with the aim of relieving congestion and improving access to Firepool - this is a long standing proposal that has been supported by the County and Borough Councils
- new bus priority measures to improve north-south links across the town and possibly a new bus station

- new park and ride sites at Silk Mills (under construction) and Cambria Farm.

7.22 Consultation into the TTSR in March 2004 found broad support for the stated objectives and the majority of the main proposals, except the Inner Relief Road, where opinion was split.

7.23 The comprehensive design proposals in the UDF designed a cultural quarter in the Tangier area including a theatre, cinema and an exciting range of other cultural facilities. But this is located on part of the route that the IRR would take. These schemes are not compatible, and the construction of the road would reduce the development potential of Tangier and significantly alter the character of the area. It was decided that a compromise solution be sought that retained the IIR in a much-modified form (less heavily engineered) whilst at the same time enabling the development of a cultural quarter. The 'Third Way' as it has become known, was subject to public consultation during October 2004, and received broad public support. The 'Third Way' is now an integral element of the TTSR, which has now received support from both county and district councils.

7.24 Having taken account of the brownfield potential, the next section of the report generates possible spatial options for delivering the greenfield residual housing requirements.

8 Devising options for locating development beyond Taunton's current boundaries

Introduction

8.1 For all the Taunton growth scenarios being tested, section 7 has calculated that there will be a need for a sustainable urban extension(s) to the town. In many other settlements, for decades, extensions to towns have been characterised by homogenous residential areas of unimaginative design. The UES set out to define a set of objectives for sustainable urban extensions. These attributes are re-presented in appendix 2 and are precisely the type of characteristics the study has in mind when it refers to 'sustainable' or 'large urban extensions'.

8.2 A set of spatial development options have been developed in order to test the feasibility and predicted impacts of the growth scenarios set out by the SWRA, and more particularly to assist in developing a strategy. These options have been developed following a process of:

- looking in the immediate vicinity of the Taunton urban area where the best opportunity lies for achieving proximity to the existing facilities and services
- taking account of the presence of environmental constraints, such as areas of flood risk and national landscape and nature conservation designations
- looking at the ability to absorb development in the landscape and with regard to the setting of the settlement, using a landscape character approach
- taking account of the strategic transport implications of development provision.

8.3 Land around the edge of Taunton has been subject to considerable examination in the Taunton Urban Extension Study. The quality of this work has been supported by Somerset County and Taunton Deane District Councils, and this study draws on a lot of this original fieldwork. The findings are reviewed below.

Strategic constraints

8.4 Taunton is surrounded by high grade agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a). National policy set out in PPS7 requires that high quality agricultural land is protected, and where its loss is unavoidable, that lower grades are used first, except where other sustainability considerations, such as biodiversity, landscape character and accessibility outweigh these matters. The loss of high grade agricultural land is unavoidable for Taunton and MAFF and the Inspector's Report into the Local Plan (2003) accepts that this should not prevent the town from growing. This is an issue for land in all directions and therefore, in the early sieving stages of identifying possible locations for development, no areas were discounted. Where they arise, disproportionate impacts on agricultural land have been considered in the strategic sustainability appraisal (section 15), alongside other sustainability considerations.

8.5 Just two areas – land to the east and west of the town following the river Tone – were sieved out immediately because they are liable to flooding (figure 8.1). PPG25 advocates a sequential approach that avoids undeveloped land liable to flooding, where there are other lower risk opportunities available. Because other lower risk opportunities do exist, the French Weir green wedge (west of the town centre) and including land to the west of Norton Fitzwarren, and land east of the M5 at Creech St Michael and Ruishton have been discounted.

FIGURE 8.1

8.6 Other than flooding and high grade agricultural land, the immediate vicinity of Taunton is unconstrained by strategic biodiversity or landscape designations. The Blackdown Hills AONB is approximately three kilometres to the south and the Quantocks AONB, about four kilometres to the north. The closest SSSI is about three kilometres from the edge of Taunton in a westerly direction. A second SSSI is found four kilometres to the south-east. These are sufficiently far out not to prevent urban extensions in these directions. However, it is noted that urban extensions to the north towards the Quantocks and due south of the M5 would have impacts on the views from Quantocks and Blackdown Hills AONBs.

8.7 SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites contain internationally important species. There are no SPAs (Special Protection Areas) or Ramsar sites close to Taunton, and the nearest SAC (Special Area of Conservation) is found at Hestercombe House, approximately two kilometres to the north of Taunton. Hestercombe House is designated as a SAC because of Lesser Horseshoe Bats, known to live and forage in the area. Any extensions in a northerly direction would need to consider the impacts on the bat population at Hestercombe House.

8.8 Despite the relative absence of strategic constraints, there are local environmental considerations that need to be taken into account.

Local environmental constraints and policy designations

8.9 In the absence of most other constraints, local landscape features have served as the main determinant in identifying the preferred locations for growth around the town. Therefore a brief review of the findings of the UES landscape analysis are summarised below:

- to the south east, beyond the motorway, the area is of wholly rural character but there are few significant landscape constraints. Depending on its scale and extent, development in this area could have impacts on views from the AONB. Stoke St Mary is an attractive village and it is possible that its rural setting could be accommodated within a sustainable urban extension

- the southern Vivary green wedge is an important local recreational resource and a footpath links the town centre with Cotlake Hill. The western edge of the green wedge provides an important link in maintaining the connection between Trull and the countryside. The green wedge was not considered suitable in the UES to accommodate a significant urban extension of 4000 dwellings. However, because of its proximity to the town centre, a small extension onto the south eastern part of the green wedge is considered to be a possibility

- an extension to the town beyond Comeytrowe would seem to be acceptable in landscape terms. North of the A38, there is a greater sense of openness and this area is considered to be more sensitive to development

- despite its designation in the Local Plan as a Special Landscape Feature, there is an opportunity to extend the built up area at Bishops Hull westwards slightly, without causing any significant landscape impact. This is because the urban edge is currently poorly defined and a small extension could serve to re-instate landscaping along the development edge

- the two Special Landscape Features and the hilltop settlement (scheduled ancient monument) constrain any significant development beyond Norton Fitzwarren. However, there may be some smaller possibilities in this direction

- north of Staplegrove, there is a small piece of land between the built up area and the Special Landscape Feature that could be developed without any serious landscape impact

- significant development in a northerly direction of the town is considered to have an adverse affect on the landscape setting of the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine and Pyrland Hall historic country house. Whilst the UES landscape assessment considers that this area is not suitable for accommodating a development of 4000 dwellings, there could be some potential to accommodate a smaller extension, without harming the setting of Cheddon Fitzpaine or Pyrland Hall

- land in the vicinity of Monkton Heathfield and south of the A3259 offers sufficient development potential to meet the strategic requirements of an urban extension.

8.10 Figures 8.2 - 8.5 present the key environmental constraints in and around Taunton.

INSERT FIGURE 8.2-8.5

8.11 Following a thorough environmental constraints check, the UES concluded that Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe were the preferred areas of search for a strategic urban extension of about 4000 homes.

8.12 We note from other findings in the landscape assessment that there a number of small scale extensions could also be developed at:

- Bishops Hull
- Land to the east of the Vivary Green Wedge
- North of Staplegrove
- North east of Pyrland
- Norton Fitzwarren.

8.13 The UES discounted land to the east of the motorway mainly because of concerns about overcoming the barrier of the M5 and integrating the development with the rest of the town, coupled with a lack of facilities and services in the area. But it was not ruled out as a long term option, and performed well on the basis of having no significant environmental constraints. The TSAS is testing much higher rates of growth than the UES, therefore, a greater critical mass of development in this area could overcome issues such as developing new infrastructure to facilitate access to Taunton town centre, as well as developing a self-contained extension, with a district centre and a range of services and facilities to meet needs arising from the development. For this reason, this area has been included as a possible spatial option in response to the high growth scenario 3.

8.14 Figure 8.6 shows the broad areas of search identified through this sieving process.

The spatial options

8.15 For testing purposes, options relating to the two extremes of the low and high growth scenarios are proposed. If the middle scenario were selected as the appropriate future strategy, then it could select from a combination of spatial options making up 2a or 2b but on a slightly smaller scale.

8.16 The spatial options comprise a mix of small and large extensions to the town, with each set focusing on a particular geographic cluster to enable infrastructure provision. These are described below.

Scenario 1 – continuation of RPG10

- Option 1a: development to the south of the town (about 7,250 dwellings)

  Option 1a includes a strategic urban extension at Comeytrowe (6000 – 6500 dwellings) as well a small extension at the Vivary Green Wedge (500 – 1000 dwellings). A concentration of development in the south could serve to support the development of a southern outer distributor road to improve access across the south of the town.

- Option 1b: development to the north of the town (about 7,250 dwellings)

  Option 1b comprises a number of extensions across the north of the town with the aim of supporting a northern outer distributor road, improving access across Taunton and beyond into West Somerset. This includes land at Monkton Heathfield (4000 dwellings) and land at Staplegrove and Pyrland (about 3000 dwellings).

Scenario 3 – high growth

- option 2a: development to the north and south of the town (about 12,500 dwellings)

  This spatial option combines 1a and 1b, with the onus on Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe, reducing pressure on the northern fringes at Staplegrove and Pyrland. This comprises east Vivary Green Wedge (500

– 1000 dwellings), Comeytrowe (6000-6500), Staplegrove (1000), Pyrland (1000), Monkton Heathfield (3300)

- option 2b: development to the east of the motorway (about 12,500 dwellings)

  All 12,500 residual housing development requirements would be met on a large scale extension to the east of the motorway, with the expectation that a self-sufficient extension was developed.

8.17 It is expected that about 1000 dwellings will come forward from smaller scale urban extensions, taking advantage of existing infrastructure and facilities, and which may have locational advantages in terms of proximity and accessibility to the town centre. For instance, there is potential in the vicinity of Bishops Hull and Norton Fitzwarren which could materialise in the Local Development Framework. Accessibility to existing facilities is a fundamental consideration for smaller urban extensions that are unlikely to support the provision of mixed uses and new services.

8.18 These options formed the basis for the consultation carried out for the Taunton Sub-Area Study.

Land use requirements associated with the possible urban extensions

8.19 The options have been described in terms of the number of dwellings so far, but for the larger areas of development at least there would be other activities included in the mix of land uses, and the amount of land the overall development would take has to be considered in determining the consequences of pursuing any of the options.

Community facilities

8.20 Open space, primary and secondary schools and other community facilities (likely to include a hall and health centre), would be provided as part of all of the extensions, subject to national and local standards where they exist. The precise requirement would be determined as part of the detailed planning for the site. Further analysis of education requirements is set out in section 14.

Retail and leisure provision

8.21 Options 1a, 1b and 2a, would be expected to comprise local centres at Comeytrowe and Monkton Heathfield, providing for local convenience shopping needs and local leisure uses, such as restaurants and pubs.

8.22 Option 2b is of a scale that should support a wider range of services in the form of a district centre, with a greater variety of convenience shopping and a supermarket. Given that option 2b is a considerable distance away from leisure and retail opportunities found in the town centre, there is an argument for enabling greater diversity of leisure uses in this location. But there are concerns that this would lead to circumstances diverting investment away from the town centre regeneration sites identified in the Taunton UDF. For this reason, in testing this option, leisure and retail provision in this location are assumed to be of a scale and type that served local needs only, rather than strategic needs for the town as a whole. This would mean that there would continue to be a dependence on the town centre for most specialist leisure uses.

Employment

8.23 Section 6 indicated that the sustainable urban extensions would need to make provision for about 8 hectares of B1b, B1c, B2 and B8 employment land. The most attractive location for the market would be at Monkton Heathfield to take advantage of good access to the strategic road network.

8.24 For testing purposes, these 8 hectares will come forward either at Comeytrowe (option 1a), Monkton Heathfield (1b) or land to the east of the motorway (2b). For spatial option 2a, provision would be made at Monkton Heathfield.

8.25 The intention of option 2b is to create a relatively self-sufficient extension, due to its distance from services and employment in the town centre. Land to the east of the motorway would pose a particularly attractive location for an out of town business park, regularly identified as needed by the business community. However, this could have the effect of diverting investment away from the UDF town centre regeneration sites which include significant proportions of high quality employment land. The proposals set out in the UDF are critical to reviving the centre of Taunton and enhancing its role as a successful sub-regional centre. For this reason, for the purposes of testing, no new office based employment is proposed in any of the urban extensions.

8.26 In addition to provision for B uses arising in the extensions, some education, health and retail based employment will arise in these locations as new schools, health facilities, local shopping and other community uses are developed. However, the main focus for office, cultural, retail and leisure employment will be the town centre, and for a large proportion of health and education related employment - the existing hospital and colleges within the town.

8.27 Longer term, the UES also considered the potential for a strategic employment site at Taunton. This recognised that in the event of a new junction 24A on the M5 at Walford Cross (close to Monkton Heathfield), that an urban extension at Monkton Heathfield would be well placed to support the development of a strategic employment site, with excellent strategic road access. For the purposes of testing for this study, this has not been added to the set of assumptions subject to transport modelling.

Summary

8.28 Land immediately adjacent to Taunton is relatively unaffected by national environmental designations, although high grade agricultural land surrounds the town. But this is not an overriding constraint and is one of the considerations that needs to be taken into account in comparing the sustainability of the spatial options in the SSA.

8.29 Local landscape features are prevalent around the town and if they are to be respected present limits to the extent of development in some directions.

8.30 Nevertheless, there are a number of opportunities for the town to expand that avoid any impact on significant environmental assets. These have been combined into 2 set of options for each of the low and high growth scenarios, focusing on a particular geographical area. They include land to north of the town, land to the south of the town, a combination of north and south, and land to the east of the motorway.

8.31 Alongside housing, all of the options would be expected to include a mix of community uses related to the level of need arising from the development. The sustainable urban extension will include provision for B use class employment as well as some new jobs arising in other sectors such as health, education and other services. In addition, once the UDF sites are developed, all office based employment and the majority of retail, cultural and leisure based employment will be available in the town centre. This heightens the need to ensure good quality public transport links are secured from any of the potential urban extensions to the town centre.

9 Assessing the options

Introduction

9.1 The project has proceeded by creating a set of options which:

- make the maximum use of development within Taunton, of the scale and form identified through the urban housing potential study and the Urban Design Framework

- consider the possible ways in which the further development requirement to 2026 that the study is required to consider could be located as sustainable urban extensions to the present boundaries of the urban area

- present different combinations of the locational opportunities for development to meet two overall levels of provision, and hence produce four spatial options.

9.2 These options are illustrative of the permutations that could be put forward. Though valuable for the purposes of testing and for the consultation, the preferred strategy that is identified will not necessarily be one of this set of options, but aspects of each spatial option that perform best in environmental, social and economic terms.

Assessment

9.3 The assessment of the options is informed by a number of technical investigations as well as by the consultation process. The technical assessment has been by a combination of assessing the deliverability and feasibility of the levels of growth in the options, and by comparing the benefits and disbenefits of the spatial distribution of development provided for in the options.

9.4 In terms of deliverability, the process has been concerned with:

- identifying what level of economic growth appears to be achievable within the Sub Area by 2026, and subsequently from the number of jobs in the area in that period, identifying the housing requirement derived from the numerical and structural changes in the population

- investigating the potential for different levels of housing supply to come forward and according to different permutations of possible development locations.

9.5 The consideration of the spatial distribution has focused upon:

- investigating the transport implications of new development in different locations and to different scales, including the consideration of new highway infrastructure and modal choice

- a sieving process, first discounting areas covered by national environmental constraints and then taking into account local environmental constraints

- examining the requirements of the options in terms of waste management and for the provision of health, education and cultural facilities (though these have not tended to be determinative of preferences between options)

- socio-economic considerations such as the market delivery of employment sites within the extension, relationship with deprived wards, those areas which are most likely to contribute towards more sustainable development of existing local plan allocations

9.7 The investigations informing this process are described in detail in the sections that follow.

10 The implications of the economic projections

Introduction

10.1 The future development requirement for Taunton should be informed by a process of understanding of how the area works, and the way it is likely to perform, alongside what the community wants. For this work all of these matters have been incorporated into the process of developing a strategy and the determination of the appropriate level of growth to plan for in particular. An important part of this has been to consider the amount of development likely to take place in the economy up to 2026, and relate this to what the implications are for population change and hence for the number of households and the requirement for housing.

10.2 By doing so, the process should bring forward a strategy that is deliverable. To be deliverable, there needs to be employment to attract people into the area, alongside other factors such as a perceived high quality of life and a mix of housing opportunities to meet people's housing needs. In addition to the relationship between employment opportunities and deliverability, the situation of maintaining a strategic balance between homes and jobs in a settlement, has the consequence hopefully of better managing the demand for transport.

10.3 This section looks further at the economic forecasting (reported in section 6) with the benefit of the responses to the consultation process, and it develops the implications of the predicted economic situation for housing provision.

Future economic growth potential

10.4 Somerset more generally, and Taunton in particular, have continued to be popular locations in which to live. Both the economy and the level of population have continued to grow strongly.

10.5 It is noted that the economic projections prepared for this work are below past rates. However, the consultation amongst stakeholders with knowledge of these matters can find no obvious reasons to suggest that Taunton will experience any significant change in its economic circumstances in the future. Nevertheless, the study has opted to err on the side of caution, not least because the study is forecasting over a very long period, in which the later stages becomes very difficult to predict.

10.6 Some have suggested particular local inhibitors have constrained the economy of Taunton from more rapid growth, in which case the projections are based on lower levels of past economic achievement. In any case, there is a recognised need to address employment land supply issues and cross town accessibility constraints to maintain competitiveness and ensure the maximum economic potential of Taunton and the wider sub-area in the future. The proposals from the UDF work address the need for more high quality employment space and this and the Taunton Transport Strategy Review, may provide the means of tackling some of the transport issues, including high levels of cross town congestion.

Forecast demand for jobs and housing

10.7 The economic forecasts undertaken for this study project a total of 15,075 jobs to be generated across the Taunton TTWA. Taking an economic led approach, and with the aim of matching additional jobs with additional homes, this equates to a Taunton Deane dwelling requirement of 13,870, which shares a similar geographical area as the TTWA. The study has arrived at the figure of 13,870 dwellings, firstly by considering the increase in the population expected to arise from the additional jobs in the area, and further by calculating the subsequent number of new homes needed to house this rise in the population. This is explained in detail in the paragraphs below.

10.8 These calculations are shown in the tables below. The creation of 15,075 jobs will need to be filled by economically active persons, who will then need to be housed. Assuming that unemployment is unlikely to fall any further, and that net in-commuting remains at 2001 levels, this will lead to an increase in the number of economically active persons living in Taunton to 72,130. Drawing on the population forecasts in para 6.77 which predict the proportion of economically active to remain constant, the total population will increase to 131,163 persons. This exceeds the SWRA short-term net migration[20] projections for Taunton Deane.

Taunton TTWA Jobs	2001	2026
Employees	50,800	65,875
Self employed (12% of total employment)	7,107	7,905
Jobs filled by in-commuters	2,500	2,500
Employed workers (total employed – in-commuters)	**55,407**	**71,280**
Unemployed (average 1998 – 2002)	850	850
Economically active (total employed + unemployed)	56,257	72,130
Working age population	63,004	80,781
Taunton Deane total population	**102,299**	**131,163**

Figure 10.1 Economic led scenario - Taunton Deane population 2026

10.9 The additional population attracted to the area for employment, will need to housed. Working on SWRA projections of 2.17 persons per household for Taunton Deane, including a 3% uplift to take account of consistent vacancy rates, for the total population this amounts to the need for an additional 17,061 dwellings for the District.

10.10 On the basis of past rates of employment growth, 81% of job growth in the TTWA will be created in Taunton. In the interests of promoting balanced job and housing growth and knowing that there is already a good balance in the

[20] Short term net-migration projections use past trends going back over a shorter time period. In-migration into Taunton is more pronounced in the more recent past (ie over a shorter time period), compared with the long-term migration projections, which averages out at a lower rate. The short term migration projections are therefore the most optimistic.

town, and that unemployment is probably as low as it can be, 81% of the housing requirement would be made in Taunton. For the town, this would create demand for an additional 13,870 dwellings.

10.11 To some extent, planning policy and the provision of employment land will be able to influence the location of employment growth, by constraining change in some locations and enabling it in others. Precisely how much of the growth that will take place in the TTWA should be directed to Taunton is a decision that will be made taking into account a whole range of economic, social and environmental objectives. For instance, Wellington is not self-sufficient in employment and experiences significant out-commuting. Therefore, some of the additional employment growth in the TTWA could be directed to Wellington to address this issue.

10.12 Land supply issues have been reported as a constraint to employment growth in Taunton and may have played a part in dispersing growth to areas outside Taunton. This study has not been able to carry out a full analysis and is unable to confirm this situation. Further investigation would add light on this issue.

10.13 Whatever is decided, it is inevitable that some growth will take place in areas outside the town and it would be inaccurate to expect that Taunton could ever attract 100% of the growth.

Households	**2001**	**2026**
Taunton Deane total population	102,299	131,163
Total no. of households (131,163 / 2.17)	43880	60,444
Taunton Deane additional households required by 2026 (ie 60,444 - 43,880)		16,564
Taunton Deane additional households required by 2026 + 3% uplift for vacant units		**17,061**
Taunton town housing requirement at 81.3% of District provision		**13,870**

Figure 10.2 Economic led scenario – Taunton Deane and Taunton town housing requirements to 2026

Summary

10.14 The employment growth forecasts translate into a housing requirement of 17,061 dwellings across the Taunton TTWA. For Taunton itself, this amounts to a requirement of about 13,870 dwellings.

10.15 Because a cautious approach to economic forecasting has been applied, and because Taunton is an attractive location to live, there is reason to be confident that this level of economic activity and hence need for housing provision will arise. This level of development however is less than the upper level that the SWRA has requested be tested, and hence less than would be provided for by options 2a and 2b.

11 Investigating the potential to deliver housing

Introduction

11.1 This section explores the likelihood of the operation of the housing market delivering the amount of development required, and in the locations required, by the different options. The work has involved the examination of statistical information, on the performance of the housing market in the past for instance, and discussions with people active in the provision of housing.

The growth scenarios

11.2 The study investigates the two different growth scenarios set out in sections 7 and 8, and specifically the implications for development on greenfield sites arising from the residual requirement between the total housing requirements and supply illustrated in figures 7.1 and 7.2. Essentially, two growth scenarios are being investigated, a 'low growth' strategy, which is considering the construction of 15,100 additional dwellings between 2001 and 2026, and a 'high growth' scenario for 20,350 dwellings. These alternative growth levels derive from the SWRA's requirement to test a continuation of the RPG10 rates of housing provision, and RPG10 + 50%.

11.3 Commitments agreed with Taunton Deane Borough Council at April 2004 amount to 6839 units in the form of housing completions, dwellings under construction, and planning commitments (including planning consents and housing land allocations). Estimated future housing supply must be subtracted from the overall housing requirement. Rounded to nearest 50, the dwelling shortfall scenarios that need to be accommodated on greenfield sites are therefore reduced to 8250, and 13500 respectively, and this is illustrated in the table 11.1 below. The 'greenfield shortfall' will need to be delivered through entirely new sites, as yet unidentified, although the Taunton Sub-Area Study consultation document shows a number of locations around the town to be considered. These will need to be delivered by the planning system, through a combination of the RSS, and an LDF for Taunton. It is not anticipated that any of the sites that will contribute towards the 'greenfield shortfall' will deliver any completions before mid-2011. This has implications for the annual completion requirement 2011 to 2026 on a number of greenfield sites around the town. As it will take some years to 'gear up' to the levels of completion required to meet the growth scenarios being tested, illustrated in Paras. 3.13 - 3.17, the different and increasing completion rates are also illustrated in figure 11.1.

	Growth strategy low	**Growth strategy high**
Dwelling provision scenario	15,100	20,350
Commitments April 2004	6,839	6,839
Shortfall 2004 - 2026	8,250	13,500
Ave completion rate 2001-2007	300	300
Ave completion rate 2007-2011	700	700
Ave completion rate 2011-2026	700	1050
Ave greenfield completion rate 2011-2026	550	900

Figure 11.1

The operation of the housing market

11.4 Any assessment of how the housing market may operate in the future to 2026 must take as its first reference point the past performance of the market. Many factors affect the level of development, in the past and in the future, including:

- the overall performance of the national, regional and local economy, including government policy and tax relief allowances
- within the overall economy, the performance of the housing market, and the various elements of the housing market, both in terms of dwelling type and tenure
- the availability of funding for affordable housing, or in the past, dwellings provided and managed by the Council
- the availability of sites for housing, in different locations reflecting different markets
- the time taken to negotiate a planning permission.

11.5 As a starting point, consideration has to be given to the past performance of a housing market, and the context of that performance. The past performance is judged upon the rate of housing completions, in the context that supply of land with permission is strongly influenced and controlled by the planning system. Figure 11.2 shows net completion rates for the Taunton PUA from 1996 to 2004, including greenfield urban extensions. From the beginning of the Joint Structure Plan Alteration period in 1996 up to 2004 there were 2,586 dwelling completions in Taunton and the immediately surrounding area, including for instance, Monkton Heathfield and Norton Fitzwarren.

year	**completions**
96/97	246
97/98	214
98/99	293
99/00	626
00/01	412
01/02	236
02/03	363
03/04	196
TOTAL	**2,586**
Annual average	**323**

Figure 11.2 net completions

11.6 The use of completion rates rather than planning permissions granted each year has the advantage of demonstrating what the market actually delivered, and illustrates precisely the extent to which the market takes up the development opportunity offered by the consent. In this way, it is a very accurate reflection, not only of the prevailing economic and market conditions, but also of the interaction of all the other factors that influence the entire housing market, such as the provision of Council/affordable housing, and the operation of the planning system.

11.7 The picture of the past operation of the housing market is that whilst completions have varied from relatively high levels to lower rates, this is to be expected, and reflects the typical activity of the UK housing market with its peaks and troughs. The firm view of the development industry is that the most significant reason for the relatively low completion rates over the past few years is the operation of the planning system. The planning and local political agenda leading up towards the publication of PPG3 in 2000 sought to minimise the release of greenfield sites. PPG3 has firmly set in place the sequential approach to the prior release of previously developed land, and since 2001 completion rates have slightly recovered nationally, but this is not yet evident in the Taunton sub-area.

11.8 The industry's view is that, despite an economic recovery since the mid-1990s, a corresponding increase in housebuilding rates has not occurred, not only because of the planning system's approach to the release of new greenfield allocations, but also because of the increasing complexities in negotiating a planning consent. The HBF's view is that onerous obligations sought through S.106 are a significant factor in slowing down the delivery of permissions and therefore completions. There is no doubt that the housing market in the Taunton sub-area is strong. The UDF/UES Baseline Report considers that Taunton is an attractive location to live and has easy access by car (M5) and rail to Bristol and Exeter. GVA Grimley's market view is that in recent years, the town has attracted people into the town because of these factors and because of the lower value of property compared to Bristol and Exeter. Residential development land in the wider Taunton area is in short supply and consequently in high demand, which is in line with the majority of major settlements in the region. Discussions with national and regional house builders have indicated that the majority are actively securing development land for housing in the Taunton area to meet future demand, mostly by option agreement.

11.9 The supply of housing land has been constrained by the introduction of Government policy PPG3 in March 2000, which is now beginning to show its effect on the residential market, with the lowest level of housing completions for 54 years reported in February 2002. PPG3, which prioritises the reuse of brownfield sites before greenfield sites are developed thereby limiting greenfield supply, has been a contributor towards the recent house price inflation and consequently growth in residential land values in the area. New greenfield residential sites have been very limited over the past five years, and a limited supply will be released through the adoption of the Local Plan.

11.10 The second-hand residential market has experienced significant price growth in recent years with most estate agents reporting that obtaining properties to sell is the biggest issue. The lack of supply of second hand houses, and of development land, has been a major influencing factor on values and the time taken to achieve a sale. However, during the last nine months the majority of local estate agents have reported a significant weakening in the market of up to a 50% downturn in sales rates.

11.11 The new homes market up until August 2004 was very strong, with most national housebuilders achieving their ambitious targets. In the half year since August 2004, targets have under achieved by about 10%. Sales prices have flattened, or marginally decreased by up to 5%. Land values have not increased, but also not fallen demonstrating high and continuing demand for development sites. Land prices remain at c. £1.1 - £1.2 million per acre, and sales prices at £190 - £200 / sq.ft. in suburban areas. The market for apartments is strong and not yet fully explored; sales prices for flats in the town centre are about 235 - £260 / sq. ft.

11.12 The reason that the market has flattened is because of the five successive interest rate rises of 0.25% each, raising base rates from 3.5% in August 2003 to 4.75% in August 2004. This was the Bank of England's response to the possibility of a damaging 'boom-bust' in house prices, so increased interest rates were seen as the mechanism to take the heat out of the market, without flattening it. This policy appears to have had the intended effect. Developers and agents' views in February 2005 are that the slow down, or flattening in price inflation will last 6-12 months, but that this is in the hands of the Bank of England. The published views of national mortgage lenders and market experts of the prospects for the housing market in 2005 are mixed; even the so-called experts cannot agree. Here are a few:

11.13 The Financial Times stated in December 2004 that "House prices fell at their fastest pace for 12 years in November 2004, but there are signs that potential buyers are regaining interest in the property market." It forecasts a 3% increase in 2005, as does the Nationwide and the RICS. Capital Economics forecasts a 7% rise, Halifax a 2% fall, and Hometrack's view is that prices will stay the same. A reasonable view of all this is that prices will be between 0% and 2% rise during 2005. This is less than could be achieved in the Stock Market, so whilst investors may not be attracted until price inflation approaches 8% - 9%, it should not deter purchasers in for the long term.

11.14 These views are supported by three critical factors that will underpin the market: household incomes are increasing by 5% a year, unemployment is continuing to fall and banks are lending more generously. The Government is also committed to the UK economy converging with the Eurozone to enable possible entry into the euro, which is still its stated intent. Barratt Developments PLC, the U.K.'s biggest homebuilder by volume, said in November 2005 that it expects 2005 to be "a year of progress as historically low interest rates, high employment and a shortage of homes support demand." The overall picture is that greater confidence will return during 2005, and that there are good prospects for the dwelling completion rate to increase.

11.15 Discussions with local estate agents have identified a number of consistent trends in the market, which can be summarised as follows:

- shortage of good quality properties at realistic asking prices to sell
- strong investor market
- about 6-7 weeks to sell realistically priced properties
- high demand for properties under £150,000
- high demand for flats
- shortage of retirement apartments
- strong local demand for town centre properties
- lower demand for executive style houses
- first time buyers finding it difficult to afford to buy

11.16 Whilst most of the local estate agents reported a change in the market they also appeared optimistic about the future in the short term. It was evident that properties would have to be realistically priced in order to achieve a sale in a reasonable time period. This has shifted from the previous position where vendors were placing properties on the market above their value but were achieving a sale a few months later as the market had caught up with their asking price.

Affordable housing demand

11.17 The 2002 Taunton Deane Housing Needs Survey assesses the position of the Taunton housing market and future housing requirements for the borough. The survey concluded there is a surplus of demand over supply. In terms of stock sought by first-time buyers, terraced houses represented the largest volume of sales in the borough and were the access point for the majority of first time buyer. Population growth and household formation is likely to increase the demand for housing in Taunton Deane. The most significant change is the major increase of people aged over 65, which will increase the need for care and support as well as housing to suit their needs. The annual scale of need and supply of affordable housing identified in the Housing Needs Survey indicates in para 8.2.2 that there is a net annual outstanding need of 81 dwellings after supply from re-lets and predicted new affordable housing provision. One of the strongest groups in need of affordable housing are young people, predominantly those raised in Taunton Deane, wishing to set up their own household. The main preference is for flat accommodation, which is currently under-represented in the stock available within the Taunton area.

Market overview

11.18 In summary, Taunton is perceived by homeowners as a traditional market town providing a quality environment to live with good employment opportunities. Strong demand from homeowners has generated strong demand from the major house builders who perceive the town to have high inward migration of people and low outward migration fuelling demand and underpinning its status as a major centre. Upgrading of the town to PUA status and the potential attraction of new employment opportunities in the town will put pressure on the residential market which will have to accommodate an influx of population attributed to this. If this demand is to be met it will be necessary to provide an adequate mix of housing types in a choice of locations to satisfy this increase in demand. The next section explores the depth of this demand, and the extent to which the market has the capacity to deliver the levels of development required by two different growth scenarios.

The future: growth scenarios and the operation of the market

11.19 The housing requirements of the Taunton sub-area will be set out in the RSS, and the levels of growth will be kept under regular review, as required by the plan, monitor and manage approach to planning. The low and high growth scenarios currently under consideration require average completion levels of 700 and 1050 dwellings per annum (dpa) respectively every year from 2011 to 2026. This requires an increase of about 380 to 730 dpa from the current base level of completions of about 320 dpa (from figure 11.2). Between 1996 and 2004, with a limited supply of both greenfield and previously developed land (pdl), completions for the Taunton PUA have been about 320 dpa. A peak of 626 completions was achieved in 1999 - 2000, but the three years since 2001 have only produced an average of 265 dpa, partly because of the lack of greenfield sites with planning permission available to developers, as opposed to a lack of demand for housing.

11.20 Discussions have taken place with a range of agents and developers, both currently active in the housing market, and actively seeking to invest in future developments. In terms of the market capacity, the consistent view to emerge is one of optimism, both for the immediate, and medium/long term future. The housing market was broken down into the component elements set out in the growth scenarios in section 8. Discussions focused upon the future potential to deliver housing completions on a number of different sites, what type of development that could be expected, and the likely completion rate which could be delivered. As a generality, national developers will not invest in a site unless they are confident in achieving about 40-50 completions per year. Also as a generality, the larger the site, the more developers will be involved.

11.21 The discussions took place in the context of past delivery, the state of the current Taunton economy, and the prospects for the future performance of the economy. The developers and agents concerned were responsible for long-term investment decisions which will translate into developments from about 2011 onwards, so an informed view has been acquired on the market's assessment of long-term future prospects.

11.22 The process of preparing for development often starts 10 - 15 years before the start on site. Completion rates will be affected by the policies of different developers. Larger sites of 500 plus dwellings are generally bought by one of the national volume housebuilders, and with swaps and sales, large sites will be developed out by 4 or 5 developers.

11.23 This process is likely to be replicated in Taunton. Large developments at Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe could support an average of about 5 developers each producing 40-50 dpa for the private market. Typically, developers producing this level of private housing will also build (or housing associations will) about 20 dpa affordable units. The smaller areas at Pyrland, Staplegrove, Dowsland west, Bishops Hull and Norton Fitzwarren, being developed at the same time as Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe, would have a smaller number of developers, and a correspondingly lower completion rate. This is because of the cumulative effect of multiple concurrent developments which define the finite market for housing in the Taunton area, illustrated in table 11.3 below:

Site	**Capacity up to**	**likely max no. of developers**
Dowslands West	1000	3
Comeytrowe	6500	6
Staplegrove	1500	3
Priorswood/Pyrland	1500	3
Monkton Heathfield	4000	6
Stoke St Mary / Henlade	12500	6
Bishops Hull	500	2
Norton Fitzwarren	500	2

Figure 11.3

11.24 It is unlikely that the maximum number of developers will be able to produce a yield of 40 - 50 dpa plus affordable housing consistently over the period of the whole development. Major developments tend to start slowly and build up to a peak, with the maximum yields affected by land sales and swaps. In one of the smaller sites, there may be one developer for a time, and 2 or 3 developers for part of the construction period. The larger sites will vary between 2 and 6 developers.

Implications for the growth options

11.25 The spatial growth options comprise a mix of small and large urban extensions to the town, with each set focusing on a particular geographic cluster to enable infrastructure provision. Each one is tested for deliverability according to the likely operation of then market, taking account of the cumulative effect of multiple concurrent developments. They are as follows:

Scenario 1 – continuation of RPG10

Option 1a: development to the south of the town (about 8,250 dwellings)

Option 1a includes a strategic urban extension at Comeytrowe (6000 to 6500 dwellings) as well a small extension at the Dowsland West (500 to 1000 dwellings). A concentration of development in the south could serve to support the development of a southern outer distributor road to improve access across the south of the town, as well as the smaller peripheral greenfield developments that will bring forward up to about 1000 dwellings, which are common to all the scenarios.

Option 1a - Sites	Capacity	no. of developers	dpa each*	dpa total	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)			
					11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26
Dowslands West	500-1000	3	70	210	500-1000			500-1000
Comeytrowe	6000 – 6500	5	70	350	1750	1750	1750	5250
smaller peripheral greenfield sites	1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
totals	**8250**	**11**			**3250 - 3750**	**1750**	**1750**	**6750 - 7250**

Figure 11.4 * including 40 - 50 private and 20 affordable housing completions

11.26 Option 1a illustrates that only up to about 7250 dwellings are likely to delivered through the market, because only 5250 of the completions will be delivered at Comeytrowe of the 6000 - 6500. This also assumes that completions will be delivered from mid-2011 on all these sites, requiring permissions to be in place by about 2009/2010, and allowing for the necessary infrastructure to be put in place. In this spatial option illustrated, it falls short by about 1000 units of the target of 8250 dwellings. However, if an additional developer were to be involved at Comeytrowe for instance, the target of 8250 units could be met.

- **Option 1b: development to the north of the town** (about 8,250 dwellings)

Option 1b comprises a number of extensions across the north of the town with the aim of supporting a northern outer distributor road, improving access across Taunton and beyond into West Somerset. This includes land at Monkton Heathfield (about 4000-4250 dwellings) and land at Staplegrove and Pyrland/Priorswood (about 3000 dwellings), as well as the smaller peripheral greenfield sites which are common to all the scenarios

Option 1b - sites	Capacity	no. of developers	dpa each*	dpa total	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)			
					11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26
Monkton Heathfield	4000-4250	5	70	350	1750	1750	750	4000-4250
Staplegrove Pyrland/Priorswood	3000	3 + 3	70 + 70	210 + 210	1050 + 1050	450 + 450		3000
smaller peripheral greenfield sites	1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
totals	**8000-8250**	**14**			**4850**	**2650**	**750**	**8000-8250**

Figure 11.5 * including 40 - 50 private and 20 affordable housing completions

11.27 Option 1b illustrates that the combination of the 6 sites each being developed simultaneously means that up to up to about 8250 dwellings are likely to delivered through the market, and illustrates that scenario 1b can be delivered. This also assumes that completions will be delivered from mid-2011 on all these sites, requiring permissions to be in place by about 2009/2010, and allowing for the necessary infrastructure to be put in place. The practical problem with this scenario is that the development is front-loaded to concentrate most of the development in the 2011 - 2021 period, at an annual average rate of 750 dpa. This could be resolved by phasing development to deliver the 8250 dwellings at a more even rate across the whole period. An alternative option 1b with different phasing is set out below, requiring the sites at Staplegrove and Pyrland/Priorswood to start producing completions phased from about 2019:

alternative option 1b - sites	Capacity	no. of developers	dpa each*	dpa total	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)			
					11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26
Monkton Heathfield	4000-4250	5	70	350	1750	1750	750	4000-4250
Staplegrove Pyrland/Priorswood	3000	3 + 3	70 + 70	210 + 210	1050 + 1050	450 + 450		3000
smaller peripheral greenfield sites	1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
totals	**8250**	**14**			**2750**	**2650**	**2850**	**8000-8250**

Figure 11.6 *including 40 - 50 private and 20 affordable housing completions

Scenario 3 – high growth

- **option 2a**: development to the north and south of the town (about 13,500 dwellings)

  This spatial option combines 1a and 1b, with the onus on Monkton Healthfield and Comeytrowe, reducing pressure on the northern fringes at Staplegrove and Pyrland. This comprises east Vivary Green Wedge (500 – 1000 dwellings), Comeytrowe (6000-6500), Staplegrove (1000), Pyrland (1000), Monkton Heathfield (3300), in addition to the smaller peripheral greenfield sites which are common to all the scenarios.

Option 2a - sites	Capacity	no. of developers	dpa each*	dpa total	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)			
					11-16	16-21	21-26	Total

								11 - 26
Monkton Heathfield	3300	5	70	350	1750	1550		3300
Comeytrowe	6000 – 6500	5	70	350	1750	1750	1750	5250
Staplegrove Pyrland/Priorswood	3000	3 + 3	70 + 70	210 + 210	1050 + 1050	450 + 450		3000
Dowslands West	500-1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
smaller peripheral greenfield sites	1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
totals	**12,800-13,800**	**22**			**7500**	**3300**	**1750**	**12550**

Figure 11.7 *including 40 - 50 private and 20 affordable housing completions

11.28 Option 2a illustrates that the combination of 8 sites each being developed simultaneously means that up to about 12,550 dwellings could theoretically be delivered. It almost meets the lower range of the scenario of 12,800. However, it also assumes that about 22 major developments will be developing simultaneously and continuously for the 5-year period 2011 - 2016, which has never happened before in Taunton, and it is questionable whether the market has the capacity to deliver this level of development. It requires 1150 annual completions in the 2011 - 2016 from 22 developers, 3.6 times higher than the 320 dpa achieved in the Taunton TUA between 1996 and 2004. Developers and agents regard this level of development, and particularly this number of developers, or active sites, as unfeasible. It may be that this could be partly resolved by some phasing of development to attempt to deliver the 12,550 dwellings at a more even rate. An alternative option 2a with different phasing is set out below:

alternative option 2a - sites	Capacity	no. of developers	dpa each*	dpa total	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)			
					11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26
Monkton Heathfield	3300	5	70	350	1750	1550		3300
Comeytrowe	6000 – 6500	5	70	350	1750	1750	1750	5250
Staplegrove Pyrland/Priorswood	3000	3 + 3	70 + 70	210 + 210	1050 + 1050	450 + 450		3000
Dowslands West	500-1000	3	70	210			1000	1000
smaller peripheral greenfield sites	1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
totals	**12,800-13,800**	**22**			**4500**	**4050**	**4000**	**12550**

Figure 11.8 * including 40 - 50 private and 20 affordable housing completions

11.29 This more evenly phased delivery of housing completions requires 12 -13 developers simultaneously producing 50 dpa plus 20 dpa affordable units between 2011 and 2021, which is about the maximum that the development industry believe possible, but does not allow for any economic recessions, delays caused by land assembly, legal processes, provision of infrastructure, including major relief roads, or the operation of the planning system. We believe it to be an over-optimistic forecast of the future, not least because it assumes that about 22 major developments will be developing simultaneously and continuously for the 5-year period 2011 - 2017. In any event, it also relies on completions being delivered from mid-2011 on all the major sites at Monkton Heathfield and Comeytrowe, requiring permissions to be in place by about 2009/2010, and allowing for the necessary infrastructure to be put in place.

- **option 2b**: development to the east of the motorway (about 12,500 dwellings)

All 12,500 residual housing development requirements would be met on a large scale extension to the east of the motorway, in the vicinity of Stoke St Mary/Henlade, with the expectation that a self-sufficient extension was developed.

11.30 The development industry regards this option similar to relying on a large site like Monkton Heathfield or Comeytrowe. It is likely to attract an average maximum of no more than 6 developers at any one time, say one more than Monkton Heathfield or Comeytrowe as the site would be developed without any other competition in Taunton. Even at a very optimistic average of 6 developers producing 70 dpa including affordable housing, the annual total is 420 dpa, delivering 6300 over the 15-year period 2011 - 2026. In addition there are the smaller peripheral greenfield sites which are common to all the scenarios. This is illustrated below:

Option 2b - Sites	Capacity	no. of developers	dpa each*	dpa total	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)			
					11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26
Stoke St Mary/Henlade	12,500	6	70	420	2100	2100	2100	6300
smaller peripheral greenfield sites	1000	3	70	210	1000			1000
totals	**13,500**	**9**			**3100**	**2100**	**2100**	**7300**

Figure 11.9 ***** including 40 - 50 private and 20 affordable housing completions

11.31 It is possible that some 7300 completions could be delivered through this scenario, falling short of the 13,500 target by 6200 dwellings. Even at the optimistic completion rate of 420 dpa at Stoke St Mary/Henlade, this option clearly will not deliver the growth levels required by option 2b.

11.32 Each of these four (plus two alternative) options is summarized and compared below with the market's ability to deliver (given the availability of sites with consent), drawing attention to the shortfall compared with the level of development each scenario seeks.

Scenario options

option	capacity	ave no. of d'pers	Completions 11 - 26 (up to)				comment
			11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26	
1a	8250	11	3250 - 3750	1750	1750	6750 - 7250	because only about 5250 will be delivered at Cometrowe, and only 4 sites are used, the maximum that will be delivered is 7250. **1000 shortfall of 8250**
1b	8250	14	4850	2650	750	8250	the use of 6 sites enables the target of 8250 to be delivered but first 5 years must average 970 dpa, which is probably unachievable. An alternative scenario 1b is put forward for consideration. **No theoretical shortfall.**
1b alt	3750	14	3750	2650	2850	8250	This gives 8250 completions spread more evenly, with the sites at Staplegrove, Pyrland, & Priorswood starting producing completions phased from about 2019. **No shortfall**.
2a	12,800-13,800	22	7500	3300	1750	12550	up to about 12,550 dwellings could theoretically be delivered. Requires 1150 annual completions in the 2011 - 2016 from 22 developers. This level of development, and number of active sites is unfeasible. **No theoretical shortfall. A**lternative scenario 2a is put forward for consideration.
2a alt	12,800-13,800	22	4500	4050	4000	12550	A more evenly phased delivery,12 -13 developers, the max possible, but does not allow for inevitable delays. An over-optimistic forecast of the future. **No theoretical shortfall, but not feasible.**
2b	13,500	9	3100	2100	2100	7300	7300 completions could be delivered through this scenario. **Shortfall of 6200 dwellings**

Figure 11.10 - Scenario options

Summary

11.33 Overall, it is considered that in order to deliver any of the scenarios a number of sites need to be brought forward at the same time in different areas of the town. The level of development is directly related to the number of selling outlets, whilst there is a finite level of completions that can be delivered from each general 'north' and 'south' area overall.

11.34 This is illustrated by the fact that 1a is not deliverable because there are too few sites. The use of 6 sites in 1b results in no theoretical shortfall, whilst the amended phasing in 1b 'alternative' scenario should deliver the required number of completions by 2026. Scenarios 2a and 2a 'alternative' are over-optimistic, whilst 2b results in a massive shortfall of 6200 dwellings.

11.35 Our overall conclusion is that 'best' performance of the market, taking reasonable account of economic booms and recessions, delays caused by land assembly, legal processes, provision of infrastructure, including major relief roads, or the operation of the planning system would be to deliver about 65 dpa including affordable housing from about 12 sites around Taunton. This would need to include 8 sites continually producing completions in Monkton Heathfield and Cometrowe from 2011 to 2026, with 4 more north and south of the town over the whole period, from a combination of Bishops Hull, Norton Fitzwarren, Pyrland, Priorswood, Staplegrove, and Dowslands West. This combination could produce11,800 dwellings by 2026. This would be a shortfall of some 1700 dwellings from Scenario 3 – high growth, but about 3500 more than Scenario 1 - low growth.

best possible market scenario	Capacity	Average no. of developers	dpa each*	Completions 11 - 26			
				11-16	16-21	21-26	Total 11 - 26
Monkton Heathfield	4000	4	65	1300	1300	1300	3900
Comeytrowe	4000	4	65	1300	1300	1300	3900
Staplegrove	1000	2	65	1000			1000
Pyrland/Priorswood	1000	2	65		1000		1000
Dowslands West	500-1000	2	65			1000	1000
Bishops Hull and Norton Fitzwarren	1000	2	65	500	500		1000
totals		**12 in any year**		**4100**	**4100**	**3600**	**11,800**

Figure 11.11

11.36 This would deliver a ‘growth strategy medium’ of 18640 dwellings 2001 to 2026, by adding the 6839 completions and commitments to the 11,800 achievable completions on new sites post 2011.

12 Transport implications

Introduction

12.1 The transport implications of the scenarios developed in section 8, with the addition of more detail on the possible composition of the urban extensions, have been examined. Transport proposals have been identified for each land use option, building on previous work undertaken for the Taunton Urban Development Framework (UDF) and Urban Extension Study (UES). As with these previous studies, Halcrow and Atkins have made use of the existing Taunton TSRT traffic models to carry out the investigation.

12.2 Two 'low growth' development options (1a and 1b) and two 'high growth' options (2a and 2b) have been considered, in addition to outstanding allocated Local Plan sites and all development identified in the UDF. The development levels considered reflect potential development within Taunton up to 2026.

12.3 Table 12.1 specifies the locations and scale of development for each option tested, with some development common to all options.

12.4 An initial round of testing was undertaken which considered all of the above four options. All four options were then taken through a second iteration of testing to refine the transport associated proposals. Each of these tests undertaken has been performed for the am and pm peak hours. In order to help distinguish between the transport impacts of each option, the option-specific development trips were added to 2011 UDF matrices without any further background growth applied.

12.5 Further testing of options 1a and 1b has been undertaken with full 2026 traffic growth in order to provide further verification of differences between the options and to give an indication of the forecast differences between current and 2026 traffic conditions. These tests have included am peak, inter-peak, and pm peak hour tests.

Table 12.1 Development Options

Option	Location	Type	Scale
All	Collection of small urban extensions	Residential	1000 units
1a	**Comeytrowe**	**Residential**	**6200 units**
	Dowslands West	**Residential**	**1000 units**
	Comeytrowe	**Employment* (B use class)**	**30,000 m^2 GFA**
1b	**Monkton Heathfield**	**Residential**	**3600 units**
	North of Staplegrove	**Residential**	**2000 units**
	North of Pyrland	**Residential**	**1600 units**
	Monkton Heathfield	**Employment* (B use class)**	**30,000 m^2 GFA**
2a	**Comeytrowe**	**Residential**	**6200 units**
	Dowslands West	**Residential**	**1000 units**
	Monkton Heathfield	**Residential**	**3300 units**
	North of Staplegrove	**Residential**	**1000 units**
	North of Pyrland	**Residential**	**1000 units**
	Comeytrowe	**Employment* (B use class)**	**1900 m^2 GFA**
	Monkton Heathfield	**Employment*[21] (B use class)**	**1300 m^2 GFA**
2b	**Henlade / Stoke St Mary**	**Residential**	**12500 units**
	Henlade / Stoke St Mary	**Employment (B use class)**	**30,000 m^2 GFA**

Data sources

12.6 The data sources that have been used are as follows:

- development details as defined by Baker Associates
- residential / employment rates previously agreed for the UDF study
- Traffic flows for A358 scheme obtained from the Highways Agency's scheme consultants
- Taunton automatic traffic count (ATC) data
- public transport trips and other traffic flows from TSRT model

[21] * In addition, 2900 jobs in other sectors such as education, health and other services will come forward in the sustainable urban extension. These additional jobs have been taken into account in the transport modelling.

Transport Measures

12.7 The A358 dual scheme has been included in all options, based on details provided by the Highways Agency's consultants for the scheme.

12.8 Table 12.2 provides details of transport measures proposed for the specific development options.

12.9 For the second iteration of testing with 2011 background growth, a number of network changes / refinements were made, as follows:

- widening at Silk Mills / Staplegrove Road and Chelston Roundabouts

- refined signal timings at M5 Junction 25 and other locations as necessary.

Cost of Infrastructure

12.10 Initial cost estimates for capital works associated with delivery of infrastructure for Options 1a and 1b have been produced, and these will be included in the Implementation Plan as it is developed. The cost estimates suggest that the provision of transport infrastructure will be lower for option 1b than option 1a, by about 10%.

Table 12.2 Development Option Transport Measures

Strategy	Option 1a: Comeytrowe	Option 1b: Monkton Heathfield	Option 2a: Comeytrowe and Monkton Heathfield	Option 2b: Henlade and Stoke St Mary
Highways	• Southern Outer Distributor Road to link Blackbrook to Wellington Rd via Trull • Minor changes on Trull Road • Creech Castle flyover	• Northern Outer Distributor Road to link Monkton Heathfield to A358 West • Completion of dual link 'A38 Monkton Heathfield Distributor Rd' • Creech Castle flyover	• Option 1a + Option 1b • M5 J24A: limited movements	• Southern Outer distributor Road to link Blackbrook to Wellington Rd via Trull • Southern Inner Distributor Road to link Dowslands / Haines Hill • New bus / cycle and highway links across M5 • Creech Castle flyover
Park & Ride	• Site on Wellington Road, west of Bishops Hull • Services along Wellington Road, making use of the proposed bus priority measures	• Strategic site near junction of A361-A38, Walford Cross Roads. • Subsidiary transport interchange off new Link Road Or just west of Monkton Heathfield	• Option 1a + Option 1b	• No additional Park and Ride due to proximity of Cambria Farm
Bus Services	• EITHER: upgrading the existing service 9 • OR: new service Comeytrowe to Firepool via Wellington Road	• Enhancement of service 21/21A • Route extensions to SCAT and Musgrove Park • Making use of A3259 corridor • Circular services between Firepool and Town Centre	• Option 1a + Option 1b	• Two new services: - via South Road / Stoke Road - via new link to Hamilton Rd

Results and Discussion

12.11 Table 12.3 provides model results for each of the options considered, based on the testing of 2026 Taunton development levels undertaken with background growth to 2011, to help distinguish between development options. Table 4.2 gives an assessment of options based on the model output in relation to appraisal objectives previously used for the UDF/Third Way study, which reflect current regional and national transport policy. This assessment identifies which option(s) performs best against each objective, and the relative performance of other options, graded as slight / moderate / major difference from best performance.

12.12 In order to consider the preferred low / high growth options this section provides comments on the comparison of low and high growth options separately.

Comparison of 1a and 1b

12.13 Results in Table 12.3 show Option 1a performs better in relation to some indicators relating to network operation and less overall suppression would be expected, although once suppressed trips have been removed Option 1b has slightly less over-capacity queuing and there is no difference in terms of average network speed. The effect of the trip suppression is likely to result in ‘peak spreading’, with the extension of morning and evening peak periods. Further examination of this effect has been undertaken in relation to the results of the tests with full 2026 traffic growth.

12.14 In terms of economic impact, 1b has slightly higher trip suppression for the new development areas than Option 1a. However, the lower congestion with Option 1b will have economic benefits for Taunton as a whole.

12.15 Public transport patronage is forecast to be marginally lower for Option 1a. This is consistent with previous findings in the UES, which identified that it would be difficult to provide effective bus priority measures along the Trull Road corridor. Conversely, the development proposals for Option 1b would build upon the significant existing services on the Taunton to Bridgewater Quality Bus Corridor and hence provide better opportunities for modal shift to public transport and increased financial viability of services provided.

12.16 Proportions of suppressed trips that could potentially switch to walk or cycle (under 4km) are slightly higher for option 1a. This is thought to be due to the closer proximity of the development to the town centre for this option. The proximity of the Monkton Heathfield development area to the National Cycle Network route into Taunton centre along the canal is an advantage of Option 1b and hence it would be important to link into this existing facility.

12.17 There is expected to be little difference between environmental impact of Options 1a and 1b in terms of air quality, as shown by the forecast pollutant emissions for the study area in Table 12.3. The environmental impact of infrastructure is expected to be greater with Option 1a due to the need for the Southern Outer Distributor Road, which is judged to have greater impact than the schemes associated with Option 1b.

12.18 The cost of infrastructure associated with Option 1a is expected to be higher than 1b due to the greater length of the Southern Outer Distributor Road. Initial infrastructure cost estimates are around £29.5 million for Option 1a and £26.4 million for Option 1b.

12.19 Information regarding flows at M5 junctions 24, 25 and 26 for Options 1a and 1b is presented in Table 12.5. This represents light vehicle flows only as a guide. These flows demonstrate that Option 1a would have greater impact on the motorway network than Option 1b. With a slight increase at Junction 24 for Option 1b, there would be reductions compared to 1a at the other junctions close to Taunton, particularly Junction 25. One reason for this is thought to be that the increased pressure on Wellington Road in Option 1a would cause more trips between Taunton and the south to use Junction 25 instead of Junction 26.

Comparison of 2a and 2b

12.20 Even with a new highway link across the M5 and provision of the Southern Inner Distributor Road, the access for new development trips to the central areas of Taunton are restricted for Option 2b, due to a general lack of capacity on radial routes from the south / east. This is reflected in the significant trip suppression for this option and high over-capacity queuing if suppressed trips are not removed. Again, the identified trip suppression would be likely to lead to extension of the morning and evening peak periods.

12.21 Additionally, sustainable alternatives to the private car could not easily be encouraged with development at Henlade / Stoke St Mary. Although the upgrading of the A358 will increase capacity for movements from the east, at least to the M5, the new link will diminish opportunities for creating connections from this potential development area, including those to the Cambria Farm Park and Ride facility. Due to the greater distance from the rest of the Taunton area and severance caused by the motorway. Walk / cycle trips will be difficult to encourage other than within the new development area for this option.

12.22 Option 2a performs better than Option 2b against almost all indicators considered. The dispersed development proposed in Option 2a would lead to reduced traffic impact and lower trip suppression, particularly for the new development trips. Impact on the town centre is marginally greater in 2a since there are generally better access opportunities with this option.

12.23 Option 2a is expected to offer better opportunities for the local economy than Option 2b. Although there is little difference expected in terms of congestion, trip suppression is forecast to be much higher for new development with Option 2b as explained above.

12.24 There is expected to be no significant difference between environmental impact of Options 2a and 2b in terms of air quality, as shown by the forecast pollutant emissions in Table 12.3.

12.25 The model results suggest increased public transport usage for Option 2a than 2b. It is expected that there would be better public transport opportunities with option 2a, which would include building on established Quality Bus Corridors, in particular between Taunton and Bridgewater.

Risks to delivery

12.26 There is expected to be a lower risk to delivery associated with the NODR than the SODR due to greater environmental impact and possible local opposition to the SODR scheme. This is therefore considered to be a further benefit of Option 1b over 1a.

12.27 It is thought that there would be lower risk of delivery of public transport services with Options 1b and 2a over the alternative low/high growth options due to the expected greater financial viability of public transport routes with these options.

12.28 Increased delivery risks may also arise from options that have greater impact on the trunk road network, for which mitigation measures will need to be agreed with the Highways Agency. Due to the envisaged greater impact on the M5 for Option 1a than 1b there may be a greater need to consider ramp metering to restrict access to the M5 for Option 1a to ensure there is no unacceptable traffic impact on strategic movements through the Taunton area.

12.29 There would also be some delivery risk associated with construction of a new motorway junction. This has been considered as part of the transport proposals for Option 2a, however a full assessment of the effects of not including this new junction with Option 2a has not yet been carried out. This issue would need to be investigated further before a final decision was made regarding provision of this new junction.

Smarter Choices / Demand Management

12.30 The DfT published guidance in July 2004 aimed at local authorities for promoting sustainable travel through a combination of soft and hard measures under the heading of ‘Smarter Choices’. Based on research undertaken in 2003/2004, the guidance proposes cost-effective measures to reduce congestion by offering and promoting greater travel choice.

12.31 The soft measures include Travel Planning for schools, workplaces and individuals (neighbourhoods), improved sustainable travel information and marketing, support for car share clubs and promotion of measures to reduce the need to travel (teleworking, teleconferencing, internet shopping). Hard measures include reallocation of road space back to pedestrians and cyclists, signal priority given to pedestrians and buses, parking control and congestion charging.

12.32 The guidance quotes evidence for reductions in urban traffic levels of around 21% in the peak hours and 13% off-peak if an intensive ‘Smarter Choices’ programme is adopted. With envisaged congestion, environmental, quality of life and health benefits, these measures are now seen as a vital part of the Government’s strategy for local transport.

12.33 It is not considered that there are significant differences between the Taunton spatial strategy options in terms of the opportunities for effectively implementing such measures within Taunton, although perhaps alternatives to the private car would be hardest to promote with Option 2b. However, whichever Taunton growth option is taken forward it will be important to consider how measures included in the Smarter Choices guidance can best be included in the Taunton’s transport strategy.

12.34 Coupled with implementation of public transport/walk/cycle improvements and soft factors, demand management could offer an important means of managing traffic patterns as Taunton expands. Congestion charging would be likely to have a significant effect, similar to increased central area parking charges, although with greater ‘reach’ due to the high proportion of PNR (private non-residential) parking within Taunton. If congestion charging were to be introduced there would be increased requirement for provision of attractive alternatives to the private car if significant public opposition was to be avoided. Having said this, if such an approach was adopted increased funding may be available from congestion charging revenue and from central sources such as the Government’s Transport Innovation Fund that could be directed towards providing such improvements.

2026 Growth Model Tests

12.35 Further testing of Options 1a and 1b has been undertaken with full background traffic growth to 2026. The purpose of this has been to provide further verification of differences between Options 1a and 1b and to give an indication of the forecast differences between current and 2026 traffic conditions in the peak hours and throughout the day.

12.36 Tables 12.6 to 12.8 provide a summary of some of the main results of the model forecasting for Options 1a and 1b at 2026. Also shown for comparison purposes are the 2001 base year model results. Although the 2001 model is now a few years old it still provides a useful indication of the scale of differences to be expected between now and 2026.

12.37 These results confirm that testing with full 2026 growth gives largely consistent indications of network performance for Options 1a and 1b to the tests carried out with 2011 background growth, although the differences in results between the tests are reduced due to the higher levels of background growth applied. It can be observed that the 2026 results confirm the relative difference in public transport forecasts shown in the previous tests. The 2026 tests also show that Option 1b has slightly greater trip suppression that 1a, although very little difference is indicated between over-capacity queuing and network average speed in the peak hours.

12.38 The comparison of the 2026 test results with the 2001 model base year gives the following indications of 2026 network conditions:

- significant increases in traffic congestion due to increased traffic. The traffic demand is forecast to increase by 65-75% by 2026 compared to 2001. However, this would lead to trip suppression in the peak hours, resulting in re-timing of trips (peak spreading), change of mode, change of destination or cause some trips not to take place. Once trip suppression is accounted for, traffic growth from 2001 levels would be around 40-50 %

- approximately 13-16% of peak hour traffic demand is anticipated to be suppressed due to network conditions

- average peak hour journey speeds for the Greater Taunton area are likely to reduce from around 60kph to around 40 kph

- average peak hour journey speeds for the Greater Taunton area are likely to reduce from around 60kph to around 40kph

- through consideration of forecast over-capacity queuing time, the results suggest congestion may increase by a factor up 15 times in the am peak by 2026

- the forecasts suggest that future congestion and average speeds in the inter-peak period, which broadly represent off-peak conditions between the hours of 6am to 8pm, in 2026, will be similar to current peak hour conditions across the network.

12.39 An indication of peak hour spreading up to 2026 associated with Option 1b is shown by Figures 12.1 and 12.2 for the am and pm peak hours respectively. These figures show current and 2026 peak period flows for a selection of links within Taunton based on recent ATC data, with the current peak hour flows given an index of 100. The 2026 flows have been derived by applying growth in demand for trips, with the peak hours (0800-0900 and 1700-1800) capped by removing suppressed trips. An estimated apportionment of suppressed trips to the adjacent 'shoulder' hours has been made.

12.40 These figures not only show the forecast relative increases in peak period vehicle flows up to 2026, but also show a levelling of peak period flows between peak hours and ‘shoulder’ hours. This is particularly the case for the pm peak and 0900-1000 in the morning, where the shoulder hours would have similar levels of traffic flows, and hence congestion, to the peak hours. In turn this may lead to further spreading of traffic beyond the hours shown.

12.41 It should be noted that although the above forecasts are based on testing that includes improved public transport and Park and Ride provision, it does not explicitly model increases in walk/cycle trips that may occur. However, due to the significant additional demand for travel over the timeframe considered, the above transport network conditions are likely to prevail in 2026 unless there is a step change in quality of public transport provision, demand management and / or ‘soft factors’ such as those promoted by Smarter Choices to encourage more sustainable travel behaviour.

12.42 With continuing traffic growth and building congestion in the future, it will become more important to identify opportunities to enable public transport routes to avoid the most congested areas and manage congestion with positive control of locations of traffic queues, for example to minimise congestion in the town centre.

Figure 12.1 Am peak hour spreading

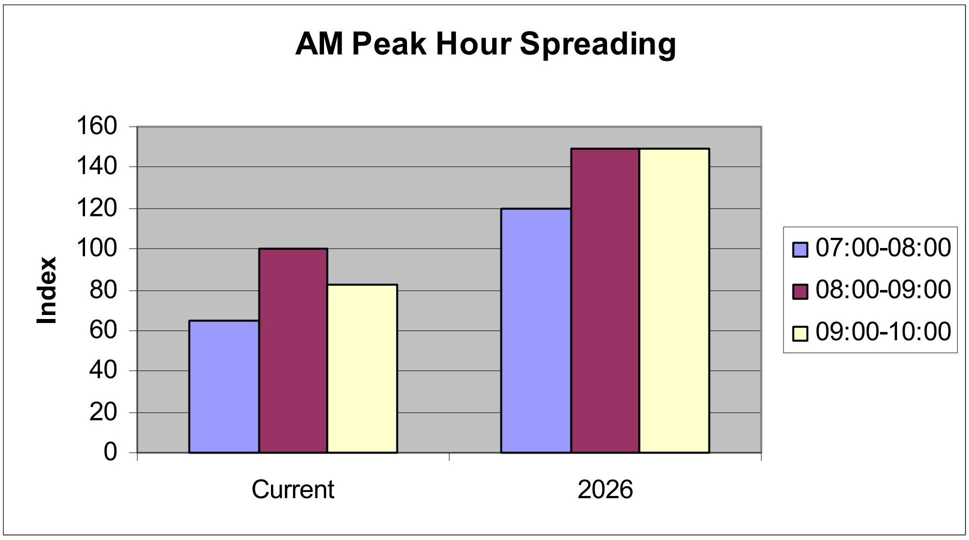
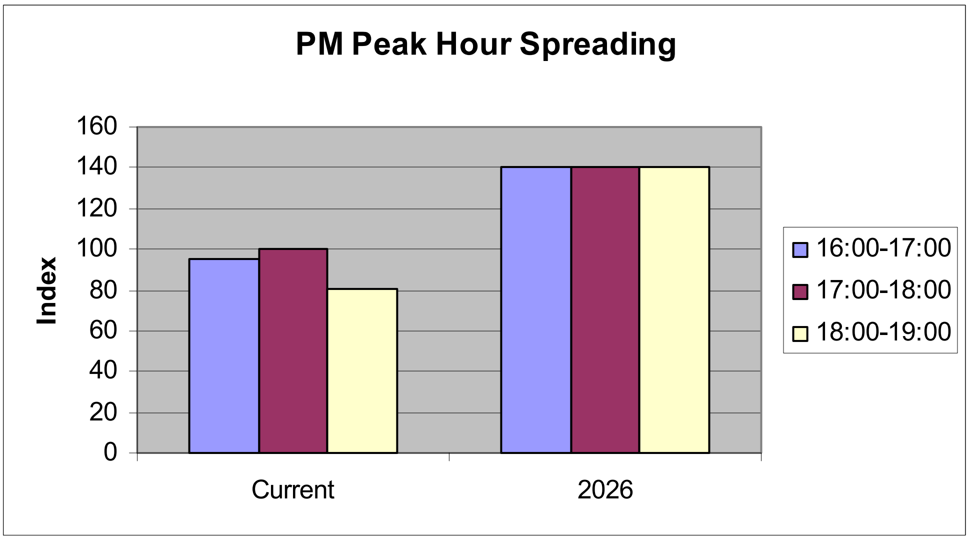


Figure 12.2 Pm Peak Hour spreading



Review of performance against transport policy

12.43 This section provides a commentary on how the study appraisal objectives link to the underlying transport policy and how each of the options perform in this conext.

12.44 The DfT's 'Full Guidance on Local Transport Plans – Second Edition' sets out national priorities for transport strategies being developed at the local level. This document highlights the following priority outcomes: Congestion, Accessibility, Safety, Air Quality, Value for Money. Regional transport policy is set out in the South West Regional Assembly's document 'Developing the Regional Transport Strategy'. This identifies impact on the trunk road network to be an important consideration and highlights congestion and regeneration as key issues for Taunton.

12.45 Based on these policy documents, the following five appraisal objectives used in this study are seen to have increased importance over the other objectives contained in the appraisal:

- to minimise congestion on key routes and junctions
- to promote modal shift to public transport
- to improve access to West Somerset
- to assist with the achievement of air quality targets
- minimising infrastructure costs.

12.46 It can be seen in the Appraisal results in Table 12.4 that in relation to the majority of these objectives, Option 1b performs better than 1a and likewise, 2a performs better than 2B.

12.47 Importantly, Option 1b is expected to minimise congestion to a greater extent than 1a and better promotes modal shift to public transport. There are some objectives for which Option 1a performs better than 1b, however the difference in each of these scores is only 'slight'. In terms of trunk road impact, the review of forecast traffic flows at M5 Junctions 24, 25 and 26 shows that Option 1b has less impact at these strategic junctions than Option 1a.

12.48 The infrastructure costs for Option 1b are expected to be lower than Option 1a, requiring a lower level of capital funding. In addition the envisaged greater financial viability of public transport provision for Option 1b, would be expected to have a lower revenue funding requirement.

12.49 For the high growth scenarios, there is shown to be little difference between Options 2a and 2b in terms of congestion, although this is largely because of the significant trip suppression and spreading of peak hour traffic conditions expected with option 2b. Promoting modal shift to public transport is expected to be harder to achieve with Option 2b, as previously explained.

12.50 With the Henlade development scenario, capital funding requirements are expected to be slightly lower, although revenue funding support is expected to be higher, to promote adequate public transport linkages for the new development.

12.51 Locating development to the east of the M5 is forecast to have a greater impact on the trunk road network, due to increased pressure at M5 Junction 25 and diversion of local trips onto the M5 to avoid local congestion created.

Conclusion

12.52 For the above reasons, Option 1b, with new development located to the north of Taunton, largely concentrated at Monkton Heathfield, is the preferred low growth option in transportation terms. Further work would be needed to establish whether a new motorway junction would be required to support Option 2a, with new development dispersed around the Taunton urban area. However, despite this, Option 2a is the preferred high growth option in transportation terms.

12.53 Testing at 2026 traffic growth levels has confirmed the above recommendation for the preferred low growth option. In addition to this the 2026 tests give an indication of the likely future traffic conditions in Taunton unless a step change in public transport provision, demand management and / or a focussed programme of 'soft' factors are introduced.

Table 12.3 TSRT Model Results

Indicator	1a	1b	2a	2b
Over-capacity queued time – fixed assignment	15092	15545	15839	16477
Average Speed (kph) – fixed assignment	34.5	34.0	34.8	34.5
Over-capacity queued time – elastic assignment	5791	5663	6125	6107
Average Speed (kph) – elastic assignment	47.8	47.8	47.7	48.5
Trip suppression	10.3%	11.1%	10.3%	10.6%
Development trip suppression (am)	329	408	496	1116
Total PT patronage (am/pm increase over 2001)	4286	4378	4355	4010
% short distance suppressed trips (under 4km)	35%	32%	31%	31%
Town centre peak hour flows (am /pm)	8401	8165	8110	7740
Pollutant emissions within study area (am /pm)	1845	1841	1923	1920
Journey Times:				
Average for centre from residential areas (mins)	9.1	10.1	9.4	10.5
Average for M5 to W Somerset (mins)	25.5	25.3	27.6	29.4
Average for Taunton to/from regional centres (mins)	27.7	27.5	28.0	28.3

Notes:
1. Town centre links: North Street, Corporation Street, East Street
2. Pollutant emissions: NOx and PM10 (total kg)
3. Res. Areas: Halcon , Pyrland , Dowslands , Comeytrowe, Monkton Heathfield , N of Staplegrove, Henlade
4. Strategic links: Bristol, Exeter, Yeovil

Table 12.4 Option Appraisal

	Low Growth Options		High Growth Options	
OBJECTIVE	**1a**	**1b**	**2a**	**2b**
ECONOMY				
Stimulating employment growth				
To ensure key development areas are readily accessible	**1**	**2**	**2**	**4**
TRANSPORT				
Improving accessibility				
To improve access to West Somerset	**1**	**1**	**3**	**4**
To develop strategic transport linkages	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**
Minimising congestion				
To minimise congestion on key routes and junctions	**2**	**1**	**3**	**3**
Improving reliability of journey times				
To improve reliability by private car	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Promoting modal shift				
To promote modal shift to public transport	**3**	**1**	**2**	**3**
To promote cycling and walking, particularly for short journeys	**1**	**2**	**3**	**3**
ENVIRONMENT				
Reducing traffic in the town centre				
To remove unnecessary traffic from the town centre	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**
Meeting air quality targets				
To assist with the achievement of air quality targets	**1**	**1**	**2**	**2**
URBAN DESIGN				
Minimising visual impact/severance				
To minimise visual impact of new roads *	**3**	**1**	**4**	**4**
DELIVERY				
Creating development value				
Minimising infrastructure costs *	**2**	**1**	**3**	**2**

1 = best performing option
2 = slightly worse than best performing option
3 = moderately worse than best performing option
4 = significantly worse than best performing option
* qualitative assessment only

Table 12.5 Light Vehicle flows at Motorway Junctions

	Junction Total			Excluding M5 Flow		
	1a	1b	% Diff	1a	1b	% Diff
Junction 24						
am	6988	7100	2%	2719	2808	3%
pm	7627	7640	0%	3014	3062	2%
Total	14615	14740	1%	5733	5870	2%
Junction 25						
am	9050	8758	-3%	5696	5495	-4%
pm	9018	8777	-3%	5515	5303	-4%
Total	18068	17535	-3%	11211	10798	-4%
Junction 26						
am	6041	5883	-3%	2262	2152	-5%
pm	6159	6046	-2%	2028	2050	1%
Total	12200	11930	-2%	4290	4203	-2%

Table 12.6 Transport Model Forecasts 2026 AM Peak – Options 1A and 1B

	Base 2001	Option 1A 2026	Option 1B 2026
Total Trips Assigned	34901	52174	51942
Scale of trip suppression	-	13.3%	13.8%
Overcapacity Queued Time (veh-hrs)	437.6	6622	6448
Average Vehicle Speed (km/hr)	62.5	38.6	39.0
Increase in PT Peak Hour Patronage (persons/hr)	-	+2568	+2634

Table 12.7 Transport Model Forecasts 2026 IP Peak – Options 1A and 1B

	Base 2001	Option 1A 2026	Option 1B 2026
Total Trips Assigned	25211	37850	37945
Scale of trip suppression	-	3.9%	3.4%
Overcapacity Queued Time (veh-hrs)	44.5	528	574
Average Vehicle Speed (km/hr)	72.1	63.7	63.1
Increase in PT Peak Hour Patronage (persons/hr)	-	+1118	+1120

Table 12.8 Transport Model Forecasts 2026 PM Peak – Options 1A and 1B

	Base 2001	Option 1A 2026	Option 1B 2026
Total Trips Assigned	34551	48749	48566
Scale of trip suppression	-	15.7%	17.0%
Overcapacity Queued Time (veh-hrs)	701	5281	5488
Average Vehicle Speed (km/hr)	59.5	42.1	41.5
Increase in PT Peak Hour Patronage (persons/hr)	-	+2270	+2333

13 Waste management implications

Introduction

13.1 Between April 2003 and April 2004, 28.9% of Taunton Deane's municipal waste was recycled. The District intend to increase this to 36% for 2004/2005.

13.2 Currently Taunton's municipal waste that has not been diverted to other methods of treatment is disposed of at the Walpole landfill, which is more than 10 miles away from Taunton. Estimates made for the purposes of the Waste Local Plan estimate that Somerset's landfill capacity will run out in 2011/2012.

13.3 New disposal capacity will have to be found by the end of 2011/2012. The Waste Local Plan estimates that there was approximately 11/12 years of disposal capacity available as at 2001. Therefore regardless of any of the growth scenarios being brought forward, new disposal and management capacity will have to found before the end of 2012. With this in mind, the County Council has agreed with GOSW and ODPM in its Minerals and Waste Development Scheme to adopt the Waste local Plan as its Core Waste Policy so that swift progress can be made in identifying future waste sites.

Impact of the growth options

13.4 The growth options being tested in this study are expected to have very little impact on the overall disposal capacity, because disposal capacity for the purposes of the Waste Local Plan covers the whole of Somerset and this increase is small in comparison. It is estimated in the Waste Local Plan that there was just over 8,700,000m^3 of disposal capacity in 2001 which is equivalent to 9,570,000 tonnes of waste. Based on current information, each household in Somerset produces 2.2 tonnes of waste per year. The scenario for RPG +50% will result in 20,350 dwellings in the Taunton area. This results in an increase in municipal waste arisings of 314,160 tonnes of municipal waste by the end of 2026.

13.5 However, whilst increases to the number of dwellings in Taunton might not impact significantly on the disposal capacity of Somerset, the concentration of development in the Taunton area will act to concentrate municipal waste arisings. In accordance with the policies of the Waste Local Plan, increasingly, waste must be managed as close to its source as possible. This will mean that as more waste treatment and disposal methods are brought forward to replace the current disposal methods, they will need to be located in closer proximity than the methods that currently exist.

13.6 The most obvious options that could be implemented that would compliment and enable the growth options put forward would be improved kerbside recycling. This will mean wider coverage of the service and more types of waste being collected and recycled as part of the scheme. The improvement of the Civic Amenity site facilities that currently exist in Somerset would also allow more waste to be managed in a more sustainable manner. Both of these activities are currently being undertaken by the Somerset Waste Partnership, which the County Council is a member in its statutory role as the Waste Disposal Authority.

13.7 Composting of green waste will also be increased and the on-farm composting initiative will be encouraged and supported by the County Council.

13.8 As yet no other waste management technologies have been identified to deal with Somerset's waste. The Adopted Waste Local Plan advocates an approach to waste management in the County that favours smaller scale facilities that are able to manage waste produced as close as possible to its source.

Summary

13.9 Whilst the overall effect of the growth scenarios on landfill capacity is not expected to be that great in comparison with total municipal waste arisings across Somerset, there will be an increased need to manage the waste locally in Taunton. This will include the need for more kerbside collection services and more facilities for processing waste recycling and composting. Additional landfill capacity is required in 2011/12 regardless of the future development strategy for Taunton.

14 Impact on cultural, health and education needs

Introduction

14.1 New development will create additional demands on community facilities such as health and education. The new population is also expected to support greater diversity of provision (particularly cultural facilities) and support the development of new schools and health services that can help address deficiencies in existing levels of provision.

14.2 Other facilities such as community centres and open space will be expected to be provided as part of the extension(s) to the town, subject to normal standards.

14.3 This section looks at the impact of the growth scenarios on culture, health and education provision.

Cultural facilities

14.4 Culture embraces a wide variety of activities, places, values and beliefs, and includes[22]:

- performing and visual arts, craft and fashion
- media, film, television, video and language
- museums, artefacts, archives and design
- libraries, literature, writing and publishing
- built heritage, architecture, landscape and archaeology
- sports participation, events, facilities and development
- parks, open spaces, habitats and countryside access
- play, playspaces and play activities
- tourism, festivals and attractions
- informal leisure.

14.5 In planning for the future the ODPM identifies 13 attributes of sustainable communities. These include providing 'a sense of place', 'good community facilities' and a 'diverse and vibrant local culture'[23]. PPS 1 identifies that sustainable communities need quality housing, a flourishing economy and 'a diverse local culture'. One of the aims of the Integrated Regional Strategy for the South West[24] is to enhance the quality and diversity of the region's cultural life, including increased participation in cultural activities.

14.6 The cultural sector is also seen to be an important contributor to many threads of regional policy, through its role in economic development and employment growth, including its relationship with the knowledge economy and innovation. This is through the effect it can have on enhancing regional image, improving quality of life and the potential it offers for improving social inclusion. Cultural activity can and does drive regeneration, not least in making people feel proud of their communities and of themselves. Taking part in sport and outdoor leisure can lead to healthier lifestyles; visits to cinemas, libraries and museums can stimulate the imagination and aid lifelong learning. Tourism thrives where local culture is strong, and can assist in preserving the qualities of the environment that will attract visitors.

[22] M Elson and L Downing (2005) *Culture and the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West*
[23] ODPM (2003) *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*
[24] South West Regional Assembly (2004) *Just Connect*

14.7 In economic terms cultural activity has grown rapidly in recent years, and now comprises 12.7% of national GDP[25]. It is one of the most rapidly growing sectors in the southwest, with an 8% growth in jobs (2.6% nationally) and a 40% increase in turnover in the four years to 2002[26]. Tourism alone is worth over £500 million to the economy of Somerset[27].

14.8 Cultural activity has proved to be successful in aiding regeneration, as for example the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth, the Plymouth Theatre Royal Production Centre, the Eden project and Tate St Ives. All have led to the creation of new jobs, higher retail expenditure and an increased number of visitors. Similar results have been achieved through cultural partnerships in urban areas. Partnerships and initiatives in sport, and linking sport to health, reflect the government's aim to improve the health and well being of the community.

14.9 Overall, an active cultural sector is seen to equate to a vibrant and successful location for investment and to contribute to an improved quality of life. While there can be an opportunity in spatial strategies for 'culture' to be dealt with as a separate subject area, where disparate threads can be consolidated, it would also be expected that cultural issues will play a wider role in strategies through their contribution to the creation of sustainable and inclusive communities, to the economy and environment, and to the creation of a sense of place and quality of life.

14.10 There is an expectation and a need therefore for the role of culture to be reflected in spatial strategies, both at a regional and a sub regional level.

Policies for the Regional Spatial Strategy

14.11 The Elson and Downing study (Culture and the Regional Spatial Strategy) proposes that the following policy areas should be addressed in the Regional Spatial Strategy:

- identification of the importance of culture to the economy and to community development with the aim of significantly increasing participation
- aim to secure good quality cultural facilities accessible to the majority of people
- aim to develop cultural clusters and linkages in the region
- identify the important role of cultural activity in regeneration areas and 'new' communities
- acknowledge the importance of natural and man made environments to the cultural sector and to the economy
- aim for high quality regional/sub regional facilities in PUAs, the provision of modern neighbourhood and local facilities, and multi activity centres in market towns and rural areas
- seek developer contributions for the full range of cultural facilities
- co-locate facilities in multi use buildings and locations
- establish partnerships at a regional and sub regional level, that will establish priorities.

14.12 The above study also suggests that sub-regional strategies should contain policies that address the following areas:

- contain a vision of the cultural profile of the area in 25 years time
- identify strategic initiatives eg cultural quarters, clusters, links to regeneration

[25] DCMS (2004) *Culture at the Heart of Regeneration*
[26] Mercer (2004) *2020 Vision: Cultural and Creative Futures for the South West*
[27] Somerset County Council (2002) *A Cultural Strategy for the County of Somerset*

- identify the principal cultural facilities required in the main areas of new growth
- phasing policies to ensure facilities are provided in phase with development
- strategic planning obligations policy
- implementation plans, resource plans and delivery partnerships.

Cultural provision in Taunton

14.13 Taunton is a focus within the region for shopping, commerce and services. Within Somerset there is a growing professional sector in the creative industries, employing over 5000 people with a turnover of £314 million[7]. The Brewhouse Theatre for example attracts 65,000 people annually, contributing £3.8 million to the local economy,[8] and the County Museum hosts 20,000 visitors per year. A review of Brewhouse Theatre audience addresses suggests that there is a 45 minute drive time catchment area for cultural facilities in Taunton, within which there is a population of 450,000.

14.14 Notwithstanding these cultural assets, it would appear that the cultural offer in Taunton does require improvement. The Integria study noted above suggests that the level of employment and income derived from the cultural sector and quoted above for Somerset is only around half of the regional average. The Taunton Cultural Consortium, a partnership that includes the local authorities, has concluded in part that a barrier to further growth and development is the small scale and under-resourced nature of the main buildings housing cultural provision in the town.

14.15 Using nationally derived data for participation rates, and a catchment population of 450,000 as suggested above, would indicate potential customer levels of 157,000 for museums, 85,000 for exhibitions and 200,000 for libraries for example. This is a contrast with known existing participation levels. It does however indicate the extent of increased usage that could derive from enlarged and improved facilities. The Integria study has estimated that if Taunton were to expand its cultural sector to match the average for the region, this would lead to the creation of an additional 1800 jobs and £100 million in the local economy.

14.16 There is therefore recognition of the potential for development of the cultural sector in Taunton. This is in part a simple reaction to the relatively under-developed nature of the sector at present. In addition there is a concentration of existing provision in the town centre within a small area, from the HE College to the Somerset Cricket Ground and centred around the Castle Green area and the riverside in the town centre. Within this area there is the college and cricket ground, the museum, records collection, library and theatre. The County Council have identified £3 million in the forward capital programme, linked to a Heritage Lottery Fund bid, to create a Cultural Centre of Excellence as a key element of developing the concept of the Cultural Quarter in the town centre.

14.17 Overall, there will need to be a major commitment from the public sector to deliver the potential for growth that exists in the cultural sector in Taunton. The Vision for Taunton identifies the potential and the Urban Design Framework demonstrates the extent of new and improved provision that can be achieved through a masterplan for the town centre. The UDF plans for significantly enlarged economic activity in the town centre, coupled with extensive proposals for new high density town centre housing that will add to the immediate local catchment population, offer a way forward to realise the UDF proposals. It is anticipated that some developer contributions may impact on the delivery of these proposals, but this is likely to be incidental rather than fundamental to implementation.

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[7] Report for Taunton Deane Borough Council by Integria (2004) *Harnessing Opportunities*
[8] Arts Council methodology

The contribution of culture to the vision for Taunton

14.18 Taunton will be a successful business location with an increasing representation of innovatory and knowledge based businesses. The cultural sector will be a significant contributor to this anticipated economic success, with a priority to develop education, sport, tourism and other activities based around the arts and associated leisure pursuits.

14.19 It is proposed that Taunton will become an important centre in the region for its range and quality of leisure, sporting and cultural activity focused around the town centre, and exploiting the quality of the natural and built environment, the quality of place and vibrant cultural activity to develop as a visitor and conference centre.

14.20 These proposals are intended to benefit both the economy of the area, and also promote the regeneration of the town centre, social inclusion and participation. The vibrant waterfront to be created along the River Tone will link all parts of the town centre, making it accessible for all and the setting for open spaces to accommodate major cultural, civic and sporting events. It also will provide the linkage and context for an appreciation of the historic character of the town, together with connections to the countryside and leisure opportunities. The regeneration of underused sites will provide the framework for realising the foregoing objectives, as well as providing for new housing opportunities for all sectors of the community.

Strategic Initiatives and projects in the cultural sector

14.21 The business sector is expected to grow in part through the expansion of the health and education sectors, particularly at Musgrove Park Hospital and the Somerset College of Arts and Technology (SCAT). The hospital will extend its specialisation role and its potential links with SCAT in a teaching and learning context. SCAT itself will continue to expand its role as an educational resource for business and as a source of knowledge and skills for the existing and future workforce. In addition, there are plans for SCAT to become a regional centre of excellence in the field of sustainable construction focussed around the new 'Genesis' centre currently under construction and for a small number of business incubation units attached to the campus utilising the academic skills of the institution to add value to local business activity.

14.22 This SCAT-based incubation facility will link to a larger and commercially provided centre of 60-70 units, likely to be provided on nearby land at Tangier. This centre could, in turn, become the hub of the proposed creative industries support centre identified in the Integria study referred to previously.

14.23 It is proposed to develop a new 'cultural quarter' as a focus for activity in the centre of the town. The area around the Castle and the associated riverside location has the potential for a new and expanded theatre provision, along with a library and museum facility that enabled wider public access and use. There is the space for a new cinema should that prove to be a viable development. The extensive adjoining open spaces alongside the river provide the opportunity for outdoor public performance space and significant improvements to the public realm generally. There is the prospect of developing a sufficient momentum for the creation of a 'cluster' of related cultural activities.

14.24 These activities are closely connected by riverside access to a prospective remodelled County Cricket Ground, where additional public spaces and leisure/visitor facilities can be provided in association with a first class sporting venue of national standing capable of hosting international level events. It will also include the potential for a dedicated cricketing academy and a regional centre for sports injuries. Such an investment would be based on the principle of a multi-use centre, with other sporting and leisure activities, including teaching academies, health and fitness provision and visitor attractions. Other high-class regional sporting facilities that are planned to be improved include the Blackbrook Tennis Centre.

14.25 The overall regeneration theme will be linked by the 'rediscovery' of the River Tone as the cultural and civic heart of the town. The riverfront will provide a high quality urban setting for new civic spaces, links between business and retail and cultural sectors, and a series of informal spaces for residents. It will provide safe and attractive routes for both pedestrians and cyclists, and link to the adjoining open countryside. Community access to the riverfront will also bring to the fore, the historic character of Taunton, and increase the level of shared appreciation and pride in the town by the community. Public art policies and design briefs will ensure that new spaces, buildings and features incorporate visual connections to the history and use of spaces.

14.26 In addition, it is intended to reinforce the links between the town centre and the adjoining countryside through improved access to areas of public open space such as Vivary Park, safeguarding the existing 'green wedges' which come into the heart of the town and supporting initiatives such as the Neroche Project which seek to create stronger links between the nearby Blackdowns AONB and the town generally and the two Enterprise Areas in particular. There will be a particular emphasis not just on improved access but also on the educational potential and value of such areas.

14.27 The local authorities are also exploring the potential for new and sustainable tourism facilities within the Sub-Area—including a visitor attraction themed around wood and trees and the uses to which fast-growing crops such as Willow can be put, together with a second potential facility themed around ancient knowledge and wisdom.

Sustainable urban extensions

14.28 There needs to be proper provision for the cultural needs of planned urban extensions to provide for sustainable new communities. Where urban extensions build upon existing communities then facilities and services already in place may provide a basis for future provision.

14.29 It will be expected that the educational needs of the new population will be provided for in accessible locations within and adjoining the development, together with play spaces, pitches and sports accommodation, and formal/informal public and green spaces. Local shopping provision, library and health facilities, and a community centre are also required.

14.30 The opportunity should be taken to incorporate mixed uses into multi-functional buildings wherever possible, to maximise participation and access by the community and stimulate cross activity usage. Schools, health centres and libraries, for example, offer potential synergies in a multi-function building if planned from the drawing board and if located in the heart of the community. Many other combinations are possible. In assessing the scale of new facilities required as part of the development of the new communities, and the overall increased requirements in the town as a whole from the increased population, guidance will be sought from regional agencies as appropriate, e.g. Sport England's demand estimation models.

14.31 To maximise accessibility for the largest number of people, the town centre will be the focus for most new cultural investment. Maximising accessibility from all parts of the urban area will be an imperative for any future strategy. Therefore, in new communities there should be a particular effort made to provide effective links with the town centre, by public transport, walking and cycling. Being a small urban area, Taunton has the opportunity to plan and deliver such links, utilising existing routes and the planned improvements to the riverfront as an attractive link to the town centre.

Phasing Policies and Planning Obligations

14.32 Phasing and planning obligation policies are expected to be included in the Regional Spatial Strategy, as recommended by Elson and Downing. The sub-regional strategy for Taunton will build upon these policies by providing a more detailed interpretation of local requirements. Guidelines for developers will be prepared detailing the scale of provision of facilities and services required to support new housing growth, together with guidance on the anticipated timing of the principal items of infrastructure. The approach will be to regard local service provision as a comprehensive package, required to deliver sustainable new communities. In this respect it is the timing of provision as much as the scale of provision that is important in getting new communities off on the right foot.

Implementation, Resources and Partnerships

14.33 The proposals for Taunton have been the subject of discussion between the Borough Council, County Council, the Regional Development Agency and the community at large. There is broad support for many of the aspects of the community regeneration proposals, particularly for the town centre and the overall vision for Taunton. There is also a commitment to continued joint working involving the principal partners to deliver the vision for the future. It is intended to have a dedicated Delivery Team comprising five staff in place by the Summer of 2005 and existing partnerships will continue to be developed as an integral part of the implementation of the Vision for Taunton.

Education

14.34 Taunton has twenty four primary schools and five secondary schools. An expansion of the town would lead to additional requirements on primary and secondary education and the normal operation of the planning system is that developers will make a contribution to additional provision.

14.35 Before calculating the need for new schools, it is necessary to gain an appreciation of the deficiency/surplus of places that already exist in schools around the town. Predications about future school capacity in Taunton is compiled in the Somerset County Council School Organisation Plan. However, this assessment only looks forward to the year 2008. It is unlikely that any of the urban extensions will come on stream until 2010 - 2011 to take account of planning timescales. Despite this slight gap in information over this 2 - 3 year period, the School Organisation Plan is the best available source of data, and for the purposes of this part of the report, will be used as a guide to capacity in schools in about 2010.

Primary schools

14.36 Figure 14.1 shows that all of the sub-areas of the town have surplus capacity in 2008. This masks local variations in supply.

Sub-Area	Net capacity (May 04)	Surplus/ deficit capacity (Sept 08)
North Taunton	2180	319
South & East Taunton	2513	343
South & West Taunton	1300	102
Total for Area	6398	764

Figure 14.1 Surplus/deficit of primary school places in Taunton

14.37 The number of surplus places is spread over twenty four schools and is therefore quite small in comparison with the needs associated with the growth scenarios being tested in this study. It is also noted that these sub-areas are quite large and some of this capacity may be in schools some distance from the extensions. In addition, these estimates do not reflect future housing which will come forward as set out in the emerging Taunton Deane Local Plan, as needs arising from potential housing land is not included in the forecasting models until it has planning permission. On this basis, it is assumed that there will be very little surplus capacity in primary schools accessible to any of the urban extensions being tested. But any minor differences would be considered at the detailed planning stage.

14.38 In turning to the need for education generated by the spatial options, planning standards are applied. Somerset County Council's standards require one class of 30 children to be provided for every 150 dwellings that is built. Assuming that additional needs will be provided as part of the urban extensions, and taking the maximum size of a primary school to be about 420 places, this generates the need for about 4 new primary schools in the low growth scenario and 6 - 7 schools in the high growth scenario.

Spatial options	No of school places required	No of new schools
South Taunton (option 1a)	1450	3 - 4
North Taunton (option 1b)	1450	3 - 4
North and South Taunton (option 2a)	1450 in the south 1060 in the north	6
East of the Motorway	2700	6-7

Figure 14.2 Primary school needs resulting from the spatial options

Secondary schools

14.39 Taking account of the two large Local Plan housing allocations in the Taunton Deane Local Plan provision for housing (but overlooking all other future housing supply), the table below shows that there is very little future surplus capacity at most of the secondary schools, excluding St Augustine of Canterbury. Heathfield and Ladymead are noted to have a deficit of places. Therefore, the urban extensions associated with the spatial options would need to make provision for all additional needs.

Secondary school	Net capacity (April 2004)	Surplus/ deficit capacity (2011)
Ladymead (north)	900	-47
The Castle (west)	1160	16
Bishop Fox's (south)	900	81
St Augustine of Canterbury	700	267
Heathfield	1125	-173

Figure 14.3 Surplus/deficit of secondary school places in Taunton

14.40 Looking at future secondary school provision for the spatial options, Somerset County Council require a class of 30 pupils to be provided for every 210 dwellings. With a maximum capacity of about 1500 pupils, the spatial options will lead to a requirement of between one and two secondary schools.

Spatial option	No of school places required	New secondary schools required
South Taunton (option 1a)	1035	1
North Taunton (option 1b)	1035	1
North + South Taunton (option 2a)	South - 785 North - 1000	2
East of the Motorway	1785	1

14.41 In options 1a and 2a, school place requirements emanating from an allocation at the Vivary Green Wedge could be met from spare capacity at Bishop Fox's.

14.42 At Monkton Heathfield, an additional secondary school could address the future deficiencies expected in this area arising from the existing Local Plan allocation.

Discussion

14.43 The planning system would look to secure contributions from developers for new primary and secondary school provision as part of new development. The urban extensions are of a scale that will require new schools, rather than relying totally on expanding existing schools.

14.44 Because most of the secondary schools in Taunton are either full or deficient of places and some are constrained from further expansion in their existing location, the least economic spatial option for the future provision of school places would be to scatter lots of small scale urban extensions around the town. From an education provision point of view, larger concentrated urban extensions are therefore preferred. In directing new development to locations to support particular land use needs, future growth of Taunton in the direction of Monkton Heathfield would serve to further support the economics of a new school in this area which in any case will be required to accommodate education needs arising from the existing Monkton Heathfield housing allocation in the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

Health

14.45 In general the health of the population in Somerset is good. Life expectancy is above average and there are relatively low death rates from cancer (117.1 per 100,000 of the population versus national average of 130.6) and circulatory diseases (96.1 versus national average of 120.4). Infant mortality is also low. However, it is interesting to note that the suicide rate is higher than average. Other statistics show lower than average incidence of lung cancer; a higher than average incidence of malignant melanoma and other skin cancers; and a higher than average incidence of low grade mental health problems in the community. However, there are areas of socio-economic deprivation which show high incidences of health problems.

14.46 While it can be seen that the overall health status in Somerset is relatively good, further improvements can be achieved by giving priority to:

- improving access to all health services
- conditions related to the growing numbers of elderly people living longer and the need to promote independence in older people
- the most common diseases at national and local level which still account for the majority of deaths and days lost through illness. These major diseases include coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, mental illness, asthma and diabetes.

14.47 In general terms the population of Taunton Deane is relatively healthy when compared to England as a whole, as is the rest of Somerset. The key features of the local population's health include:

- a lower rate of heart disease compared to the national average, and lower than the rates for Sedgemoor and Mendip
- a higher rate for fatal accidents than the national average, and higher than the other four districts in Somerset
- a lower rate of suicide compared to the national average, and lower than the rate for Sedgemoor and Mendip
- a higher rate of drug agency clients than for the South West as a whole, with the exception of Avon
- the rate of conception amongst under 18s in Taunton Deane is 40.2 per 1000 (1998 - 2000) compared to the Somerset rate of 38.1 and national rate of 44.9.

14.48 Taunton Deane's pattern of need on the health and social need variables is similar to that for the county as a whole. However, Taunton Deane has a lower incidence of referrals from Social Services for those aged 0-18. There are pockets of both urban and rural health and social need, particularly in North and East Taunton, and parts of Wellington. The Barnardos 'Invisible Children Study' (2001) found that of all the towns in the South West, Taunton had the highest proportion of children living in poverty (37%), a total of approximately 3,180 under 16 year olds. This is supported by the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which finds Taunton Deane to contain wards with very high percentages of children living in poverty (63%).

Health providers and priorities

14.49 The NHS is undergoing considerable change and pursuing the modernising agenda. This seeks improvements in a considerable range of standards, service provision, priorities, and new development as set out in the NHS plan, 'The NHS Improvement Plan: Putting People at the Heart of Public Services' 2004 and National Service Frameworks.

14.50 The Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority (SHA) is responsible for setting strategic objectives and coordinating the delivery of plans to improve the health of the local population and ensure the provision of modern, high quality, fast and convenient care, treatment and prevention services which meet national standards, individual needs and have taken into account the views of front line clinicians and local people.

14.51 The SHA has produced a 3 year delivery plan which looks to 2005/6 which sets out the delivery agenda of the Dorset and Somerset Health Community. It identifies areas where local improvement is needed which include:

- skin cancer, suicides, teenage pregnancy, smoking rates, accident prevention, vulnerable children and young people
- tackling health inequalities overall
- targeting the most deprived areas
- working with Local Authorities and other partners on the wider Government agenda to address economic well-being, crime and justice, unemployment, priority housing and the environment.

14.52 Last year the SHA approved £23million spending on improvements across Dorset and Somerset including:

- developing services for patients suffering from heart conditions and from cancers at Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust
- refurbishing and developing facilities to treat more patients at East Somerset NHS Trust in Yeovil
- developing a new West Mendip Community Hospital to replace the current community hospitals in Wells and at Butleigh.

14.53 The SHA consider that any development growth in Taunton will need corresponding expansion in health infrastructure in the relevant locations. They also believe it is important from a public health perspective that all locations have good access to the town centre and places of work to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport. The SHA note that Monkton Heathfield and Dowslands West are particularly well located to provide this access. They have previously identified road infrastructure as affecting health services by causing difficulties for staff traveling across the town and also in relation to the movement of emergency vehicles.

14.54 The largest hospital in Somerset is the Taunton and Somerset Hospital at Musgrove Park in Taunton. This is managed by the Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust and is housed in old buildings in need of refurbishment. Due to expansion constraints there are current plans to increase the services on the existing site with considerable strategic capital development at the hospital. By providing new centres for cancer and cardiac services, local facilities will be improved and the need to travel to Bristol will be reduced, they will also require a considerable expansion in the workforce. As a result of the national plan to extend numbers in medical education the hospital has this year begun to teach medical students from Bristol University, which has led to a new Education centre being developed. There will be transport implications of approximately 100 students travelling to Taunton from Bristol.

14.55 The Trust is interested in the amount of growth rather than its location. It is important that growth assumptions are made clear and discussed with the hospital as a considerable increase in new population to the area, of which many would be of working age would give a very different demand on health services that the existing projections. This may well facilitate a review of maternity services. Any increased demand will put additional pressure on the transport infrastructure as well as recruitment. Access will be critical in all the scenarios. The Hospital trust support the move by PCTs towards the development of specialist centres and provision of outpatient and diagnostic facilities into the community.

14.56 There are 4 Primary Care Trusts (PCT) in Somerset. These provide primary care services to the local population with 77 practices run by 334 general practitioners. The population split of the PCT's is as follows:

- Somerset Coast Primary Care Trust - 138,438
- South Somerset Primary Care Trust - 145,872
- South West Dorset Primary Care Trust - 135,469
- Taunton Deane Primary Care Trust - 102,917

14.57 The PCT's sometimes get involved in local development control planning issues and believe it is vital that new housing and economic development are matched with the development of appropriate health services and facilities. A key element of modernisation plans is the need for a wider range of services to be provided in the community closer to patients which means enhanced primary care premises. This will have implications for public transport services in accessing local facilities.

14.58 Taunton Deane PCT is the one most affected by the expansion proposals for Taunton. The Primary Care Trust includes 15 general practices, 16 dental surgeries, 18 community pharmacies and 10 optometrists, and employs 399 staff. The Primary Care Trust is also responsible for the management of two community hospitals in Cotford St Luke, near Taunton, and Wellington and the provision of community nursing, health visiting, school nursing and therapy services to its population.

14.59 A key task for the Primary Care Trust in 2003/04 was the relocation of the Taunton Community Hospital from the Musgrove Park Hospital site to the Dene Barton Unit at Cotford St Luke. This is working well, however recruitment is still an issue. Plans for the development of the Wellington and District Cottage Hospital following the move of mental health for older people inpatient services from Stratfield House over the next 12 to 18 months have also been agreed by the Primary Care Trust. The Primary Care Trust over the next three years is keen to develop the potential of both community hospitals and the range of services they provide.

14.60 A skills shortage currently exists in the NHS, and recruitment and retention of staff is a particular issue for Taunton PCT and other PCTs. It is also likely that skills development will be needed as primary care priorities alter in response to new objectives.

Implications of the spatial options on health provision

14.61 The general numbers involved in the options could be accommodated with new facilities. It will be necessary to expand some practices and develop larger specialist units. Regardless of the scenarios being tested for this study, this is something the PCT are already investigating. In terms of the specific locations for new growth it will be necessary to identify practices that can be grouped together and start to amalgamate these into larger sites. While there is already some pressure from practices that want to instigate this change, if these are not in the 'right' locations, work will be needed by the PCT to persuade practices to develop and group together to form specialist practices.

Discussion

14.62 The health of the population of Taunton is generally good, despite some wards experiencing more significant social and health needs. Taunton benefits from high quality health services at all levels, as shown by all trusts achieving 2 or 3 star status. This contributes to providing a social environment that is suitable and attractive for development and growth.

14.63 To ensure that a high standard of care at both primary and secondary levels is maintained, it is important that the implications for health services of any new development in Taunton are properly considered and planned. No particular health provision constraints to any of the growth levels were raised and the SHA and the Trusts are of the view that they will respond to the need generated by changes in the population arising from the future development strategy of the area.

14.64 It is encouraging that so many health providers are gradually getting more involved in the planning agenda and recognising the implications of development on the provision of health care. Further involvement and consultation with all the relevant health organisations - the SHA, the hospital trusts and the PCTs will be needed to ensure adequate health services are provided to the new population. Their input can assist in identifying the determinants of health, assessing inequalities, and creating healthy communities. This is particularly important if the aim of sustainable development is to be achieved.

15 The strategic sustainability assessment

Introduction

15.1 The brief for the JSAs requires that the studies undertake a strategic sustainability assessment. To compare performance with respect to environmental, social and economic objectives, the four spatial options (set out in section 8) have been subjected to the regional SSA framework.

15.2 Although the Sub-Area Studies (SAS) themselves will not be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) under the SEA Directive, the findings from these studies will be incorporated within the RSS, as policies and proposals. Those elements that end up in the RSS must be subject to SSA, which meets the SEA Directive's requirements. To assist the preparation of the RSS, including the SSA of the sub-regional policies, SWRA require a suitable information base. The Sub-Regional studies will therefore need to be based on sound evidence, and this base will need to be recorded and sufficient to carry out the SSA of the RSS.

Methodology

15.3 The approach being taken is to carry out a sustainability appraisal in a manner, which addresses the requirement of the SEA Directive. The basic features of the approach are as follows:

- To draw upon other plans, strategies and information documents e.g. the Taunton Urban Extension Study (November, 2004) to identify environmental, social, economic and other sustainability characteristics and to formulate baseline information on these issues;

- To undertake a general SSA including consideration of the likely effects on the environmental components of the sustainability agenda;

- To report on whether there could be different and better implications if certain methods were used to mitigate the impact.

15.4 The SSA will utilise a two-tier structure with broad 'high level objectives' amplified and explained by more specific 'detailed questions'. As the focus on outcome objectives implies, sustainability appraisal is concerned with getting the best overall result. In light of this, while some outcomes may be deemed more unacceptable in terms of sustainability, many negative impacts could be offset by positive impacts. This substitution of 'strategic benefits' is welcomed in the SSA Guidance for Sub-Regional Studies' prepared for the South West Regional Assembly (June, 2004) and will therefore be sought in this process.

15.5 The six high level objectives for the SSA are as follows: improve health; support communities that meet people's needs; develop the economy in ways that meet people's needs; provide access to meet people's needs with the least damage to communities and the environment; maintain and improve environmental quality and assets; and, minimise consumption of natural resources.

15.6 However, it should be remembered that SSA is only a tool and does not alone make decisions. Its primary role is to ensure that the full range of sustainability consequences in terms of the options are made clear, so that ultimately political choices about options can take these into account.

15.7 In carrying out the appraisal, the options will be appraised against each of the high level objectives using the detailed questions. In order to answer these questions, where possible, reference will be needed in respect of the evidence base that has been compiled (see Appendix 4). Against each of the detailed questions, an assessment will be made whether the option is likely to make a positive or negative contribution, using the following symbols:

✓✓	Major positive
✓	Minor positive
0	Neutral effect
x	Minor negative
xx	Major negative
?	Uncertain effect

15.8 In order to determine whether the effect is major or minor, a number of issues will need to be taken into account, such as:

- whether the effect is likely to be permanent or temporary
- the likelihood of the effect occurring
- the scale of the effect (e.g. whether it will affect one location or a wide area)
- the current status and trends in the environmental, social and economic baseline of the area affected
- whether it is likely to affect particularly sensitive locations (e.g. landscapes, communities, habitat, buildings etc, particularly those that are designated at the (inter) national level) or mean that thresholds may be breached (e.g. air quality standards).

15.9 In all instances, using the above criteria for assessing effects, a commentary will be provided justifying the use of a particular assessment symbol, with reference to the evidence base, and recommendations made where possible for mitigating any adverse effects, or improving positive effects arising.

15.10 For the SAS of the RSS, a SSA matrix will be used (see Appendix 4). This has been slightly adapted as suggested in the SSA guidance for Sub-Regional Studies prepared for the South West Regional Assembly (June, 2004).

Baseline Information

15.11 Relevant baseline information on the six high level objectives was collected from a number of sources, including the Office of National Statistics, the Taunton Vision Baseline Report/Urban Extension Study and Somerset Statistics. This data is presented in Appendix 4.

15.12 The types of data/information included are social (populations, proportion of those with long-term illness, those claiming benefits, those with qualifications, education facilities, crime rates, indices of multiple deprivation), economic (employment projections, economic activity rates, house prices, average earnings), transport (travel to work, in/out commuters), environmental (key landscapes/townscape characteristics, existing water, agricultural land, noise/vibration and air quality e.g. AQMA's, as well as ecological sites of local, county, national and international importance) and resources (electricity, gas, water, sewage supply).

15.13 Key figures/trends uncovered from the baseline are that in 2001 there were 63,535 people living in Taunton, 69% of the population were in 'good health' and 18% had limiting long-term illnesses. In terms of education, 14,573 of all 16-74 year olds had no qualifications and most schools, both primary and secondary, were at capacity. In terms of the economy, 80% of the working age population were economically active and in November 2004 only 443 people were claiming job seekers allowance. Economic forecasts undertaken for the Taunton Sub-Area Study, project a total of 15,075 jobs to be generated across the Taunton TTWA by 2026. Taking an economic led approach, and with the aim of matching additional jobs with additional homes, this equates to a Taunton Deane dwelling requirement of 13,870 by 2026, which shares a similar geographical area as the TTWA. In terms of transport, over half the working population travelled to work by car/van, 10,447 commuted into Taunton and 6,735 were out commuters. In 2003, there were 10,839 working households in Taunton, with an average income of £29,113 and a mean house price of £144,747. The 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation demonstrates that Taunton's most deprived wards lie to the north and the east, whereas, the least deprived are to the south and west of the town.

15.14 In environmental terms, Taunton is situated between two AONB's (the Quantock and the Blackdown Hills) and within the town there are three green wedges. The water quality in the River tone is capable of supporting most species of fish but is deemed poor in terms of nitrates and phosphates. Agricultural land quality is best to the northeast and there are a number of archaeological sites, medieval discoveries, cropmarks and scheduled ancient monuments around the outskirts of the town. There are a number of County Wildlife Sites and a County Geological Site in the Taunton area and otter, kingfisher, water vole, bats, peregrine falcons and black redstarts have all been recorded around the town.

15.15 Any significant development in Taunton would mean that the electricity, gas, water and sewerage system would need reinforcing. In terms of pollution and noise/vibration, areas already highlighted as having problems are East Reach, Henlade, Victoria Parkway and Toneway.

15.16 Where quantifiable in terms of the impact of a particular option, this will be referred to when carrying out the appraisal. However, if a number cannot be quantified with confidence, it is instead predicted whether the effect will be positive, negative or neutral and the source the data taken from will be referenced.

Findings of the SSA

15.17 On the whole it has proved difficult to quantify the impacts resulting from the options in terms of the baseline data (Appendix 4). However, the primary outcome of a sustainability appraisal is to predict a potential effect, be that positive, neutral, negative or uncertain. Therefore, whilst the process is somewhat subjective for each high level objective, the potential effects of each growth option can be predicted. The following section will discuss the differing effects of the four options for Taunton upon the six high level objectives set out in para 2.3.

High Level Objective 1: Improve Health

15.18 Any further concentration of growth in Taunton could have a short-term negative effect on health due to construction and a long-term positive effect if the new areas are of good quality and design. However, any increase in Taunton's population will also place a greater strain upon the existing primary green spaces, although there is scope for new areas to be created as part of any new development.

15.19 It seems that 1b (north) would be the most beneficial low growth option in terms of health, as there are already good public cycle/foot paths to health services (especially Musgrove Park) in the town centre, whilst those to the south (1a) are of lesser quality. Furthermore, development to the north would be adjacent to the most deprived wards in Taunton, potentially reducing health inequalities in the town as a whole through improved access to the town centre, to employment and to new leisure and health provision that would form part of the development areas. Of the high growth options, 2a (north and south) would experience the above benefits, whereas poor links to the town centre and therefore Musgrove Hospital would prove option 2b to be potentially less sustainable. Furthermore, due to the greater distance from the rest of the Taunton area and severance caused by the motorway, walking and cycling trips may be difficult to encourage.

15.20 Overall, it would seem that of the low growth options, in terms of improving health through good access to health services, option 1b would be more sustainable and of the high growth options 2a is potentially most favourable.

High Level Objective 2: Support Communities that meet people’s needs

15.21 In terms of access to education, most of Taunton’s primary and secondary schools are already at, or near capacity. Therefore, any sustainable urban extension would require the construction of new education facilities, thus no difference in impacts between the spatial options for secondary education are expected. However, in terms of further education and therefore increasing those with higher-level qualifications again options 1b and 2a are preferred. This is because development to the north already has good public transport and cycle/footpath links to the town centre and therefore to the Somerset College of Art and Technology (SCAT) and other town centre schools. Both option 1a (south) and to a greater extent, the south-eastern site (2b) have poorer accessibility to the town centre and would need to be relatively self-sustaining as alternatives to the private car are not easily encouraged. However, geographically, the area to the south is in closer proximity to the town centre. Furthermore, in terms of benefits to other communities (e.g. the deprived areas of Taunton), option 1b would be the most sustainable due to its close proximity to those deprived wards in the north and east, because of the potential benefits of being able to access new education facilities. However, this does not take into account the parental choice involved with education facilities, which has an impact upon transport issues within the sustainability criteria.

15.22 Any further concentration of growth and subsequent economic activity would have a positive effect on access to cultural activities and the vibrancy of local communities. Furthermore, a higher growth rate i.e. option 2a or 2b would give opportunities for a higher level of provision of ‘affordable housing’. However, overall it would seem that option 1b is the most sustainable in terms of objective 2 because good quality public transport and cycle/footpaths are already in place to those facilities in the town centre. However, geographically option 1a is closer to the town centre and in particular SCAT. Nevertheless, due to its proximity to deprived wards option 1b may reduce inequalities in access to these services.

High Level Objective 3: Develop the economy in ways that meet people’s needs

15.23 In terms of developing the economy, because of better access to the strategic road network, there is considered to be more potential for the private sector to deliver a strategic employment site at Monkton Heathfield in addition to that already allocated in the Local Plan. Furthermore, option 1b is already well placed on the strategic road network and in a prime location to potentially reduce inequalities due to its proximity to Taunton’s most deprived wards. On the other hand, the south west (1a) does not have the same level of access to existing employment sites and would have to be relatively self-sustaining. Furthermore, option 1a would provide reduced benefit to those deprived wards to the north and east.

15.24 In terms of the high growth options, employment growth forecasts translated into a housing requirement for Taunton up to 2026 are significantly less than the levels required for options 2a and 2b. These options are therefore not in balance with an implied housing and population growth well in excess of forecast employment growth. Such an imbalance may lead to unsustainable trends, such as increased travel for work purposes.

15.25 A further concentration of growth in Taunton would be more sustainable in that it would increase the circulation of wealth within the region. However, in terms of reducing income inequalities and access to employment, option 1b is potentially the most sustainable growth option, primarily due to existing and potential sustainable transport links to town centre employment sites.

High Level Objective 4: Provide access to meet people's needs with least damage to communities and the environment

15.26 Over half of Taunton's employees travel to work by car so any further expansion of Taunton needs to seek alternative methods to the private car to help keep any increase in congestion at a minimum.

15.27 Option 1b already has good public transport and cycle/footpath links to the town centre and access to the strategic road network. Furthermore, development could provide a northern outer distributor road to relieve congestion in the town centre and improve access to West Somerset. Option 1a on the other hand, has poorer access to the strategic road network and cycle/footpaths but is geographically closer to the town centre. There is also limited potential for improved public transport links. However, development in this location could facilitate a southern outer distributor road to reduce cross-town movement and therefore, town centre congestion.

15.28 Concentrating development to the south east (2b) with direct access to the motorway may promote greater long-distance commuting. Sustainable alternatives to the private car are not easily encouraged with development southeast of the motorway. Furthermore, due to the greater distance from the rest of the Taunton area and severance caused by the motorway, walk and cycle trips will be difficult to encourage. To this extent, option 2a is the better higher growth option as it would facilitate higher public transport patronage and have a more positive impact upon town centre congestion through the potential construction of two outer distributor roads.

15.29 Any further concentration of development in Taunton must have the potential to facilitate a modal shift to public transport and because there are existing opportunities for this already at Monkton Heathfield to the north, option 1b seems to be the most sustainable location. On the other hand, option 2b is the most unsustainable location due to its distance and inability to provide alternatives to the private car.

High Level Objective 5: Maintain and improve environmental quality and assets

15.30 In terms of environmental damage, growth to the north (1b) and south east (2b) could have a negative visual effect upon views from the Quantock and Blackdown Hills AONB's, but it should be possible to minimise impacts in the masterplanning of these areas. Options 1a, 1b and 2a would cause some environmental problems associated with the construction of new northern and southern outer distributor roads. On the other hand, this may aid in reducing the increase in town centre congestion currently expected.

15.31 The highest-grade agricultural land around Taunton is to the north (1b). Options 2a and 2b involves higher levels of growth and therefore greater levels of greenfield land will be lost. Furthermore, development to the north (1b) and the southeast (2b) would have to take into account potential impacts upon a number of County Wildlife Sites and associated protected species. However, there have also been a number of legally protected species reported in all other potential development locations that would have to be considered as part of any specific development proposal.

15.32 All options could have a negative effect on designated Conservation Areas (Trull, Cheddon Fitzpaine and Stoke St. Mary), but well planned urban extensions should seek to preserve the setting of these areas. Options 1a, 1b and 2a would impact upon Taunton's green wedges. Furthermore, all options pose a potential impact upon a number of sites recorded in the archaeological records. However, all of these could be investigated, recorded and potentially conserved within the development areas, thus mitigating the effect.

15.33 Development, in itself, will lead to an impact upon the environment. However, giving consideration to environmental issues during the delineation of development boundaries could enable the introduction of mitigation measures. Furthermore, by creating attractive, well designed urban spaces, this impact could be reduced further. Overall, it may be concluded that in environmental terms (based largely on agricultural land quality), the most sustainable option is 1a to the southwest, although there are only marginal differences between 1a and 1b.

High Level Objective 6: Minimise consumption of natural resources

15.34 Any expansion of Taunton will result in a higher consumption of non-renewable energy. However, there is potential to minimise this through energy efficient design. Expansion of the town will also require reinforcement of the electricity, gas, water and sewerage network. This is expected to be more difficult for option 1b, requiring the construction of a new public sewerage connection in this area that would need to cross the canal, railway and river.

15.35 Any further growth will also have a negative effect on noise, vibration and air pollution. Unless there is a major modal shift to public transport, the AQMA's identified in the town will become worse. In light of this, it would seem that option 1b is preferred due to existing public transport links that could be utilised immediately unlike option 2b where sustainable alternatives to the private car will be hard to encourage.

15.36 Overall, it would appear that low growth in Taunton would have the least negative effect on this objective and again due to transport matters, option 1b is the most sustainable. Of the high growth scenarios, option 2a is preferable because 2b is considered to have more limited potential for a modal shift away from the private car.

Conclusions

15.37 In conclusion, it is apparent from the appraisal and subsequent discussion that in many respects further growth in Taunton, beyond the existing urban boundaries, would have similar effects e.g. potential strain on primary green spaces, need for further education and health facilities, increase in numbers of commuters/congestion, access to cultural activities, impacts upon greenfield land, conservation areas, archaeological records etc.

15.38 In economic terms, it would appear that growth in Taunton until 2026 should be of the level outlined in the low growth options (1a and 1b). This is because economic forecasts project a total of 15,075 jobs to be generated across the Taunton TTWA by 2026. However, taking an economic led approach, and with the aim of matching additional jobs with additional homes, this equates to a Taunton Deane dwelling requirement far less than the levels of growth outlined in options 2a and 2b but comparable with the low growth levels. This proves the higher growth options to be unsustainable.

15.39 Option 2b would also have significant adverse impacts regarding transport and the environment. In transport terms access into Taunton from development at 2b will involve longer journeys and alternatives to the private car will be difficult to encourage. Furthermore, locating development to the east of the motorway is forecast to have an adverse impact upon Junction 25 through a diversion of local trips onto the motorway to avoid local congestion. Finally, due to the greater distance from the rest of the Taunton area and severance caused by the motorway, walk and cycle trips will be difficult to encourage. Bearing all this in mind, access to town centre facilities e.g. Musgrove Park Hospital, SCAT and town centre schools as well as employment sites will be more difficult from option 2b and may thus facilitate greater long-distance commuting, which in itself is unsustainable. In environmental terms, option 2b would involve the loss of a relatively high level of land in a single location, incorporating a number of designated villages and depending on its extent, could have an adverse visual impact upon the Blackdown Hills.

15.40 Option 1b to the north is the most sustainable growth option primarily because of the existing public transport and cycling/walking corridors into the town centre, its access to the strategic road network, major employment sites and to education facilities, and its close proximity and positive effect on Taunton's most deprived wards. Furthermore, a northern outer distributor road as part of option 1b would aid in achieving wider sustainability objectives e.g. improved access to West Somerset. There is also potential to further extend an existing allocated 'Strategic Employment Site' at Monkton Heathfield in conjunction with other development in the area. The relatively limited potential for public transport and poor access to the town centre means that development to the south of the town (1a) would have to be relatively self-contained. However, greater levels of investment could overcome the problems inherent in the area. On the positive side, geographically, the area is closer to the town centre, SCAT and Musgrove Park Hospital and a southern outer distributor road may aid in managing town centre congestion.

15.42 In environmental terms, option 1a has the least potentially damaging effects, although the difference between 1a and 1b is marginal. Development to the north (1b) may have an adverse impact upon the Quantock Hills. However, any development will lead to a loss of greenfield land and careful thought at the masterplanning stage could help to offset this impact by creating accessible, good quality, sustainable urban extensions.

15.43 Overall, sustainable growth is relatively achievable with immediate effect to the north of Taunton and it would be beneficial to neighbouring areas of deprivation, provide real alternatives to the private car, thus helping to manage congestion in the town centre and relieve pressure on areas that are already deemed Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's), as well as aiding wider objectives e.g. improved access to West Somerset. It is clear that at present, a low growth option is most sustainable for Taunton. In general, option 1b to the north is the most sustainable growth option. However, there is relatively little difference between options 1a and 1b. In fact, option 1a has the capacity to be considered for further growth at a future date, if required to complement the phased earlier development of option 1b to the north of the town.

16 Environmental implications

Introduction

16.1 A sieving process has been applied to eliminate important environmental resources, and hence identify the set of spatial options for testing. The site selection process is set out in section 8. These options have been subject to further testing in Part 3.

16.2 The section of transport (section 12) and the SSA (section 15) both discuss the effects of the spatial options on the environment. This chapter brings together and summarises these findings.

Biodiversity

16.3 Nationally important biodiversity resources have been excluded in the site selection process. Ancient Woodland and SSSIs will be unaffected.

16.4 However, the proximity of the Special Area for Conservation at Hestercombe House, is something that would need to be considered in accommodating further new development around the edges of Pyrland/Priorswood in the north.

16.5 No county wildlife sites are affected by the any of the spatial options, but legally protected species such as badgers, otters water voles and bats are scattered around the urban fringe. These will need to be addressed in the detailed planning of the preferred sustainable urban extension.

16.6 English Nature responded to the TSAS consultation confirming that there were no impacts of any of the spatial options on legally protected nature conservation sites. They also encourage the extensions to comprise green infrastructure - a network of mulit-functional wildlife, recreation and cultural facilities.

Landscape

16.7 The Quantocks AONB is sufficiently far away from extensions in the north for there to be an adverse impact. However, a large scale extension to the east of the motorway would spread the effect of development much closer to the Blackdown Hills, although it should be possible to mitigate this in the delineation of the developable area.

16.8 Local landscape features have been considered in the site selection process. However, there are concerns that the numbers of dwellings associated with option 1b at Monkton Heathfield, Staplegrove, Priorswood and Pyrland will impact on neighbouring local landscape constraints and green wedge resources. Excluding the existing allocation at Monkton Heathfield, as well as land within the Canal and Corridor green wedge (but utilising it for recreation use), the UES concluded that it is possible to accommodate about 4000 dwellings. However, if it turns out not to be appropriate to use land within the green wedge for recreation, land at Monkton Heathfield has capacity for about 3000 dwellings.

16.9 About 90 hectares of land are considered to be available at Staplegrove and Pyrland/Priorswood, without infringing on the Staplegrove Green Wedge or Local Landscape Feature. Subtracting a third of the land area for strategic infrastructure and open space and community uses, and based on a net density of 37 dpa, this area could bring forward between 1500 - 2000 dwellings.

16.10 Taking the lowest dwelling capacity figures, the collection of northern sites would only deliver 4500 dwellings, and for the high dwelling capacity figure, 6000 dwellings. For the RPG10 low growth scenario, this has a shortfall of 2750 (low dwelling capacity figure) and 1,250 dwellings (high dwelling capacity figure) respectively. If 1b were the preferred location for a sustainable urban extension, to satisfy the residual requirements associated with even the lowest growth scenario, this would require work to commence on an additional extension before 2026.

16.11 The study had suggested that land at Dowslands West has the potential to accommodate between 500-1000 dwellings. This is likely to be at the lower end because of impacts on the landscape in this direction.

Agricultural land

16.12 Taunton is surrounded by high grade agricultural land, but option 1b contains more grade 2 and 3a land than options 1a and 2b, which are predominantly grades 3a and 3b. Development to the north of Taunton would therefore lead to the loss of higher grade agricultural land.

Historic environment

16.13 Trull to the south, Cheddon Fitzpaine to the north and Stoke St Mary to the east of the motorway are Conservation Areas. All of the options involve development in the vicinity of these areas. However, it should be possible to provide a rural setting for these areas at the detailed planning stage.

16.14 All options pose a potential impact upon a number of sites recorded in the archaeological records. However, all of these could be investigated, recorded and potentially conserved within the development areas, thus mitigating the effect.

Green wedges

16.15 The precise boundaries and size of the extensions is a matter for Taunton Deane Borough Council. The Local Plan designates three strategic Green Wedges and this study has sought to preserve these longstanding features. Staplegrove and Bathpool green wedges have not been included in the spatial options for housing development. A small section of the Vivary Green Wedge has been identified for development potential, avoiding the most environmentally sensitive areas and prominent land at Cotlake Hill.

Water resources

16.16 Taunton has a fairly extensive floodplain running in an east - west direction through the middle of the town. Undeveloped land liable to flooding has been excluded from the areas of search for urban extensions. However, expansion to the town could have the effect of reducing the flood storage capacity and could have an impact on flooding elsewhere. Sustainable urban drainage would need to incorporated into the sustainable urban extension(s) to minimise the impacts on flooding.

16.17 Any large scale expansion of Taunton will require new infrastructure for water supply and sewage, but this is not considered to be a constraint to growth.

Air quality

16.18 The transport assessment of the spatial options notes that the increase of congestion will be greatest for the high growth options. This is inevitable since there will be greater traffic movements resulting from more people living in Taunton.

16.19 It is difficult to distinguish between the low growth options, which perform very similarly. However, because of higher public transport patronage associated with 1b (taking advantage of existing the Quality Bus Corridor from Monkton Heathfield), the minimisation of congestion and hence air quality is expected to be best for option 1b. This is not clear cut, as option 1a is close to the town centre and a modal shift to walking and cycling is expected to be higher for this option.

17 Consultation

Introduction

17.1 Section 10 of the 20/10/04 SWRA brief from the SWRA sets out an expectation that the JSA studies will be subject to consultation on:

- the overall vision for the area
- the development options being considered.

17.2 A considerable amount of public involvement into the Taunton Vision has already been carried out, providing stakeholders' and the community's vision for Taunton (see section 4). This has not been re-visited. The consultation arrangements for the TSAS have concentrated on the spatial options proposed for detailed examination. Two main methods were followed for the TSAS and they are discussed below. They include:

- a series of workshops with a range of invitees
- a widely distributed consultation leaflet, with provision for response.

Workshops

17.3 Four workshops were held over a two week period inviting a range of local politicians and representatives from the following sectors. These include

- businesses/infrastructure
- local Councillors from a range of parish, town and district councils and from Somerset County Council
- community groups
- environmental groups.

17.4 Attendees are presented in appendix 3 and summaries of the views expressed during these workshops are presented below.

Workshop 1 - businesses and infrastructure

17.5 Business representatives agreed that Taunton was bound to grow and that such growth should be led by economic potential and infrastructure provision. The capacity of Junction 25 was seen as likely to limit growth, at least on the east side of the town. If the highest growth levels were to be achieved, it was felt that a major employment site was needed in the east, supported by a second motorway junction. It was perceived that businesses were moving to the edges of the town and beyond to avoid congestion. It is also felt that the town lacked good employment sites and needed land for high tech, light industrial and warehousing uses.

17.6 The capacity of the centre to accommodate the central area needs of an expanded town were questioned but the Taunton Vision's physical ideas for the town centre and river, for a step change improvement in public transport, including links to Park and Ride and also to the M5 and Ruishton/ Henlade were supported. The whole concept of a sustainable town was appreciated and was expected to embrace transport, regeneration, high environmental quality and green space. The town needed to be one that young people wanted to live in and had to provide enough affordable housing in the town centre. The town philosophy should change from 'market town' if PUA function was to be secured and the relationship with Bridgwater and Wellington spelt out. Further investigation of the east of the M5 should be pursued and thought given to ensuring adequate initial public investment, perhaps with support of a regeneration company mechanism involving TDBC, SCC and the private sector.

Workshop 2 - local Councillors

17.7 Councillors accepted that Taunton will grow significantly and that this was necessary to fulfil PUA status. But there was a widely held view that growth should not be the maximum, rather the lowest possible level of inevitable growth. The speed of growth should match the parallel availability of infrastructure of all types. Housing should be mixed and well designed, with sufficient numbers of dwellings provided to limit local house price inflation. Good quality, low cost accommodation should also be made available for young people in surrounding smaller centres.

17.8 There was a strong sense that the area should plan for young people and provide more jobs for young people who would not be going to university, as well as growth in better quality employment overall. All development design should be improved.

17.9 Views were mixed about the merits of developing east of the M5 because this area would be more remote from the town centre with potential consequences for higher levels of car commuting and poorer access to town centre services. However, it was noted that development in this area would fulfil some needs. Clarity was needed on the transport position, including the real prospects for long term road infrastructure and wider recognition that congestion needed a public transport approach.

Workshop 3 - community groups

17.10 Community groups expressed more uncertainty about the validity of the link to the Taunton Vision and the degree of public awareness of the growth issues. The growth scenario proposing 50% more growth was thought to be too much although major service providers, such as the NHS were likely to be able to handle any amount.

17.11 Some thought that the town was only part way on its transition from moderate market town to regional centre. The view was that critical mass should be sought but not urban sprawl. Careful attention should also be paid to increasing multiculturalism and the needs of both graduate and non graduate young people. Young and older people will both need better facilities to avoid alienation and better childcare provision will be needed at appropriate stages of new development.

17.12 Groups felt that the town should press for university status in spite of evolving links to universities elsewhere in the region. Groups were also concerned that the overall design of the town should be thought through, planning adequately for all public and community facilities, leisure provision and the maintenance of broader landscape character. If development went east of the M5, the provision of community facilities early on in the construction process would be even more essential.

Workshop 4 - environmental groups

17.13 The environmental groups attending accepted that Taunton should grow in order to flourish, otherwise it would decline. It was hoped that some of this growth would be cultural, not just physical. Concern was expressed as to the real need to provide for the highest growth levels suggested. However significant growth offered many opportunities and the potential for new development forms was thought to be considerable to the east of the M5 in particular.

17.14 There was a widespread view that incremental growth should be avoided and that significant attention should be paid to overall management of growth and the water and natural environment. In particular, flood management needs to be handled in an integrated way from Taunton out to the Somerset Levels.

17.15 A long term component of the strategy for the area should embrace green infrastructure, biodiversity and protection of the Vivary green wedge.

Summary

17.16 Attendees at the consultation workshops had a positive attitude to growth and the opportunities that it would bring to diversify and strengthen the town and its area. However, most were concerned that growth was controlled and not excessive.

17.17 No strong overall preference emerged for the options, although east of the M5 was seen as requiring a greater commitment to early infrastructure provision of all types than elsewhere.

17.18 For any of the growth options, enough provision needs to be made for employment and community facilities and the town centre must regenerate successfully to drive the town's prosperity as a whole. Housing should be balanced and affordable and the transport system made to work much better. All aspects of the natural environment must be integrated comprehensively with growth. Provision will be required in response to needs arising from a population that is more elderly, potentially more multicultural, with more young people (if they can be retained). Some suggested that the town should move forward from 'market town' into a more cultural, university class.

Public consultation

17.19 A six page foldout brochure was produced for circulation. 4000 copies were distributed to:

- 340 consultees on the Somerset Strategic Planning Authority database
- Parish Councils across Somerset
- Chief Executives of district councils in Somerset and neighbouring districts and counties
- County information points, such as Town Councils and County Hall
- Taunton, Wellington and Bridgwater libraries.

17.20 The brochure was sent to the local television and radio station, local newspapers and was also available on Somerset County Council's website.

17.21 The consultation material presented four spatial options - two relating to low growth and two relating to the high growth scenario. An open ended question was constructed inviting comments on the spatial options and views on how Taunton should grow. Given the short timescale of the sub-area study, a four week consultation period was given.

Consultation results

17.22 Of the 4,000 brochures distributed, 404 replies were received. Figure 17.1 illustrates that the overwhelming majority (85%) of responses were from individuals. However, there were also a significant number of responses from parish councils and local bodies (9% in total).

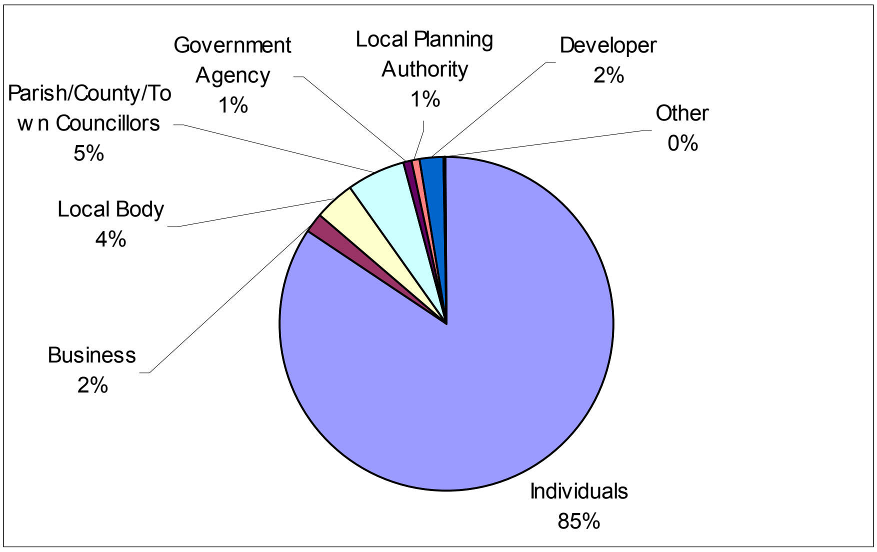

Fig.17.1 Responses by organisation type

17.23 To be able to summarise qualitative responses to the spatial options and growth levels, representations were summarised into broad categories. This was piloted and amended to include the full range of responses received. This is presented in appendix 3.

Response to growth

17.24 Of the 404 respondents, 34% objected in general to any further growth in Taunton and 17% were in support. 49% didn't express a view (Fig.17.2). Most of the responses were specific to one or more of the four options set out in the consultation leaflet.

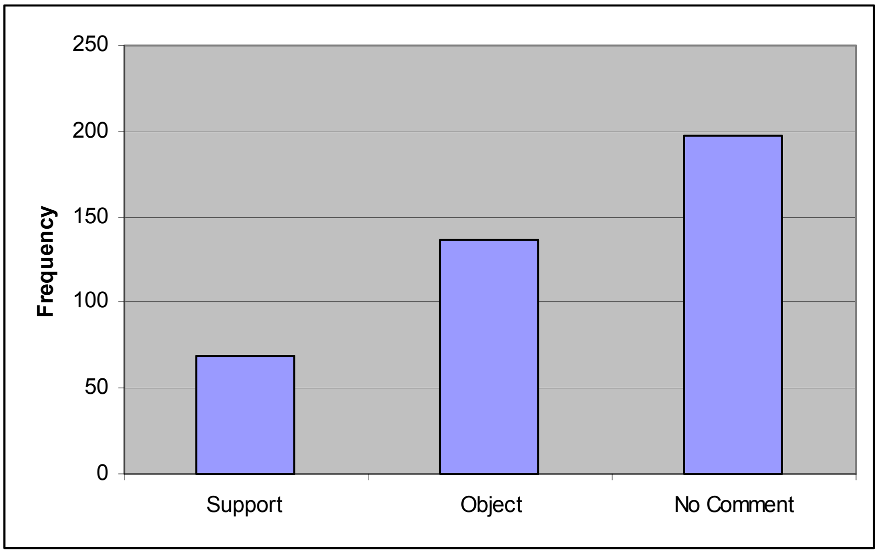

Fig.17.2 Response to general growth in Taunton

17.25 Of the 69 supportive comments made, about half gave reasons and of those objecting, everyone gave reasons. Of the total number of reasons given in support, 61% cited transport issues including the potential to construct new roads, reduce congestion/pollution and improve public transport/walking and cycling links as good reasons for expanding Taunton (Fig.17.3). 12% believed further growth would have a positive impact upon employment levels. Paradoxically, of the total number of reasons given for objection, 36% (Fig 17.4) highlighted traffic issues (i.e. the impact on congestion/pollution and the inability of transport infrastructure to cope with further growth) as reasons that growth should cease. In general, it seems that there is real concern about the ability of Taunton's transport network to cope with any further development and many respondents were concerned that such infrastructure should be constructed alongside any development, not subsequent to it.

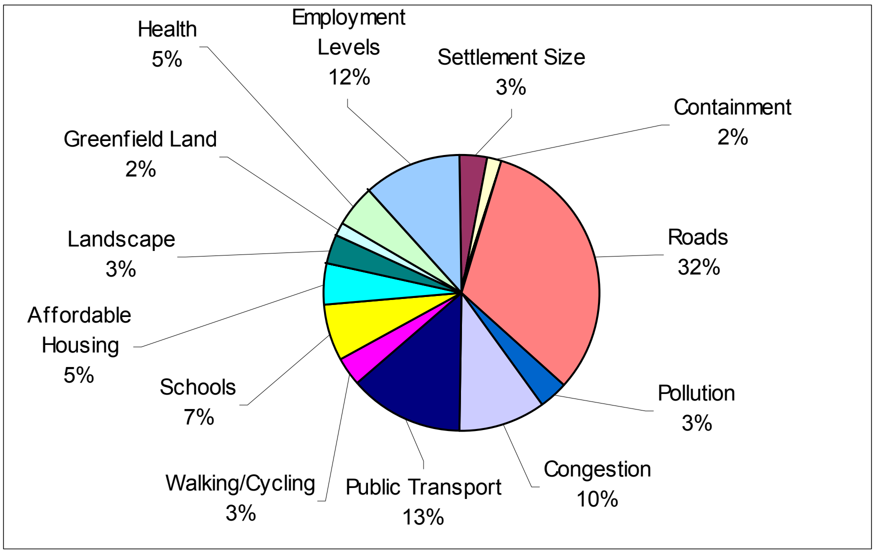

Fig.17.3 Reasons for support of general growth

17.26 Of those reasons given in objection to general growth in Taunton, other frequently cited issues were that there is no real need or 'want' for Taunton to grow any further because it is already large enough and does not need to compete with other settlements in the region such as Exeter and Bristol (8%). Furthermore, it is believed that any further development would have an adverse environmental and landscape impact upon the rural hinterland and in particular upon villages on the outskirts of Taunton such as Ruishton, Creech St Michael and Henlade. A significant number (13%) were also concerned that any further growth would have a negative impact upon existing services such as school and health facilities, unable to cope with higher demand.

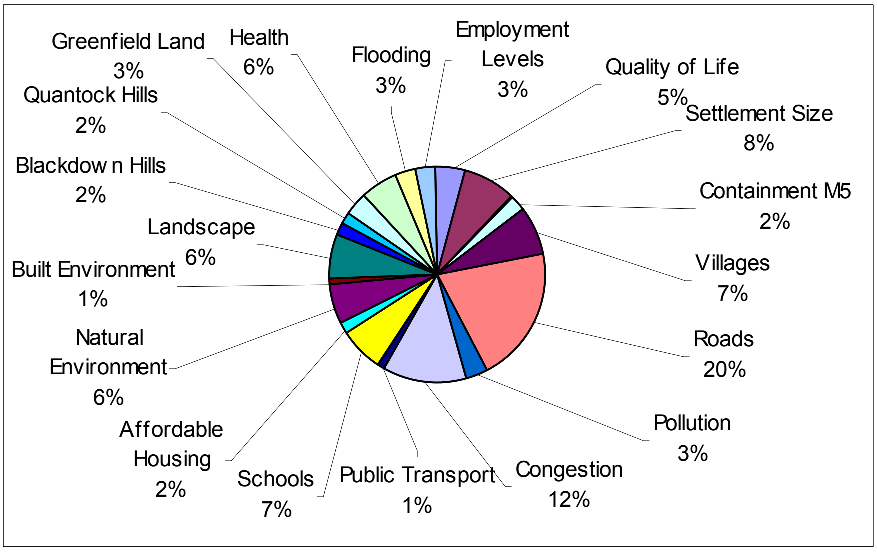

Fig.17.4 Reasons for objection to general growth

Response to the spatial options

17.27 Of the 404 responses, 7% (29) supported option 1a, 29% (115) objected and 64% made no comment (Fig.17.5); 13% (51) supported 1b, 8% (33) objected and 79% made no comment; 6% (26) supported 2a, 14% (56) objected and 80% made no comment; and 5% (21) supported 2b, 43% (175) objected and 52% made no comment. In terms of the individual options, many people made specific comments on the area in which growth would affect them directly. However, a significant proportion of people also made comments on more than one growth option.

17.28 2b attracted the most opposition (43%), and 1a was the second most objected to option (29%). The greatest level of support was for option 1b (13%), which was higher than the level of objections received (8%), although significantly less than the 79% who made no comment of the 404 respondents.

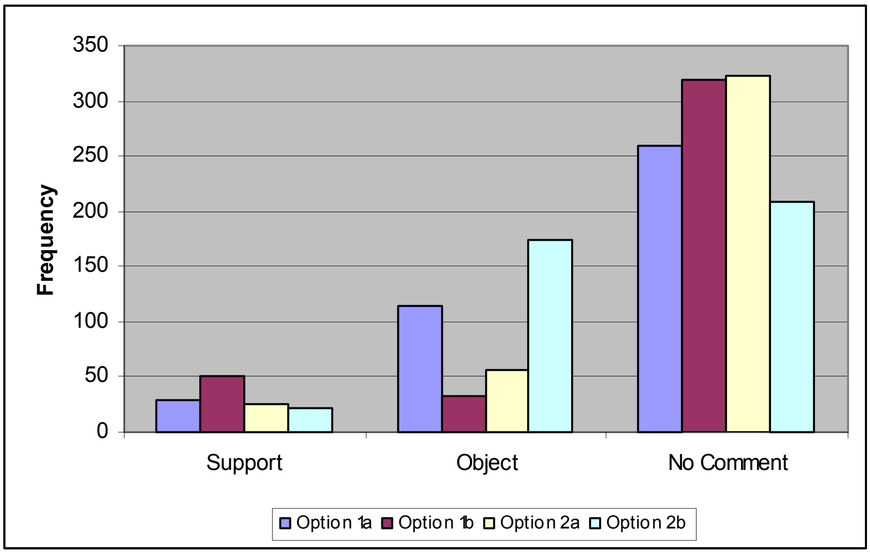

Fig.17.5 A comparison of the responses to the 4 spatial options for Taunton

17.29 The following section will outline the main reasons for support and objection to each individual growth option for Taunton.

Response to option 1a

17.30 There were 43 comments made by the 29 respondents in support of option 1a. Of these comments, 68% cited transport (congestion, roads, public transport, walking and cycling) as reasons for allocating new development to the south of Taunton (Fig.17.6). The majority of those people believed that development at this location would facilitate a Southern Outer Distributor Road, which would help to reduce town centre congestion.

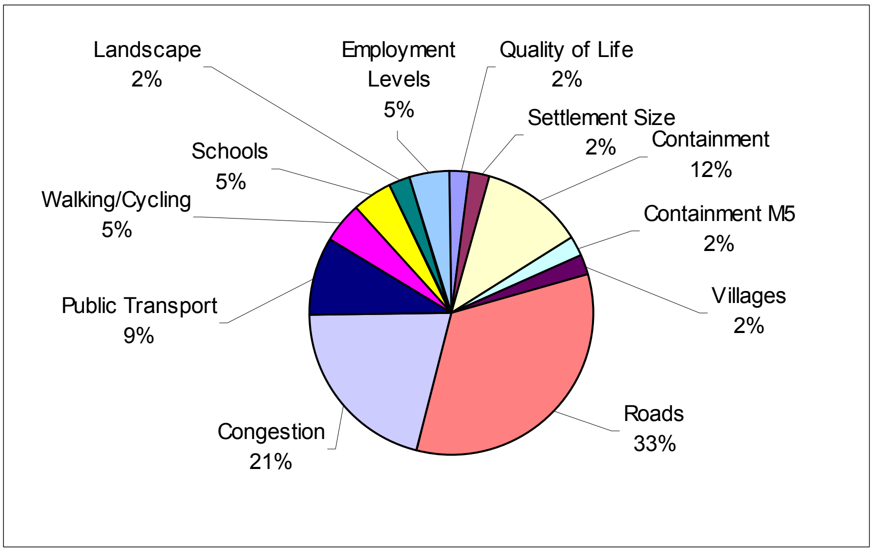

Fig.17.6 Reasons for support of option 1a

17.31 However, many (39% of the 291 reasons given by the 115 respondents in objection) thought that the same transport issues are an insurmountable constraint to urban extension(s) to the south of Taunton (Fig.17.7). In the majority of cases it was believed that new road construction would harm the landscape (4%), natural environment (11%) and swallow up Greenfield land (9%), in particular the Vivary green wedge and Cotlake Hill. 19% also had reservations about the adverse impact upon services, such as schools and health facilities.

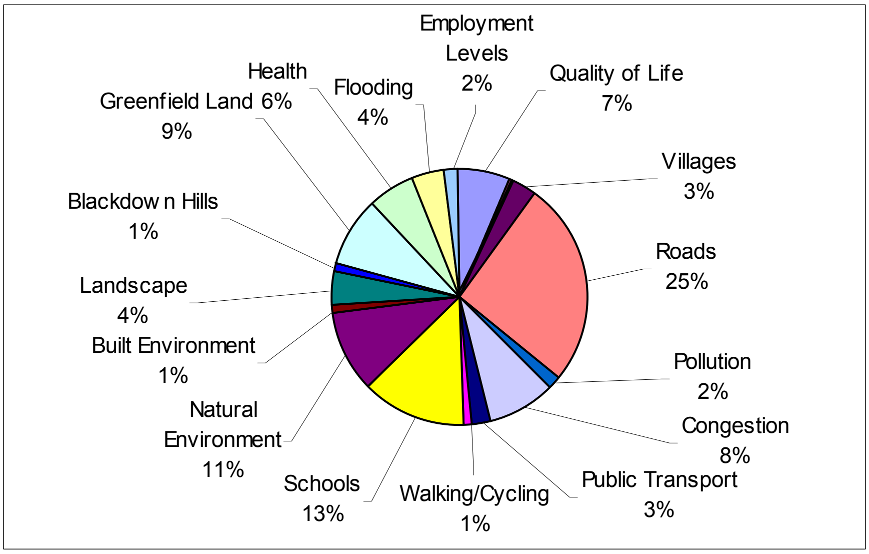

Fig.17.7 Reasons for objection to option 1a

Option 1b

17.32 Of the 75 comments made by those 51 respondents in support of option 1b to the north of Taunton, the majority (66%) cited transport related issues, such as helping to relieve town centre congestion/pollution, public transport and providing the opportunity to construct a Northern Outer Distributor Road (Fig.17.8). Furthermore, 8% cited the opportunity for more schools and 8% to facilitate an increase in employment levels.

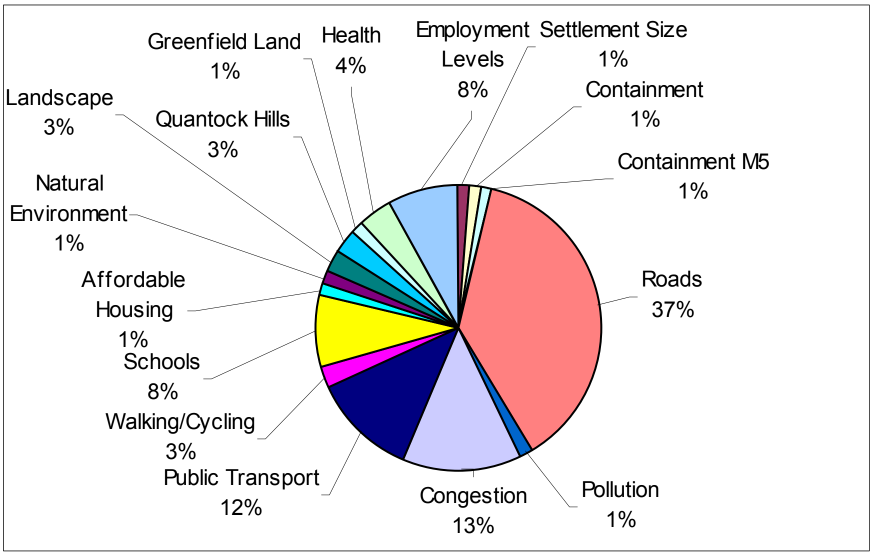

Fig.17.8 Reasons for support of option 1b

17.33 Of the 33 respondents objecting to option 1b, a significant number of the 68 comments made (38%) cited transport constraints (roads, pollution, congestion, public transport, walking and cycling) as reason for objecting to development in this location (Fig.17.9). A substantial number (36%) also cited environmental reasons, such as the loss of green wedge areas and an adverse impact upon the Quantock Hills, natural environment and landscape as major concerns.

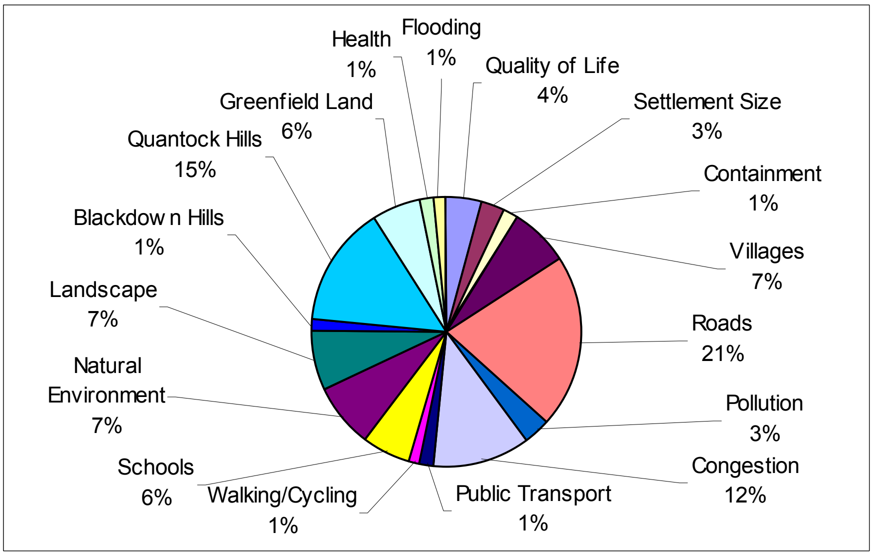

Fig.17.9 Reasons for objection to option 1b

Option 2a

17.34 Of the 36 comments made by the 26 respondents in support of option 2a (Fig.17.10), 54% cited transport opportunities (e.g. improvements in public transport walking and cycling networks, construction of new roads and improvements to congestion and pollution levels). Furthermore, employment levels (8%), schools (8%) and containment (8%) were also significant factors.

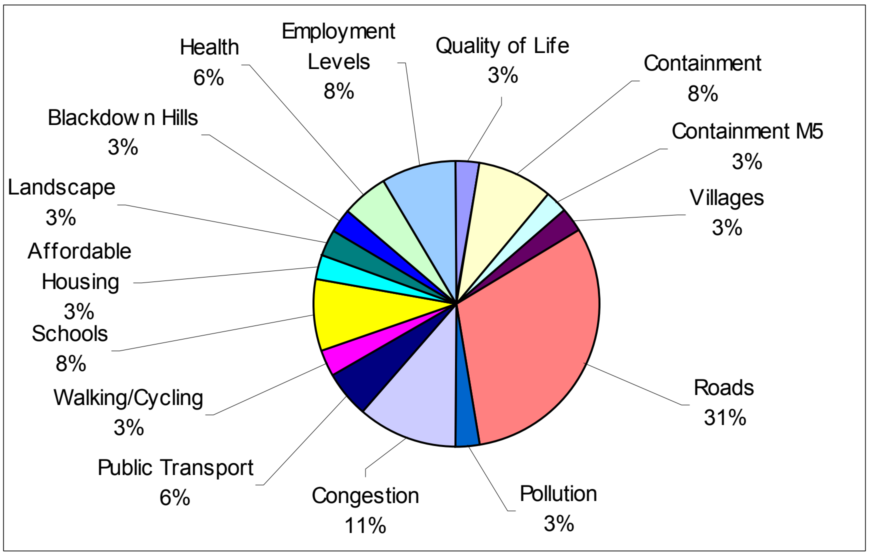

Fig.17.10 Reasons for support of option 2a

17.35 Of the 139 reasons given by the 56 respondents in objection to option 2a, transport reasons were again prominent (40% stated roads, congestion, pollution, public transport, walking/cycling). The negative environmental impacts on the surrounding landscape and especially green wedge areas, the Quantock Hills, and Cotlake Hill to the south also featured strongly in the objections to this option (Fig.17.11).

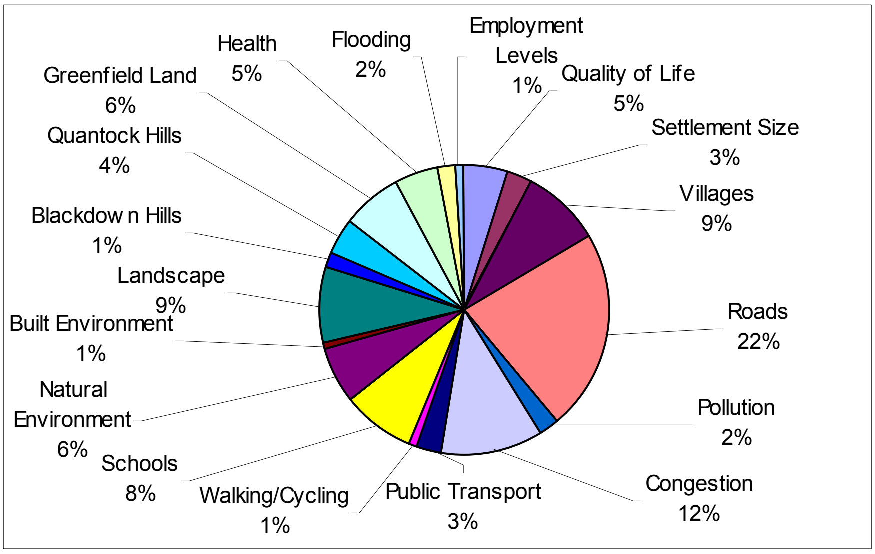

Fig.17.11 Reasons for objection to option 2a

Option 2b

17.36 Option 2b drew the greatest number of comments, with over 200 respondents expressing a view. Of the 40 comments made by 21 respondents who supported this spatial option, 61% cited transport issues, in particular the ability to exploit the proposed dualing of the A358 (Fig17.12).

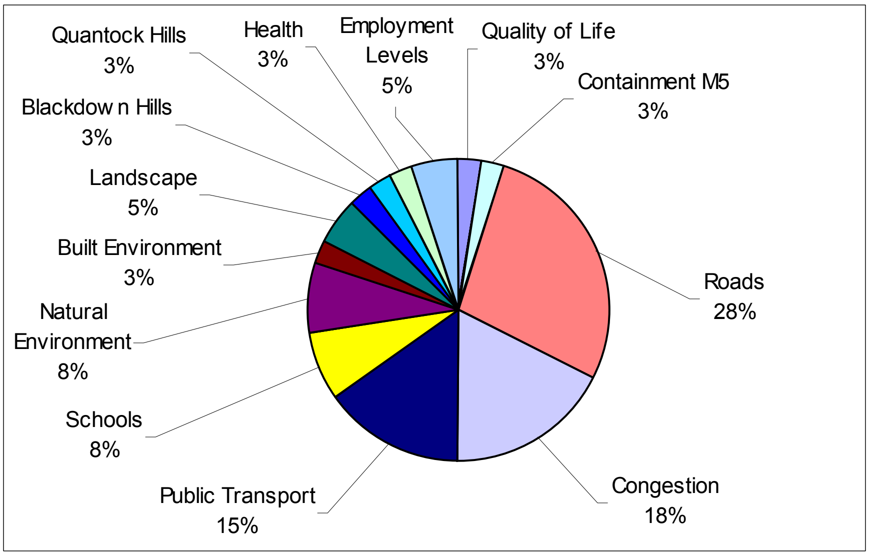

Fig.17.12 Reasons for support of option 2b

17.37 On the other hand, the number of comments objecting significantly outweighed those in support (Fig.17.13). Of the 556 comments made by 175 respondents, the greatest number of objections (36%) were again in relation to the impacts of transport related issues (roads, pollution, congestion, public transport, walking/cycling).

17.38 However, there were a number of other issues that came out of this option, for example 5% highlighted flooding issues. This may seem a low percentage but compared to the other options is a significant increase. 14% cited environmental and landscape issues, such as potential impact upon the Blackdown Hills. However, unlike the other options, there was real concern about the impact upon designated villages (16%), such as Creech St Michael, Henlade, Ruishton and Stoke St Mary and an overall feeling that development in Taunton should be contained west of the M5 motorway (13%).

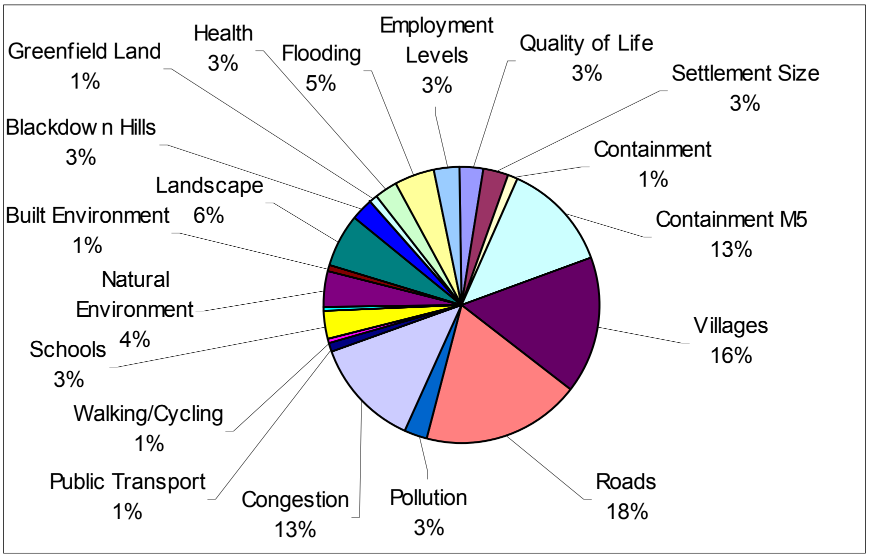

Fig.17.13 Reasons for objection to option 2b

Conclusion

17.39 Of those who responded to the consultation document, most were opposed to the growth options at Taunton put forward for consultation. An extension to the east of the motorway (option 2b) was the least favoured option, specifically due to transport, the environment and perceived negative impacts upon a semi-rural way of life. Many commented that the M5 formed a physical barrier to development in the area of search proposed in 2b that should not be breached.

17.40 Of all the options, option 1b to the north was the most favoured. This is broken down into 13% of respondents being in support of 1b, compared with 8% against. One of the main reasons given by respondents is that it has the potential to reduce congestion in Taunton town centre through the construction of the Northern Outer Distributor Road. However, environmental and landscape issues were the main concern raised by those who objected to option 1b.

17.41 There were a significant number of objections to option 1a but that may have been influenced by the potential impacts to the Vivary green wedge which attracted a lot of opposition. Even though all of the options could have potential impacts on town's green wedges, it would seem from the results that the Vivary green wedge is held in higher esteem than the northern green wedges.

17.42 There were relatively few comments on option 2a and in some cases respondents confused this option as one that would potentially spread development equally around the town as opposed to being a combination of options 1a and 1b.

18 Towards a strategy

What should determine the strategy

18.1 A preferred strategy is emerging from the consideration of the options and from the findings of the different forms of investigation and assessment included in the process.

18.2 The process has been one of:

- looking at the level of development that would be desirable from an economic viewpoint and that would be deliverable in terms of market activity, and

- determining what the best spatial distribution of the development should be, using opportunities within the urban area and possible development beyond the present urban area.

18.3 The implications of each of these contributory factors for the way that the strategy should emerge can be summarised as follows.

Future economic performance and roles

18.4 From the examination of **economic potential**, the number of additional jobs that are likely to come forward in the period up to 2026 is 12,256. This growth in economic activity will bring about an increase in the population of the Sub Area. With changes in the structure of the population too, this means a requirement for an additional 13,870 dwellings in and around Taunton, taking account of the dwellings for which provision is already made. This is around the level of growth provided for by options 1a and 1b in addition to the provision arising from the UDF.

18.5 However, the economic work indicates that there will not be the level of economic activity in the period being examined to support a population that would require the level of housing provision associated with options 2a and 2b. If provision were made for development on this scale, there is the possibility that the demand for the housing would not arise and the market would not provide it. The associated infrastructure provision would be undermined, as well as some of the planning objectives of incorporating this level and distribution of development in the spatial strategy. The alternative possibility is that more housing would come to be developed than was consistent with the level of jobs in the town, with consequently greater levels of travel from Taunton to other locations for the purposes of employment.

18.6 Though the strategy to be put forward is a strategy for Taunton and its role as a regional centre, the functional relationship with Bridgwater and also Wellington need to be considered. Taunton and Bridgwater are in different local authority areas, and though the greater regional benefit might come from maximising the complementary roles that they have to some degree, they are also inevitably in competition for inward investment and business growth. The market will in any case make investment decisions on the basis of such as land availability and transport, tending to ignore endeavours to direct different activities to different locations.

18.7 Taunton should build on its considerable strengths as a service centre, as doing so will benefit residents of Bridgwater and Wellington as well as Taunton, and will be to the benefit of the region. It can do this by improving its office accommodation, expanding its retail offer, developing more entertainment and leisure facilities, and attracting more of the creative industries. At the same time, Taunton will certainly want to hold on to the technology-based manufacturing companies that it already has, and perhaps seek to attract more. As its population continues to grow, so will the demand for education and health services.

18.8 Bridgwater has a more difficult growth trajectory, as it needs to correct some imbalance in its employment structure. It also needs to improve its educational performance and the skills of its resident population if it is to attract more knowledge-based activities. However, its relative success in attracting additional employment in communications services and health services, performing better than Taunton in both sectors, bodes well for diversification away from low-skill distribution and manufacturing sector jobs.

18.9 The analysis of the town centres of Taunton and Bridgwater has shown that they perform different roles. Taunton town centre is larger, has a greater retail offer and records higher rates of expenditure than Bridgwater which has a high incidence of value retailing.

18.10 To some extent there is competition between the centres, because Taunton includes Bridgwater in its retail catchment area. However, because of their different roles, further enhancement of the retail offer in Taunton, whilst unlikely to support Bridgwater's retail diversification, is unlikely to contribute to further deterioration either and the type of retailers (particularly larger national multiples) seeking to locate in Taunton are unlikely to be attracted to Bridgwater instead. Enhancing the quality and range of shopping opportunities and to the shopping experience in Taunton will benefit residents across the sub-area.

Market deliverability

18.11 From the consideration of the **deliverability of housing** through normal market activity, it also appears that the levels of growth associated with the higher growth scenarios and hence options 2a and 2b would not be deliverable. The annual rates at which the industry could expect to bring forward housing are more consistent with development taking place up to 2026 to the scale provided for by options 1a and 1b.

18.12 Two further points are to be noted here however:

- an important factor in the examination of market deliverability is the number of different sites bringing forward housing at any time, and in this respect option 1b, or a further slight variation on 1b, is preferable to option 1a

- though the study is concerned with growth levels to 2026, it is reasonable to assume that change in Taunton will not stop at that time. How development needs could be provided for thereafter may be a proper consideration in deciding on the preferred development locations and the phasing of their use.

The environment

18.13 From the consideration of the **environmental implications** of the different development locations identified it appears that whilst each will mean the loss of undeveloped land, there is relatively little to distinguish the different locations able to accommodate substantial levels of development on the basis of significant environmental effects. Taunton is surrounded by high quality agricultural land, though between the two main locations associated with options 1a and 1b, 1b (involving development at Monkton Heathfield), is the poorer option with the loss of more of the better grade of agricultural land. Option1b is also considered to be the poorer option in terms of the adverse effect that the development would have on landscape character.

Transport

18.14 From the consideration of **transport issues**, with the implications of the additional travel and taking account of providing the type of infrastructure likely to be required to facilitate the development, option 1a has the merit of bringing development closer to the existing centre of Taunton with its concentration of employment, services and facilities. It appears however that it would be easier to make provision for a higher level of the trips arising to be made by public transport if the development took place according to option1b. This is considered to be the more important issue for the long term, favouring option 1b. On three of the other four objectives used in the transport appraisal (minimising congestion on critical links and junctions, improving access to West Somerset and assisting with the achievement of air quality targets) option 1b performs better than option 1a. The costs of the infrastructure requirements that would be required for the development to take place are also likely to be lower under option 1b compared with option 1a, by about 10%.

Consultation

18.15 The responses to the **consultation process** influence the choice of a future strategy too. The majority of those responding to the consultation on the possible options for the strategy for submission to the SWRA objected to growth at Taunton, though the earlier consultation as part of the Taunton Vision did provide support for continued growth of the town. It is possible to conclude that the lower growth scenario and hence options 1a and 1b would be preferable to the higher growth scenario and options 2a and 2b. The wish for Taunton to stay as it is must also be given due regard. Of the two main locations for urban extension there was more support expressed for Monkton Heathfield than Comeytrowe with the relative benefits in relieving town centre congestion from the former a factor reported. Concerns about the environmental implications of some of the other (albeit smaller) development locations within the options were also expressed.

O**ther issues**

18.16 The report has examined many other issues, including the provision of health and education facilities necessary for the quality of life of existing and additional residents alike, cultural improvements that should arise or be sought as part of growth, and the management of waste. Though these are all important issues, the conclusion is that these matters will be addressed as part of any chosen strategy, but should not be determinative of the scale and distribution of development as expressed in the options.

The strategic sustainability appraisal

18.17 The report has also included a **strategic sustainability appraisal** as required by SWRA to assist in meeting the requirements set by legislation for the RSS. This has reported on the environmental, economic and social implications of the options as far as is possible at the strategic level at which these matters are being considered. The regional methodology uses six ‘headline objectives’ to assess the sustainability of alternatives that might be included in the strategy, and on all but one of these (that of maintaining and improving environmental quality and assets) the SSA finds that option 1b would be the most sustainable choice between the lower growth levels options.

Choosing between the options

18.18 This summary of the factors influencing the choice of option to take forward into **the preferred strategy** suggests that the lower growth scenario should be taken as the basis for the strategy, but in terms of development distribution, whilst **option 1b does have the**

edge, the case for one option proceeding to development whilst the other is entirely dismissed is not overwhelmingly clear and strong.

18.19 This does leave a further matter for consideration, and this is whether only one of the main locations for an urban extension should be included within the preferred strategy, or whether two should be pursued.

18.20 The arguments for proceeding with only one of the major urban extensions examined in the options include:

- the clarity of the strategy and the ability to focus on the delivery of what will be a complex project, and one that needs to be successfully implemented for the future of Taunton
- the greater likelihood of the external funding for the required strategic infrastructure being forthcoming, and less risk of major development being committed without the required infrastructure taking place
- the ability to maximise the efficiency of developer contributions in delivering community benefits.

18.21 The arguments for the more or less simultaneous start on two urban extensions include:

- the greater choice of development sites available to purchasers and investors, increasing the prospect of delivering the amount of development required in the period of the RSS
- the sense of getting underway with a strategy that will hold good over the very long term, something that is consistent with achieving greater sustainability.

18.23 On these points, the conclusion is that the strategy should proceed with one of the large urban extensions, and this should be sited at Monkton Heathfield, but development at Comeytrowe should still be considered as part of the longer term future of Taunton, with development beginning to feature in the latter stages of the period considered by the RSS.

Preferred strategy

18.24 The **preferred development strategy** for the Taunton Sub Area commended to the Steering Group therefore is:

- to seek the implementation of the proposals from the Urban Development Framework in full, maximising the opportunities for high quality development to replace underuse in the urban area, and to make the most of the River Tone as a setting for new activity with substantial development at Tangiers, Firepool and elsewhere
- to promote a large and well planned extension to the existing urban area using land at Monkton Heathfield, managing the phasing and form of the development to provide choice and opportunity while complementing rather than undermining the regenerative effort in the existing urban area
- to use other opportunities around the edge of the town to provide more development opportunities through smaller extension to the urban area

- through this combination of development areas, to bring on stream new commercial, residential, retail and cultural opportunities, and new education and health facilities consistent with an enhanced regional role for Taunton acting in a close and complementary functional relationship with Bridgwater and Wellington

- in the longer term, around 2020 on current indications, though informed by progress in the meantime, to get under way with a further substantial extension at Comeytrowe

- to integrate enhanced transport infrastructure and services with land use changes in order to achieve and maintain high accessibility through integration, with an emphasis on high quality public transport, and on achieving greater reliance on walking and cycling

- to seek the highest performance from all public and private investment according to the objectives of greater sustainability.

18.25 The material put forward in the full submission for the Taunton Sub Area Study demonstrates that this strategy is desirable, and since it also is demonstrably deliverable, the strategy is commended to the SWRA for inclusion within the RSS for the South West.

19 The implementation plan

Introduction

19.1 A strategy must be more than what would appear to be desirable – there has to be the demonstrable means of bringing the strategy about and a plan for doing so that can be taken up by all with a role in the process.

19.2 Spatial planning is intended to be an inclusive process, in both taking on board the perspectives of many different stakeholders in determining how to manage change for what purpose, but also in engaging many players in the implementation of the plan.

19.3 These ‘players’ include:

- the planning authorities with overall responsibility for the use of land and with the statutory duty to prepare plans
- landowners (public and private) and developers acting (primarily) to increase the value of their land and to profit from development, particularly (inthis context) from residential development
- businesses needing suitable locations and accommodation as an integral part of performing their business activity
- the providers of transport infrastructure and services, again both public and private
- public bodies responsible for the provision of health, education and social facilities in sufficient quantity suitable and in suitable locations in order to be accessible to all and to meet their needs
- the providers of statutory utilities, including water supply, drainage, electricity, gas and telecommunications
- individuals acting as citizens, taxpayers and as the purchasers of property.

19.4 The strategy emerging so far from this process is one that is seen as broadly deliverable. The work is not promoting levels of development that appear not to meet this essential criterion. It is deliverable in the sense that:

- there is sufficient potential for economic development to support the level of population indicated, though making this economic activity happen will still need a coordinated positive approach
- the analysis of the performance of the housing market indicates that with care given to the phasing of different locations for development, the amount of housing could take place.
- the broad locations identified for the development are ones where it is believed that there are no overriding constraints that should stop the development occurring.

19.5 With these prerequisites in place, the critical further tasks will be to identify:

- how the opportunities presented by the new planning system – particular those now in place for making Local Development frameworks which can include Area Action Plans – can be harnessed to bring about the development

- the way in which the various components of development will be provided, or more specifically funded.

19.6 On the second of these what will need to be got underway – led by the planning authority though with an increasing involvement of development partners as the project progresses is:

- for the overall composition of the development to be progressively worked up, identifying each of the components that make up the mix of development, and in more detail

- to identify the possible funding sources for components of the development (other than open market housing)

- to examine the overall likely values and costs of the development to provide an initial view of what contribution to the 'community requirement' (such as affordable housing, health education and social facilities, transport infrastructure and services) could be provided from the development while it remains viable

- to determine between contributions to the community fund from the development and other sources of funding, which parts of the development should be funded by what means

- to begin the process of including the proposals into the decision making processes, including those for infrastructure provision, and to set out the policy framework for the use of developer contributions.

19.7 This work has already identified the likely components of social infrastructure that will be part of the urban extensions, and the transport assessment of the options has identified new road links, junction improvement schemes and public transport service enhancements that will all need investment. More information needs to be obtained on the costs of all forms of infrastructure required.

19.8 An initial view of the means of implementing the development may be for there to be a high expectation of the elements of affordable housing, health, education and social facilities within the development to be funded from the value of open market housing provided, whilst there will be a need for 'external' funding to contribute substantially to the strategic infrastructure, such as the Northern Distributor Road. If this were the case this expectation should be part of the way that the preferred strategy is put forward, in the context of RSS and the sustainable communities programme, though it is recognised that considerably more work is required before this level of cost information can be provided.