

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Executive – 16 September 2009

Task and Finish Review into Employment Land in Taunton

Report of the Scrutiny Officer

(This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Simon Coles)

Executive Summary

This Task and Finish review has now been concluded. The final report has been submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and was approved subject to some amendments (detailed below) being recommended.

This cover sheet provides directions on how the Executive should deal with the Task and Finish report into large housing schemes, particularly its five recommendations.

The final report of the Task and Finish review follows this cover report.

1. Recommended Changes to the Task and Finish Report suggested by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

- 1.1 The final report of the Task and Finish Group was considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 August 2009. During the discussion of this item, a number of suggested changes to the recommendations were made. These are shown in **bold print** on the attachment marked "Extract from the Minutes of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting".

2. The Executive is asked to do the following:-

- 2.1 Consider the above recommended changes of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and agree whether or not these should be included in the report.
- 2.2 Then consider the report and its recommendations and decide which, if any, of the recommendations it wishes to adopt.
- 2.3 If the Executive agrees to adopt any of the recommendations of the review, it should state who will be responsible for delivering each of the adopted recommendations. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) has had prior sight of the report and has identified a CMT member to take responsibility for each recommendation, if adopted.

2.4 If the Executive decides **not** to adopt any of the recommendations, it must specifically state why, as prescribed by the Local Government Act 2007.

3. Contact Details

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Extract from the Minutes of the Corporate Strategy Committee meeting held on 6 August 2009.

“Resolved that the Executive be recommended to accept the Task and Finish Review’s recommendations subject to the changes shown in bold below:

- (1) In line with Circular 02/2009, the Council should initiate discussions with landowners and developers for the release of immediate short term employment land opportunities at Nerrols, Creech Heathfield and Walford Cross **and other suitable sustainable sites** for up to 5,000 square metres (around 2 hectares per site). **Such discussions should aim to encourage the owners of land to release sites to businesses, wherever possible, on a freehold rather than a leasehold basis;**
- (2) In line with Circular 02/2009, the threshold for out-of-centre office proposals for requiring a sequential assessment be raised to 1,000 square metres. This should enable additional windfall opportunities to come forward in the short term;
- (3) A strategic employment site of about 25 hectares **should** be brought forward in the medium/long term, through the LDF. **The Council recognise that it needed to collaborate closely with all relevant agencies if it wished to build in flexibility into the Core Strategy. The owners of any potential site identified should again be encouraged to release sites to businesses, wherever possible, on a freehold rather than a leasehold basis;**
- (4) To progress a strategic **employment** site it was also recommended that a working group be set up and led by **the Strategic Director, involving** Economic Development, Project Taunton **and representatives of all relevant agencies**, a Councillor representative **and others as appropriate** with the purpose of developing an evidence base and proposal for the LDF Core Strategy. **Consideration should be given to a representative from Sedgemoor District Council being invited to sit on the Working Group.** As part of this process there should be community engagement with the parishes that would be affected. It was recommended that the strategic employment site should provide opportunities for major inward investment **and relocation of existing sites** to Taunton. It was accepted development (non Class A1) would be necessary to fund the initial infrastructure to open up the site, but the total proportion of floor space for such uses should remain ancillary (around 10%) and focus on medium sized office suites (300 – 1,000 square metres) in order to remain consistent with Government policy and to avoid undermining Firepool as the strategic office site for the Taunton Strategically Significant City and Town (SSCT). **Such a Working Group**

should report back to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee within 4 months, with a progress report;

- (5) The Executive be requested to identify the specific partners for the Working Group which would be led by Taunton Deane with the process and reporting back arrangements (to ensure progress was measured) being led by the Strategic Director, Joy Wishlade.”



Executive

Task and Finish Review

A Review into Employment Land in Taunton



Taunton Deane Borough Council: Executive A Task and Finish Review into Employment Land in Taunton



Introduction by Councillor Norman Cavill

Chairman of the Employment Land Task and Finish Review

There can be no doubt that in recent years there have been several occasions when opportunities for inward investment within the Taunton area have been missed and companies wishing to expand have moved away.

This Task and Finish Group was tasked to assist in resolving and reversing this situation. We have had the benefit of reports clearly showing that business requires a variety of sites that we presently do not have allocated and an analysis of the existing allocations has resulted in a re-evaluation.

However this Group was also attended by representatives including consultants, professional agents and developers as well as officers from Taunton Deane, Somerset County Council and other statutory agencies.

As you will see from the report there was no doubt at all from those representing the private sector, that Taunton is chronically short of a major strategic site, required in the near future, which would complement Firepool. If the employment opportunities required over the next 20 years are to be provided then short, medium and long term sites are required.

This is in spite of the fact that businesses and consumers are experiencing the worst recession since the 1930s and that global warming is a reality driving the need to transition to a more sustainable economy that recognises and protects the heritage of Taunton and the surrounding natural environment.

This does not mitigate the urgent need for employment land, but rather, further emphasises the need to create local jobs in Taunton within sustainable employment sites.

The Economic Development Manager is developing a green job strategy that will be essential in stimulating the recovery from the current economic downturn. It

will promote the greening of existing jobs through more efficient use of resources, and stimulate new jobs by helping to develop skills, innovation and new technologies, which will contribute to the strengthening of the green knowledge economy but also the low carbon energy sector within Taunton.

In short we need to find the will and the way to break the mould of past years, and expedite the provision and allocation of these sites. This must become one of our primary objectives, if we are to have any future standing in the South West.

Councillor Norman P Cavill
July 2009

Acknowledgements

Ralph Willoughby-Foster

Planning Policy Advisor, Taunton Deane Borough Council

Roger Mitchinson

Senior Policy Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council

Mark Green

Project Taunton

Philip Sharratt

Interim Economic Development Manager, Taunton Deane Borough Council

Background to the Review

Why do a review on this subject?

A growing body of evidence suggests that the demand for employment land and premises is outstripping the supply within Taunton. In particular, Taunton Deane Borough Council is aware of the strong private sector feeling that there is a shortage of available employment land and that there is not the choice of premises or sites available to meet the future needs of indigenous business growth nor of potential inward investors.

There appears to be a need for small sites in the short and medium term, to provide smaller industrial and office premises of less than 10,000 sq ft with a choice of tenures and a need for a medium/longer term strategic site to attract high value inward investment that will complement the office development at Firepool.

It is important to quantify the apparent need that exists and examine the current suitability of sites identified for employment uses in the Taunton Deane Local Plan. It is understood that of the 70-80 hectares allocated in the Local Plan only 2 or 3 hectares in the Taunton area are currently capable of being brought forward for development.

The ready availability of employment sites in Taunton is an important issue which needs to be addressed. Taunton has Growth Point status and is one of the Governments eight 'Priority Places', but does not have sufficient employment land in the short term to accommodate the growth and diversification of the economy that will allow Growth Point targets to be achieved.

It was acknowledged that many companies have relocated their operations to Exeter, Yeovil and other adjoining towns due to the lack of availability of appropriate sites within Taunton to accommodate their growth requirements. However, the preferred choice of location for many of these businesses had been Taunton.

It could be argued that Taunton has an excellent strategic position, equal or better than their final relocation choice and there is anecdotal evidence that a growing number of Inward Investment Companies have considered relocating to Taunton but were unable to be offered any suitable site. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that there is a lack of appropriate employment sites and that this factor is truncating the economic potential of Taunton.

It is clear that Taunton will have to deliver a wide diversity of employment if it is to achieve the sustainable growth targets of the future. Blackbrook Business Park was the last sizeable allocation made in Taunton and that was almost 25 years ago. If Taunton is in any way to realise its economic potential identified within the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) then alterations and additions to its present employment land allocation need to be made.

Definitions and Abbreviations

- The Government Office for the South West - (GOSW)
- Strategically Significant Towns and Cities - (SSCT)
- Local Development Framework - (LDF)
- The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 - (Circular 02/2009)

Membership of the Review

Councillor Norman Cavill (chairman)

Councillor Habib Farbahi

Councillor Terry Murphy

Councillor Jayne O'Brien

Councillor Mrs Vivienne Stock-Williams

Councillor Mrs Mary Whitmarsh

Councillor John Williams

Terms of Reference

This review is subject to the following terms of reference:-

- Review the Strategic Employment Sites currently available and recommend whether they ought to remain in the Local Plan;
- Identify locations for alternative Strategic Employment Sites which could be more readily available for a wide range and types of businesses;
- Establish what could be achieved through the preparation of the current Local Development Framework (LDF) whilst considering how lengthy potential delays to land coming forward for development may be overcome;
- Undertake consultations with interested parties;
- To consider how we should work with statutory bodies such as the Highways Agency and others to enable any proposed sites to be brought forward; and
- Make recommendations to the Executive.

At the first meeting the group acknowledged that it did not intend to duplicate work already being undertaken by the LDF Steering Group and that any recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group would feed into the preparation of the Core Strategy and the LDF.

Evidence Taken, Key Findings and Recommendations

1. Taunton's Economy

The Task and Finish Group has identified that there is a need for Taunton to diversify the employment base and to increase private sector knowledge intensive activity that will provide choices of employment opportunities, retain talent within the area and attract higher wage earners to Taunton Deane.

The Local Economic Assessment, undertaken during January 2009, has shown that Taunton's economy is not thriving as it should and is overly dependant on public administration and low value consumer-led private sector activity to provide employment growth. See Taunton Deane Local Economic Assessment, Geoeconomics, February 2009.

The Government Office for the South West (GOSW) recommend that as Taunton is a Growth Point for the South West it is important that it should be investigating what restrictions it is facing and how these could be removed. The GOSW also recognise the need for flexibility in Taunton's economic growth in order to adapt to changes in the economic situation and to meet local need.

It was suggested to the group that the employment land opportunities in Taunton are not diverse enough and that this is evident in the low take up of allocated employment land for business use. It was stated that the Firepool development would not be appropriate to meet the needs of all growing local businesses and that it would not satisfy the diversity of requirements of potential inward investors, including high value manufacturing and design and production operations, or smaller operations requiring less than 10,000 sq ft of office space.

2. The Taunton Deane Employment Land and Premises Survey

During January 2009, questionnaires were distributed to businesses and public sector organisations within the Taunton Economic Zone. A total of 7,200 questionnaires were distributed with 884 returned completed - a significant increase on the 400 responses received when the questionnaire was last distributed in 2006.

The responses represented the views of a cross section of organisations across sectors, at ratios of around 30% industrial uses, 31% wholesale or retail, 23% office space, and 15% other including education, health, and hospitality uses:-

Agriculture, Food and Fisheries	5%
Manufacturing	12%
Construction	9%

Wholesale and Retail	31%
Hotel, Restaurant (including Tourism)	8%
Transport and Storage	4%
Real Estate and Business Services	6%
Public Admin and Community	6%
Education, Health and social work	7%
Other	11%

Of those that responded to the question about turnover 82% had a turnover of less than £2 million, 14% had a turnover between £2 million - £25 million and 4% had a turnover of £25 million or more, which is not unrepresentative of the structure of the local economy.

When asked if their present business premises were appropriate for their current needs, 11% of those responding reported that their premises situation was poor/very poor, indicating that if they had not already explored alternatives that they would need to plan to relocate within the next 3 year strategic cycle and that a further 34% of those responding only rated their current premises situation as “adequate for now”.

On this basis it is safe to assume that the lack of appropriate or suitable premises is a factor that has been given consideration within the decision making process to meet the growth aspirations of 45% of employers within the Taunton Economic Zone and may be a factor that is limiting the growth of employment opportunities for local residents and preventing the diversification of the local economy.

In terms of future requirements, these organisations require a choice of tenures, including easy-in/easy-out, rented, leasehold, freehold serviced and freehold land with premises predominantly of less than 10,000 sq ft, though there remains a significant proportion of organisations looking for premises within the range 10,000 sq of – 20,000 sq ft and larger than 20,000 sq ft.

Of these larger premises, Firepool will meet the needs of the larger office users requiring 10,000 sq ft plus, but it is recognised that there is currently no site available to accommodate the needs of those requiring larger manufacturing or production premises, or those with large warehousing and distribution operations.

50% of the respondents felt there was insufficient choice in employment space to meet their future needs and, in particular, identified that there was a shortage of small workshop/manufacturing space, premises for wholesale/warehousing or distribution operations and smaller office space.

The most important factors, beyond appropriateness, in determining what would compose suitable premises were cost and availability of parking, which is not surprising as the two most important factors to growing Small and Medium

Enterprises (SMEs) is cashflow and recruitment of a qualified and dedicated workforce.

The respondents were offered a number of options of 'preferred locations', including existing or planned employment areas and other areas to provide a complete choice around Taunton (North, East, South, and West) including existing sites within Wellington and Bridgwater. The top 4 locations identified were:-

- Firepool;
- East of Motorway (access to Junction 25);
- North Taunton; and
- Monkton Heathfield.

Whilst it might be expected that Firepool would have appeared close to the top of the list due to the publicity and anticipation of the regeneration of the town centre and its proximity to the town centre and the railway station, there is no significant employment allocation east of the motorway at Junction 25. There is a large allocation of employment land at Monkton Heathfield (14 ha) within the urban extension and a small allocation of employment land within what is currently planned as a mixed use housing scheme at Nerrols Farm where a total land allocation of 2 ha may be available for development in the short term.

The future of Taunton lies in the creation and growth of its indigenous business and despite the fact that the survey was undertaken during January 2009 when news coverage of the economic crisis was at its peak, there are a large number of businesses who are optimistic about the future.

Over half of the respondents were anticipating year on year growth of 5% or more, with 14% of respondents forecasting growth in excess of 15%, but the lack of available and appropriate premises of the size and tenure required by these organisations will have the effect of limited growth or forcing growth to occur outside of the Taunton Economic Zone.

Taunton is a Growth Point and the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) identifies that to meet the employment requirements of the proposed housing growth an additional 16,500 jobs will need to be created. Respondents were asked what the 'big issue' was for them and 21% felt that it was issues to do with planning and premises, which came second only after the recession at 32%.

Respondents were also asked how they felt Taunton Deane Borough Council could help them and 29% felt that improvements to the planning process and availability of premises were areas where the Council could improve their support. 53% of respondents felt that the Council does nothing to help or actively hinders local businesses.

Frome is not a recognised Growth Point and yet there are 42.9 ha of employment land being brought forward in the short term.

Across Mendip there are further employment developments being brought forward including one site of 8 ha that is outside a settlement limit and the current LDF, but the needs of the local area are providing motivation for their Forward Planning, Development Management and Economic Development Teams to work together to overcome the planning problems that might at first sight appear to produce barriers to this development succeeding in being passed through the planning process.

If, as a result of the lack of allocated employment land in Taunton that is financially viable and attractive to the private sector to bring forward for development and can, and is likely to be, brought forward within the next strategic business planning cycle of 3 to 5 years providing the mix of tenures and range of premises that will meet the needs of these growing indigenous businesses, then these ambitious Growth Point targets for employment growth will not be achieved.

The findings of the survey are that the lack of employment land and appropriate premises in Taunton is an issue of such significance that solutions need to be found now as part of the LDF process.

3. The Future of Taunton

Building on the Local Economic Assessment, during March 2009 the Economic Development Team worked with Professor Mark Hepworth and the Geoeconomics Team to produce a vision for the future of the Taunton economy. Within this study further detailed analysis of the economy was undertaken which highlighted that the 16,500 job creation target within the RSS was understated.

What Professor Hepworth describes as the 'inconvenient truth' is that around 4,000 jobs will be lost in the recession and that upwards of 20,000 new local jobs must be created between 2011 and 2026. Furthermore, a higher proportion of these jobs than before have to be concentrated in high skill, high paid occupations, with private sector knowledge intensive jobs being created at a rate of 2:1 to total jobs created in order to diversify the local economy and increase average earnings within Taunton Deane to the national average.

However, it was also revealed that 36% of the 60,000 jobs in Taunton Deane are part-time, against a regional average of 28% and a national average of 24%. Taunton is the number one part-time economy in the Country and to reduce the number of part-time jobs to the regional average will require creating an additional 4,800 full time jobs and an additional 7,500 full time jobs to bring part-time working down to the national average.

Therefore, the challenge is to create 28,000 new full time jobs between 2011 and 2026 growing high value employment at a rate 200% faster than low value administration and consumer-led employment.

It was also recognised that the local economy was imbalanced toward public sector employment, which provides around 40% of the total employment across Taunton Deane and contributes significantly to the knowledge intensive activity locally, whilst the bulk of private sector employment was in low value consumer-led activity such as retail, hospitality and tourism.

In order to provide choices of employment opportunities, which is required to retain talent and attract graduates, the local economy needs to diversify toward private sector knowledge intensive employment such as cultural and creative industries, digital and green technology businesses and programmes of activity to drive demand for 'green collar' employment, health and education establishments to attract talent including innovation centres and a physical central place for higher education in Taunton, production and construction businesses and activity including building modern industrial estates, a green building programme and social innovation to drive the adoption of sustainable energy production within mixed use urban extensions.

The "Envisioning the Future of the Taunton Economy" report suggests that Taunton is heading for gradual economic decline. There is a need for strong leadership from the Council to reverse this trend and for employment land to be made available to meet the needs of indigenous business growth and attract high value Inward Investment to Taunton, in addition to the opportunities for large office users created at Firepool.

The Firepool site will create 5,000 new jobs and the challenge for the Project Taunton Team is to ensure that this employment achieves the 3,300 high value private sector jobs required from the development to contribute to the diversification of the local economy. However, the real challenge is to create 28,000 new jobs of which 18,500 need to be high value private sector employment opportunities. Firepool, as the only strategic employment site available to Taunton will not accommodate this growth in employment and it is self evident that an additional strategic site of greater size than Firepool is required beyond the secondary employment sites already identified, including the 14 ha at Monkton Heathfield.

The Group feels that the Envisioning report, and subsequent work being commissioned by the Economic Development Unit, should be incorporated into the Corporate Strategy.

4. The Stage 1 Employment Land Review

The Stage 1 Employment Land Review was agreed at the Task and Finish Group

and signed off by Councillor Coles. It assesses existing Land Supply with Taunton Deane to inform allocations and requirements in the emerging Core Strategy. It was prepared Taunton Deane following broad agreement on findings through consultations with agents and developers.

A number of organisations took part in the consultation process, notably Summerfield Developments, Greenslade Taylor Hunt, Hatfield White, Alder King and Somerset County Council. A summary of the responses from those who took part in the consultation are contained in Appendix A. Appendices B, C, and D contain detailed responses to the Employment Land Review from Summerfield and WYG.

As a result of the consultation a number of sites were either removed from available supply (for example Henlade due to viability of development and sustainability) or retained but excluded from the totals as development was unlikely to result in additional employment (for example Priorswood former land fill site).

The Strategy Team and Planning Policy Advisor produced a report for this Group attached at Appendix E. The group decided to adopt the recommendations made in this report. The main points are summarised below.

The Stage 1 Employment Land Review Assessment identifies:-

- 55.5 ha of employment land available over the RSS period (2006-2026) for **industrial and other** employment uses within Taunton Deane, of which:-
- 22.2 ha within the Taunton SSCT (Strategically Significant Cities and Towns).
- 25.95 ha within the Wellington area.

In Taunton:-

- 8 ha immediately and short term available (within 3 years) comprised of sites at Taunton Trading Estate (5.2 ha), Crown land (1.95 ha), Courtlands (0.8 ha) and Frobisher Way (0.32 ha).
- 14 ha available within the medium term (3-10 years). All within Monkton Heathfield.

Office Use

- 100,000 sq.m. of commitments within the period 2006-2026. Nearly all of

this is within the Taunton SSCT and most is identified through the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan.

Concerns

- Lack of short, medium and longer term opportunities within the Taunton SSCT for industrial/other land.
- Now that Blackbrook is nearing completion there is a lack of current opportunities for medium sized office suites (300-1000 sq.m.).

Options for short term release outside of Local Plan / LDF

- Under Circular 02/2009 site areas of approximately 2 hectares for non office use would not need to be referred to GOSW as a departure.
- It also defines Major development in the Town Centre as under 1,000 sq.m. Thus potentially allowing additional small scale out of centre office sites.
- In line with this the following sites could be investigated to be bought forward in the short term:-
 - Crown land at Nerrols (c2 ha);
 - Creech Heathfield (part of c8 ha total);
 - Walford Cross (c2 ha); and
 - Additional windfall out of centre office sites may also arise with the higher office 'threshold'.

It is unlikely that larger sites for immediate release could you be brought forward outside of the Development Plan system.

5. Taunton's Infrastructure and Junction 25

Taunton is in the centre of the South West region and needs to further improve its road infrastructure if it going to attract additional businesses. This is a challenge which needs to be embraced and overcome.

It was emphasized by consultants and developers that potential sites to attract businesses must have the correct location as well as good infrastructure. Strategic sites such as those in Exeter and Weston-Super-Mare, which had retail, office and industrial units were near the M5 Motorway and these are the sort of sites which should be identified in Taunton.

6. Junction 25

- The Task and Finish Group was advised that it is unlikely that another Motorway junction will be built, which had previously been suggested as an idea to service the Monkton Heathfield employment site.
- Whilst the Government has been calling for Taunton to increase its economic viability, the Highways Agency has in the past been reluctant to support increased use at Junction 25. As proactive leadership has demonstrated in the past with campaigning for the proposed dualing of the A358, it was agreed that the Council should be engaging with the Highways Agency and other authorities to enable the timely and correct investment to be brought forward to achieve a new strategic site.

Somerset County Council have said that although they do not believe Junction 25 should be the key determinate, as it would be expensive, it does need to be addressed and consideration should be given by linking it to the Henlade By-Pass. They have provided reassurance that if Taunton Deane has viable ideas they would work with the Highways Agency and the Council to achieve them.

- The land east of Junction 25 is considered of high value for employment use and it was agreed that it should be a priority for the Council to work with the Highways Agency for this strategic site to come forward. Particularly as the Park and Ride, once it is available, will significantly reduce the amount of traffic movement coming from the A358 direction.
- Future funding of £1 billion is available for transport improvements under the Regional Funding Allocation 2 (RFA 2). Taunton Deane needs to enlist the assistance of the RDA and others to support its bid for the Junction 25 improvements.
- Those representatives of the business sector gave their assessments and agreed that the only site that satisfied the requirements for a new strategic site was the land adjacent to Junction 25

7. Alternative Sites to Land East of Junction 25

- It is important that potential projects are undertaken properly, for example any development at the Monkton Heathfield and A38 sites which would provide sustainable urban extensions with homes and offices. These developments could then lead the way for other similar sites, such as Galmington and Bindon Road. Although they would not be strategic sites, they would be significant in providing employment sites. However, the developers felt that it would be difficult to bring these sites forward without significant infrastructure investment to make them financially viable. The highways access would not be good enough for a strategic site.

- The Monkton Heathfield site could be bought forward in isolation without the rest of the housing development.
- There is an underlying need to find sites which are accessible. Therefore, the priority is to allocate sites near major roads in order to provide a good infrastructure.
- Apart from the Blackbrook site which is almost full, the only other site presently suitable for offices is Firepool. There is concern that there is a lack of sites for the types of business going to Blackbrook and that the Firepool site would not provide this type of development.

8. Funding

- The Regional Infrastructure Fund (RIF) produced about £2m for the flood storage scheme at Long Run Farm which will facilitate regeneration of Taunton Town Centre.
- The Local Transport Plan has included:-
 - The North West Taunton Package which provided the Silk Mills Bridge over the mainline Railway, a new Park and Ride site and bus priority measures.
 - Cambria Park and Ride is under construction.
 - Taunton Third Way and Northern Inner Distributor Road have planning permission and funding.
- To date Taunton has received about £9m of New Growth Point Funding. However there is a need to achieve Growth Targets if we are to be successful in future and avoid a potential payback situation.
- The total provision of road infrastructure can restrict the development of a small to medium site. This severely limits the number of potential sites around Taunton.
- To give this some idea of the costs of improvements. The Creech Castle Junction, which is to be funded by the RFA 2, would cost in the region of £20m. The Henlade bypass will cost £30m - £40m.

9. Recommendations

1. In line with Circular 02/2009, the Council initiates discussions with landowners and developers for the release of immediate short term employment land opportunities at Nerrols, Creech Heathfield and Walford Cross for up to 5,000 sq.m. (around 2 hectares per site);
2. In line with Circular 02/2009, the threshold for out-of-centre office proposals for requiring a sequential assessment be raised to 1,000 sq.m. This should enable additional windfall opportunities to come forward in the short term.
3. A strategic employment site of about 25 hectares be brought forward in the medium - longer term, through the LDF. (Any attempt to bring forward a strategic site outside the LDF would be blocked by the Highways Agency and possibly GOSW and SW Councils).
4. To progress a strategic site it is also recommended that a Working Group be set up and led by Economic Development or Project Taunton, involving a Taunton Deane Strategy Officer, and representatives of Somerset County Council Transport, Highways Agency, Environment Agency, Regional Development Agency/SW Councils, developers and agents and a Councillor representative with the purpose of developing an evidence base and proposal for the LDF Core Strategy. As part of this process there should be community engagement with the parishes that would be affected. It is recommended that the strategic employment site should provide opportunities for major inward investment to Taunton. It is accepted that an element of office and non Class B employment generating development (non Class A1) will be necessary to fund the initial infrastructure to open up the site, but the total proportion of floor space for such uses should remain ancillary (around 10%) and focus on medium sized office suites (300-1,000 sq.m.) in order to remain consistent with Government policy and to avoid undermining Firepool as the strategic office site for the SSCT; and
5. The Executive be requested to identify the specific partners for the Working Group which would be led by Taunton Deane with the process and reporting back arrangements (to ensure progress was measured) being led by the Strategic Director, Joy Wishlade.

10. Conclusions

Taunton is strategically placed in the centre of the South West. An attractive

location for businesses but without the required infrastructure and choice of employment sites.

The Task and Finish Group have recognised that Taunton is a Growth Point for the South West where there is a need to diversify and attract higher wage earners to the area. There are a large number of businesses that are optimistic about the future, but the lack of premises available may contribute to businesses leaving the area.

Taunton needs to improve its road infrastructure before it can attract the right business. The Firepool type developments will not be wanted by all potential businesses coming to the area and so other business types must be considered, such as high value manufacturing, design and production companies. The need for flexibility in Taunton's economic development in order to adapt to changes in the market has been identified.

Taunton has received funding to improve its infrastructure and must obtain further funding from the RFA 2 for development from 2014-2019. It should be noted that the figure of £1billion is for all the seven Counties of the South West Region.

Members from the private sector have informed the Group that it would be difficult to bring the alternative sites forward without significant infrastructure investment to make them financially viable. Taunton Deane should therefore be pro-active in engaging with the Highways Agency to enable investment to be brought forward to achieve Growth Point targets and enable development of land east of Junction 25.

The Group recommends that a new strategic site in excess of 20 hectares to the east of the M5 Motorway at Junction 25 is required as a minimum, in addition to the continued growth of smaller sites. Within the short term the only site available for immediate occupation is Chelston (Westpark 26) in Wellington, which means that there is little or no significant volume of employment land available around Taunton within the next three to five years.

It is essential for the economic wellbeing of Taunton that this Strategic site is brought forward as quickly as can be done.

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**STAGE 1 EMPLOYMENT LAND ASSESSMENT
CONSULTATION RESPONSE.**

Appendix A

Response of Greenslade Taylor Hunt, Hatfield White and Alder King

23. February 2009.

Consultees Response	Council comments
<p>Agree with the Stage 1 conclusion “there is a significant mismatch in supply between Taunton and Wellington ... the current employment supply in the Taunton area will worsen ... there is a particular need to identify and target additional land in the Taunton area ... to fulfil market gaps (eg a large strategic quality site ton attract high value growth sectors, the lack of freehold land and a better spatial spread in the rural areas”.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>The response contains a site by site assessment of the availability and viability of the Stage 1 identified sites. It concludes that for Taunton, there is only 3.01 ha of office land (at Blackbrook) and 16,570 sq.m. potential office space at East Goods Yard immediately available and around 10 ha of non office land.</p>	<p>Following discussions with stakeholders it was agreed that a 3 year ‘short term’ was an appropriate period for assessing availability. This should also include an element of ‘immediately’ available. Within a 3 year timeframe over 71,000 sq.m. of office space can be considered available. All but Firepool (47,000 sq.m / Site TTa7) was considered unconstrained/immediately available for development.</p> <p>In addition, the Stage 1 assessment uses 1 April 2006 as the start date for the RSS 20 year period to 2026, thus this response excludes 2 years of completions (2006-2008) which amounted to an additional 8,000 sq, m of office space.</p> <p>This combined short term total of over 79,000 sq.m. is around 87% of the RSS background paper estimates for office supply over the Plan period (which may prove an underestimate).</p>

	<p>However, the Council accepts that there is little availability of office space in Wellington although any additional provision should be of a scale and function to the size and future role of the town.</p> <p>Developers/agents also, strongly consider that available sites are heavily orientated to Taunton town centre and may not meet all of the sectoral demands for future suite size and business locations over the Core Strategy period. This also needs to be addressed.</p>
<p>Only 1.93 ha of office land is realistically available now and Firepool is not suitable for the sort of occupiers that have taken buildings at Blackbrook. Sites to satisfy demand over the next 5 years are thin on the ground.</p>	<p>See above comment.</p> <p>The respondees assessment actually identifies 19,428 sq.m. office space available within 2 years. A further 7,340 sq.m. has been built in Taunton area since the start of the RSS period (2006-08). This amounts to over 26,700 sq. of available office space over the first 4 years of the Plan period (out of a total requirement of between 60-90,000 sq.m.) and is not considered unreasonable. Moreover, town centre sites such as Firepool (c47,000 sq.m.) are anticipated to be available for development in phases, commencing within the next 3 year period (c2011/12).</p> <p>The Council is aware that suite sizes in some town centre regeneration sites may be too large for many potential occupiers and that a town centre location may not be suitable for operational needs, but is particularly mindful of Government, Regional and Local Planning policy. However, subject to identified need over the Plan period, the Council accepts that an element of ‘out of centre’ office (and other employment generators excluding comparison/convenience retail) use may be necessary to provide a mix of employment and to ‘pump-prime’ the consequences of high infrastructure costs within larger, strategically located employment sites. A figure of around 10% total</p>

	<p>floorspace would be the maximum the Council would consider as not being more than incidental, and thus contrary to policy.</p>
<p>With the exception of Chelston (Wellington), there has been no significant industrial development for many years. Much land in Taunton is not viable, reflecting location, access and infrastructure constraints.</p>	<p>Accepted. The mismatch in supply between Wellington and Taunton has been a recognised concern for a number of years. The Stage 1 assessment proposes the deletion of a number of sites from the ‘supply’ calculations for a number of reasons. This still leaves nearly 22 ha in the Taunton area.</p> <p>However, it is accepted that this 22 ha may not be suitable for all types of business use, sectoral requirements or other investment opportunities. Moreover, much of the land at Taunton Trading Estate is being redeveloped to include less employment provision (albeit a better utilisation of space, much of which was unusable due to building age and quality).</p> <p>The Council proposes to work in partnership with developers, agents etc to produce an evidence base identifying market gaps which cannot be met through the current supply and increase land requirements over and above current background studies, to inform Core Strategy policy and allocations.</p>
<p>There is an alarming shortage of available land available for office and industrial development in the short and medium term, with the exception of the ‘Vision’ sites’ which only cater for a limited sector of the market. There is not enough suitable land allocated for the</p>	<p>As noted in the above comments, by the respondees own observations there is over 26,760 sq.m. of office space available over the period 2006-2011. The Council considers that other sites such as ‘Firepool’ will also commence availability within a 3 year (ie short term) period, providing around 47,000 sq.m. additional office space.</p> <p>The above Council responses also suggest that subject to need it may be appropriate to also make limited office provision in larger,</p>

	<p>strategically located out of centre employment areas but such sites are unlikely to be agreed and advanced outside of the Development Plan system. The past decade has already provided significant out of centre choice at Blackbrook (around 34,000 sq.m. or c30% of existing town centre office space, including Taunton and County Council offices).</p> <p>It is accepted that availability of industrial land in Taunton is very limited, particularly in the short term. However, the Core Strategy needs to plan for requirements over the 20 year period (2006-2026), not just the short term, especially if current RSS and TDBC reports consider an oversupply over the 20 year period. It is though agreed that the range and choice of sites in Taunton is poor and that additional land is required to be identified in the Core Strategy.</p>
<p>Whilst regional policy discourages ‘poaching’ investment from nearby areas, Taunton must strive to put itself in a position where it has the best chance of retaining existing business and can compete in equal terms with other centres.</p>	<p>Agreed. The Council agrees with the principle that the currently perceived employment land oversupply in the RSS and TDBC (Stage 2) studies is misplaced since, although deliverable and viable, some of the sites identified in the Stage 1 assessment may not fulfil all of the market requirements. Again, the Council is willing to work with stakeholders to develop a robust evidence base to challenge the quantum of supply identified in these studies.</p>
<p>Strategic sites should not be pigeon holed for specific uses. Occupier demand should be left to identify what is built.</p>	<p>Partially agree. Planning policy requires a sequential approach (subject to need) for office use. However, other Class B and associated uses are usually accepted within employment estates and within a class the Council cannot specify a specific type of user that is or isn’t acceptable.</p>
<p>The following minimum allocations should be made:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. At least 10 ha for major strategic office site, with good access to the M5 and out of town office market. Other additional uses could be accommodated in addition; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Out of centre office parks would only be acceptable to ‘need’ and a sequential approach to location. It is also unlikely that ‘need’ would require an additional 10 hectares of office land.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. A strategic site or sites totalling at least 25 ha for office, industrial and sui generic use with good J25 access. iii. Several smaller sites totalling at least 10 ha for industrial and sui generic use, with good access to the primary transport routes and existing employment areas. A proportion of premium value uses should be acceptable to assist viability. Land to the west of Taunton should be included in this category; iv. Several sites totalling at least 5 ha for quasi employment uses such as trade parks, showrooms, open storage, builders merchants etc; v. Thus a total of a further 50 ha for the period to 2026 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. –v. The Stage 1 assessment already identifies around 30 ha more land than required in the Stage 2 assessments (ie around 10 ha less than the total c40 ha non office sought by the respondees). However, it is accepted that these sites may not entirely fit in with the requirements outlined by the respondees as being attractive to investors and occupiers. The Council is willing to increase the land requirements in the Core Strategy to meet market gaps if stakeholders can provide evidence to justify the principle and quantum.
<p>List of sites to be removed from the Stage 1 calculations</p>	<p>Offices T.Ta3 Blackbrook Do not accept. This is an extant planning permission. Delete in due course if necessary. T.Ta.10 Coal Orchard and T.Ta11 Morrisons. Do not accept. These sites are part of a mixed use allocation in the TCAAP, adopted late 2008. The Inspector was satisfied to retain these allocations to include office proposals of this scale. It is too early to reconsider deletion. R.Co1 Cothelstone. Do not accept. Extant planning permission. Delete in due course if necessary.</p> <p>Other uses T.Ta8, T.Cf2, T.Cf4, T.Nf6 Sites already excluded from total. T.Cf1 and T.Nf4 Sites already in use. Accept. Remove from supply total. W.We3 Tonedale Mill. Do not accept. This is an underused site. Refurb will increase employment provision. Also existing Local Plan allocation. W.We8 Chelston House Farm. Site already excluded. However, see Philip Broom – reinsert as additional site.</p>

	<p>W.W1 Pleamore. Do not accept. The site was available and under construction in 2008, thus correct to include as part of land supply for period 2006-20026.</p> <p>R.He1-3 Sites already excluded from the totals.</p> <p>R.Wi1. Do not accept. This site has valid planning permission.</p>
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Response of Philip Broom 6th February 2009

Consultees Response	Councils comments
Site W.We.8 (Chelston House Farm) is partly developed and the rest retained for future employment sale.	W.We8. Accept. Reinstate site but as already largely in employment (or quasi) use do not include as part of available supply.

Response of Summerfield 18th February 2009

Consultee Response	Councils comments
Taunton town centre office market is adequately served with plenty of short to medium space at Firepool.	Noted.
High rise buildings at Firepool will not be suitable for occupiers requiring smaller, self contained buildings, or individual bespoke designs. In addition, the accommodation will all be expensive grade A space, not suited to all occupiers.	It is too early to yet say how 'expensive' or otherwise the Firepool office space will be. However, Project Taunton have confirmed that the Firepool site is unlikely to provide small – medium sized office suites. At this stage it is also too early to gauge whether other AAP sites will cater for a range of large/small, freehold/rental, and expensive/cheaper options.
The out of town office market has been ignored in the Core Strategy and no suitable land allocations have been made up until 2026. Blackbrook is nearly fully developed, resulting in a potentially serious situation for Taunton. Suitable land must be brought forward in the	Over the previous 5 years, 98% of all Taunton office floorspace was constructed at the 'out of centre' Blackbrook. Floorspace at Blackbrook office park equates in total to around 65% of all Taunton town centre office space (excluding Council offices). It was approved

<p>Core Strategy.</p>	<p>prior to government policy requiring a sequential approach to major office development if there is an established need.</p> <p>The Core Strategy has yet to allocate any additional land. However, background studies for the RSS and Core Strategy suggest that the Borough needs a maximum of between 60,000 - 91,000 sq.m. of new office space. Existing commitments (Development Plan and permissions) amount to around 100,000 sq.m.</p> <p>At present, no evidence has been presented to the Council to suggest an additional quantum of office floorspace above background studies is required, although developers/agents have argued that town centre opportunities do not entirely fulfil market demand. As stated above, the Council is prepared to work with stakeholders to reassess need and market gaps and potentially allocate additional opportunities within policy constraints.</p>
<p>Development of Chelston has retained some businesses in Taunton Deane but there is a dearth of suitable (non office) employment land in Taunton.</p>	<p>Accepted. Monitoring reports show a clear, long term mismatch of industrial/sui generis land between Taunton and Wellington. The scale of growth proposed for Taunton will exacerbate this position unless additional land is identified for the Taunton area to 2026. The Council will seek to work with developers and agents to quantify the shortage of such land in the SSCT.</p>
<p>In conclusion, the stage 1 assessment is overoptimistic, statistics only telling half the story. Occupiers cannot be steered to where they don't want to go and inward investment will go elsewhere. A large mixed use business park of +40 ha at a strategic Taunton location that complies with institutional funding requirements should therefore be allocated.</p>	<p>Suitability/availability of sites queried:</p> <p>Offices</p> <p>T.Ta2, 4 and 12 'Already developed'. These sites were available at or since RSS commencement date (April 2006) and thus form part of the total supply.</p> <p>T.Ta3 Adjoins office park. Extant permission. This site cannot</p>

	<p>therefore be deleted from supply</p> <p>T.Ta.5,6,7 (Firepool) 'Available within 3-5 years'. Possibly. Project Taunton confident of commencement within 3 years.</p> <p>Respondees office floorspace total for Firepool/TTa7 (47,000 sq.m.) is accepted and Stage 1 draft total (51,000) sq.m. deleted.</p> <p>T,Ta10,11 (Coal Orchard, Morrissons) 'Existing non office uses' and unlikely to be of interest to be redeveloped. Noted but adopted AAP recognises regeneration potential in mid/long term Plan period and Project Taunton confirm long term aims and suitability.</p> <p>T.Nf2 (Station Road) Extant office permission. Retain.</p> <p>Non office</p> <p>TCf1, (Toneway) Accept, not available, Take off land supply</p> <p>TCf2, (Priorswood) Already excluded from supply</p> <p>T.Nf3. Site was available/allocation at April 2006 commencement date.</p> <p>T.Nf6 Already removed from supply figure</p> <p>RHe1-3 (Henlade) Already excluded from supply figures.</p> <p>WWe8 (Chelston). Part of Local Plan allocation. Retain (see Philip Broom response)</p> <p>W.Ww1 (Pleamore). Now developed but available post 2006 commencement date.</p> <p>RWi1 (Hillsmoor) Valid planning permission on site available post 2006 commencement.</p> <p>Most sites recommended for deletion are commitments and thus should be retained (planning permission or allocation) and capable of development within Plan period 2006-2026. However, accept that there may be market sectors or types of investment opportunities lacking. The Council will work with developers/agents to investigate opportunities to challenge existing evidence base for demand</p>
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	requirements as part of the Core Strategy.
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White Young, Green 10th February 2009

Consultees Response	Councils comments
According to the 2004 Guidance notes Stage 1 is only an initial assessment. Stage 2 should be conducted to assess local market circumstances and the supply in quantitative terms before an oversupply of employment land can be concluded.	The Stage 2 report has been undertaken (by DTZ). A similar assessment was undertaken by SWERDA/DTZ as part of the RSS evidence base. It is on this basis that the Council has concluded an oversupply. However, Council reports have made it clear that there may be grounds to challenge certain assertions and gaps in the assessments, hence TDBC's willingness to review the Core Strategy evidence base with developers/agents.
A significant number of the committed sites would not appear to be currently available and others are not considered available within 5 years. The Stage 1 review commitment figure is not therefore robust	<p>The Core Strategy and RSS covers the 20 year period 2006-2026 and the projected requirements for office development cover this period to 2026.</p> <p>Even removing sites deemed unsuitable by agents in the short term, Greenslade Taylor's assessment identifies 19,428 sq.m. office space available within 2 years. A further 7,340 sq.m. has been built in Taunton area since the start of the RSS period. Over 26,700 sq. of available office space over the first 5 years of the Plan period (out of a total requirement of between 60-90,000 sq.m.) is not considered unreasonable. Moreover, town centre sites such as Firepool (c47,000 sq.m.) are anticipated to commence development within 3 years (subject to economic climate?) further increasing provision. This is not considered unreasonable. Moreover, the Council considers that other sites, such as Coal Orchard and Tangier may also be advanced for development around 2014.</p>
The 91,000 sq.m. figure does not reflect the RSS requirements. The	The RSS does not indeed specify any office demand figure, purely an

<p>draft RSS does not state a specific level of office need and is not a development plan requirement supported by the RSS.</p>	<p>employment figure for Taunton TTWA (around 16,500 jobs). However, a background study for the RSS commissioned by SWERDA suggested potential office requirement of up to 91,000 sq.m. over the period 2006-2026, which is higher than the c66,000 sq.m. identified as the maximum requirement in the Borough Councils Stage 2 Assessment undertaken by DTZ.</p> <p>Further, a Regional Assembly commissioned (Aug 2008) Employment Land: Spatial Implications study considered only around 2,268 new office jobs over the period 2006-2026 in Taunton Deane which the study equates to 40,828 sq.m. of new floorspace.</p> <p>The Planning system requires an evidence base to back policy formulation and the 91,000 sq.m. has been used as a starting point by the Council. AS stated before, the Council is willing to consider any objective evidence of a shortage in quantum submitted by agents/developers if they consider the total requirement to still be above committed supply.</p>
<p>The latest modifications to RSS raised the employment requirement for Taunton Deane to 25,000 jobs</p>	<p>This figure relates to Taunton HMA which includes Bridgwater for example, ie it is not the same area as covered by Taunton Deane.</p>
<p>A 5 year rolling supply of sites should be provided. It is unreasonable for Taunton Deane to require very little employment land in the short term, thus relying upon delivery nearer 2026.</p>	<p>The Council considers it appropriate to seek to ensure a reasonable supply across the whole Plan period. As noted above, it is considered that a reasonable supply of office space is committed and available for development both within the first 5 years of the Plan period and over the next 5 years. There is also a reasonable short term supply of industrial/other land in the short term over the Deane although it is accepted that this is unacceptably skewed towards Wellington, rather than the Taunton area. However, future sites should be identified through the Development Plan process rather than ‘ad hoc’.</p>

<p>The RSS recognises a difference between town centre and out of centre requirements, making allowance for out of town office development, recognising its need and function – eg. where they are ancillary to other forms of employment provision</p>	<p>Paragraph 8.4.12 of the RSS states that “provision of office ... uses will need to be provided in-step with the needs generated by economic and population growth ... based on the ‘town centre first’ sequential approach ... follow(ing) guidance given in PPS6”</p> <p>Policy TC1 of the RSS also states “The planning of office development at other (non town centre) employment development areas should reflect the need to avoid putting at risk any approved LDD’s for a city or town centre”</p> <p>The Council is not aware of any part of the RSS which accepts out of centre office space that would conflict with the above statements or Regional, National and Local Plan policy. However, it does accept that many Class B1,b and c uses may include an office element within the building that would be ‘ancillary’ to the main use and thus not requiring planning permission and, subject to identified ‘need’ the Council comments above has accepted that there may be justification to allow an element of other office uses at major, strategically located sites in the Borough..</p>
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Somerset County Council 18th February 2009

Consultees Response	Councils comments
<p>Mismatch between Taunton and Wellingtons industrial land supply is noted and the conclusion that there is a particular need to identify and target additional land in the Taunton area is supported.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>Sites R.He1-3 (Henlade), despite the constraints, should be considered as an ‘amber’ rather than ‘red’ as, despite constraints, this area could form part of a strategic opportunity, as evidenced by the recent</p>	<p>The SHLAA does not recognise the area south of the motorway as a priority location for accommodating the towns RSS growth, reflecting the background work to the RSS.</p>

SHLAA submission. It could be suitable for a more detailed appraisal in stage 3.	
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Tim Roper 27th February 2009

Consultees Response	Councils comments
Site W.We7 (Lowmoor) has excluded land between the road and river, which has extant permission and is partly used.	Accepted. The land benefits from a 1988 planning permission and amounts to 1.18 ha. However, whilst it is accepted that the land is classed as ‘employment’ it is not proposed to add the 1.18 ha to the land supply figures since part is already implemented and the remaining land falls within the floodplain and flood alleviation would be required. If developed in long term, this should be regarded as an additional windfall.

Clarke Wilmott 5th February 2009

Consultees response	Councils comments
The sites are of a size that is insufficient to be attractive to developers and/or occupiers. Further, the site sizes make it highly unlikely that their development will deliver or contribute towards any significant infrastructure enhancements.	The Council accepts that there is a very limited supply of non office sites in the Taunton area and this needs to be rectified in the Core Strategy, but there is no evidence that the retained sites will not prove attractive for developers or occupiers. Apart from Monkton Heathfield, the sites proposed to be retained do not have significant infrastructure issues restraining development. The sites all lie within or adjoining existing employment areas and the Council does not accept that the sites proposed for retention will not be developed within the Plan period.
The 2005 Somerset Economic Strategy noted “the need for regionally significant sites in Somerset’s larger towns is a priority for future	The Local Plan was adopted in 2004, prior to the mentioned strategy, thus there has been limited opportunity to ‘allocate’ additional land

<p>competitiveness, including investment”. Taunton has failed to allocate land for this purpose, and given the content of the Stage 1 Review, this trend looks set to continue.</p>	<p>outside of the planning process since then.</p> <p>The Council does not necessarily accept that ‘this trend looks set to continue’. An aim of the Stage 1 review is to flush out gaps in provision – such as the lack of relative provision in Taunton. Firepool functions as a ‘regionally significant site’ and feedback from the consultation exercise suggests the lack of larger non office sites may provide additional scope to challenge the existing ‘demand’ requirements to 2026 in the Stage 2 Assessment. The Council proposes to continue dialogue with developers/agents to objectively quantify such gaps.</p>
<p>Apart from Blackbrook, little land of any consequence has been developed for office purposes.</p>	<p>Noted. However, a number of town centre opportunities have been identified as commitments, through planning permission and/or within the recently adopted Taunton Town Centre AAP. Even excluding Firepool, this amounts to over 20,000 sq.m. available now and a further 7,000 sq.m. built over the period from the RSS baseline commencement of 2006 to the Stage 1 date of 2008.</p>
<p>Using a 2006 basedate results in a number of sites at Blackbrook being included which have since been built.</p>	<p>Noted. However the RSS 20 year period runs from 2006 -2026 thus including completions since the 2006 commencement date is appropriate.</p>
<p>Important businesses such as Taunton Cider and Thales have been lost.</p>	<p>Noted. Taunton Cider closed around 15 years ago. Thales has been more recent although the premises remain and are partly used.</p>
<p>The reports land supply (25.17 ha) (Note, now in final draft the figure is 22 ha) is less than the area lost at the former Taunton Trading Estate (31.17 ha).</p>	<p>Noted. However, Taunton Trading Estate were former military building built for the war effort. They were old, much of the space was underused, not suited to modern industrial requirements and part of the site lay within the floodplain. Moreover, the economic restructuring of the economy enables modern business to utilise less modern space to better advantage. However, it is accepted that the loss of most of this employment land should be a factor in allocating additional land in the</p>

	Core Strategy.
There is an effective acknowledgement that much of the allocated land in the last Local Plan is either unsuitable or unavailable for development.	Accepted in part. Of the three large Taunton allocations, Taunton Trading Estate is currently under redevelopment for a mix of uses and Monkton Heathfield has permission for mixed use redevelopment (granted March 09). It is however proposed to remove the Henlade allocation from the employment supply as the site is unlikely to come forward. The allocations at Wellington are underway (Chelston House Farm) or completed (Chelston).
In consequence of the above, it is important to understand which sites are available for development, making up the 25.17 Taunton supply figure.	Clarke Wilmott phoned with this question and were told the Stage 1 sites marked as to be 'retained' are the sites in question. The assessments also show whether they are considered available in short (within 5 years), medium (within 10 years) or longer term. This should not therefore hinder their understanding of what sites are referred to.
Sites may be 'available' only in planning terms rather than in a practical or commercial sense.	The Council accepts that there are very limited sites available in Taunton as a result of the Stage 1 review (and some of these are proposed to be removed from the supply list eg T.Cf2 and 4,). However, sites at Norton Fitzwarren have planning permission and development started. Sites at Monkton Heathfield have the benefit of planning permission, granted in March 2009. It is thus too early to say they are not commercially attractive although the Council accepts that in the current economic climate, few sites are likely to be so at present.
The Council also needs to pay careful regard to the range and type of employment uses to be attracted to Taunton. This begs the question of whether Taunton Deane has an economic strategy. If one is being prepared no officer from Taunton Deane should be involved.	The Councils most recent Economic Development Strategy (draft 2007) is currently being updated. It would not be appropriate to exclude officers from the Councils own Economic Development Strategy although it is being drafted by consultants. Part of this strategy will reassess the range and type of employment uses identified / targeted in earlier studies.
The report concludes that only the Monkton Heathfield allocations within the Taunton area have a 'realistic potential to attract any	The comment regarding Monkton Heathfield and 'growth sectors' arose from internal discussions with Economic Development Section

<p>identified non office, significant, high-value growth sectors such as those within the scientific knowledge-based or creative industries'. It would be helpful if the authors have taken external commercial agency advice to underpin this conclusion. Monkton Heathfield is not high profile and it is tenditious to say that this allocation is deliverable and available. It has been under consideration for over a decade without development occurring. Lack of activity and the current economic climate suggests that funding will not be likely in the foreseeable future. Thus whilst available in the future, a prospective operator/investor could not be certain that the unit they require could be got underway in a matter of months.</p>	<p>on the basis of the size of site and Greenfield location. There have been no requests to delete the site in favour of alternative uses by the applicants and no other consultees have considered that the site is not deliverable.</p> <p>Development has not occurred in the past because the site was only allocated in the adopted Local Plan in 2004 and an application lodged in late 2005. Permission was granted by Secretary of State in March 2009. The Council does however accept that the current economic climate may inevitably affect delivery of this mixed use urban extension, along with many other sites nationally. The Council accepts the suggested medium/long term timescale (-5-10 years) of Greenslade Taylor et al is now a more realistic timeframe.</p>
<p>With the Monkton Heathfield allocation set aside, it is erroneous to conclude that there is a broad range of unit sizes available in Taunton.</p>	<p>Accepted. Without the Monkton Heathfield allocation, availability of sites and thus unit sizes are extremely limited.</p>
<p>Upon what policy guidance is the use of 'short term availability' within 5 years regarded as an acceptable approach?</p>	<p>The 5 year period for 'short term availability' was used at both the Taunton Deane Local Plan Inquiry and Taunton Town Centre AAP as constituting a 'reasonable period of time' by which to judge whether land was available. Earlier case law (eg Kingston upon Hull and Huntingdonshire) also used the 5 year period to constitute available within the context of the sequential assessment.</p> <p>The Council notes that Policy ES3 of the emerging RSS advocates a three year rolling supply of employment land to ensure allocations continue to meet the needs of business.</p> <p>Based on current annual take-up rates a rolling three year supply does exist within the Deane but this is largely due to immediate availability in Wellington. It is accepted that supply in Taunton remains extremely</p>

	limited and is an important issue for addressing in the Core Strategy.
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Ref: CSEmpStage1responses



TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL STAGE 1 EMPLOYMENT LAND REVIEW

Response from Summerfield Developments (SW) Limited (supplemental to our January 2009 Paper)

- 1 Summerfield have over 20 years' experience specialising in employment land and have developed business parks along the M4/M5 corridor at Chippenham, Bristol, Weston-super-Mare, Highbridge, Taunton, Wellington and Exeter. Occupiers include office headquarters and large distribution warehouses as well as smaller light industrial units.
- 2 We also have extensive knowledge of the city/town centre office market having developed large buildings for the MOD in Bristol, National Rivers Authority in Bridgwater and Charity Commissioners and Treasury Solicitors in Taunton.
- 3 We consider we have a good understanding of the property development market for employment uses and particularly the requirements of office, industrial and warehouse users. We also have knowledge of the general criteria for investment in land and buildings from institutional funds and private sector developers.

Our additional comments on the Employment Land Review Report are as follows:

Land Suitable for Office Development

- 1 We strongly disagree with the conclusions of the TDBC Report and consider a serious shortfall has already developed with an almost complete lack of suitable office sites in Taunton readily available. We wonder where the figure of 111,776 m² of available office space comes from, representing "an excess of projected demand by over 20%"?
- 2 In our opinion the only suitable site for offices that is potentially available is the Firepool Regeneration Site that could eventually cater for around 60,000 m² of space. However, in view of the significant infrastructure costs and scale of the development large office requirements, possibly from the public sector will probably be necessary to kick start this development.
- 3 The mainstay of the Taunton office market is in buildings of around 600m² to 1,200 m² and our opinion there are no viable sites in Taunton for this important sector of the market immediately available (apart from two sites left at Blackbrook).
- 4 In addition, and most importantly, Firepool is not suitable for prestigious bespoke office occupiers such as the NatWest Data Processing Centre and Emergency Fire Service Centre. Both required purpose build buildings with an unusual design that can only be accommodated on suitable business park sites, such as Blackbrook.



- 5 As previously explained Firepool only caters for the town centre office market and if things are left as they are Taunton will not be able to offer any suitable sites for the bespoke institutional out of town office market up until 2026. These occupiers require prestige sites with amenities and communications and in our view none of the sites listed fulfil this criteria which is a sad state of affairs.

Land Suitable for Industrial//Warehouse Development

- 1 Apart from the St Modwen development at Norton Fitzwarren (resulting in an acknowledged net loss of industrial land) not much industrial/warehouse development has happened in Taunton for at least 10 years. The only major development has been at Chelston and planning permission for the Chelston Phase II Extension was given some years ago because of an acknowledged shortfall of suitable land in Taunton. Nothing has changed to alleviate this situation.
- 2 If potential sites have not been developed over the last 10 year boom in commercial property it follows therefore that most of the sites listed are potentially unsuitable. This is for a variety of reasons but particularly because they are in the wrong location, are too rural in nature or have high infrastructure costs with low value buildings that make the sites unviable.
- 3 We therefore disagree with TDBC's contention that available supply of "58.90 hectares would appear to offer the potential for a broad range of unit sizes from small to large scale provision both within Taunton and Wellington." Apart from Chelston we consider very few sites are suitable or immediately available.

Overall conclusion

- 1 We agree with TDBC that there is a significant mismatch in supply between Taunton and Wellington but this is hardly surprising as our conclusion is that there is virtually no suitable land for either office or industrial/warehouse development immediately available in Taunton.
- 2 This is likely to be the case for some time until the Firepool site is brought forward for development but this is only suitable for town centre offices.
- 3 Taunton will lose enquiries to Bridgwater, Tiverton and Yeovil unless further land is brought forward in Taunton as an urgent interim measure.
- 4 It is pointless allocating further land at unproven locations just to make up the numbers as this will only exacerbate the problem.
- 5 We agree with the final conclusion of the TDBC report that there is particular need to identify and target additional strategic land in the Taunton area to enable the town to fulfil its role and function.
- 6 We consider this site needs to be strategic and of regional importance to build on the success of Blackbrook as a regional offices centre.

- 7 We also consider any site allocated needs to be for mixed use development for a variety of uses in order to make development viable and ensure success.
- 8 Having suitable available land to accommodate a variety of occupiers needs is the single most important factor in economic development. To have the best chance of success a business park needs to tick the right boxes for institutional investment, and good communication and amenities for staff are the key.

Richard Lloyd
10 February 2009/A



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18 February 2009

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Your Ref: RM/S02/EMPCSStage1lett120209

Dear Sir

EMPLOYMENT LAND REVIEW

Thank you for your letter of 12 February and further to our various Task and Finish Group meetings I have pleasure in enclosing two tables setting out our conclusions of the availability of employment land in Taunton Deane and Wellington.

I have been through each site looking at them objectively and concluding which sites are available or could be brought forward in the future in terms of availability, suitability of use and viability.

Our conclusions are that the Taunton town centre office market is very adequately served with plenty of available office space in the short to medium term at Firepool. However the large high rise buildings proposed at Firepool will not in my opinion be suitable for those occupiers who require smaller self contained buildings or indeed individual bespoke designs that do not readily fit into the Firepool masterplan. In addition the accommodation provided will all be expensive Grade 'A' space which will not suit all occupiers.

The out of town office market (which has been very successful in Taunton) has been ignored in the Core Strategy and no suitable land allocations have been made up until 2026. As Blackbrook has been the mainstay of the Taunton office market (98% of Taunton floor space developed over the last 5 years) and is down to its last site, this is an extremely serious situation for Taunton.

I do not believe we have lost a lot of office occupiers to rival towns in the past but am very fearful for the future if suitable quality land is not brought forward in the Core Strategy. Taunton needs to attract not just inward investment but also look after its existing companies, and if they cannot expand into suitable accommodation this will be extremely bad for economic development.



Regarding employment land in Taunton, again there is a dearth of suitable supply with many old chestnuts that have been around for years and not developed. Meanwhile a considerable amount of light industrial warehouse and sui generis uses have been developed at Chelston which over the years has had a successful and steady take-up. Many of these occupiers would prefer to be located in Taunton but at least they are still in Taunton Deane! Other companies have no doubt relocated to Bridgwater and Yeovil where there is a plentiful supply.

In conclusion I consider that the floor space and land areas mentioned as being available in the employment land review are over-optimistic and that the statistics only tell half the story. Whilst the employment market is complex success boils down to providing occupiers with what they require in the location they require. Occupiers cannot be steered to where they don't want to go - they will vote with their feet and potential inward investment in Taunton Deane will go elsewhere, or companies will leave if they cannot find suitable accommodation. In addition, in a difficult and competitive market choice is necessary to attract a wide variety of users, including sui generis uses, to ensure success.

Summerfield Developments therefore advocates the allocation of a large mixed use business park of, say, 40+ hectares at a strategic location in Taunton that complies with institutional funding requirements.

If Taunton Deane comes to a similar conclusion the next stage will be to look at potential sites in detail.

Yours sincerely
SUMMERFIELD DEVELOPMENTS (SW) LIMITED

Richard D A Lloyd
CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CHAIRMAN

EMPLOYMENT LAND REVIEW

SITE REF	ADDRESS	SITE AREA	FLOOR SPACE	SUITABLE USE	VIABILITY	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE OFFICE	AVAILABLE LIGHT INDUSTRIAL/ WAREHOUSE	COMMENTS
		HA	M ²				M ²	HA	
TAUNTON									
TTa1	Blackbrook	1.03	3500	Offices	Yes	Yes immediate	3500		Last site on established office park. Out of town offices.
TTa2	Blackbrook	0.54	1240	Offices	Yes	No			Already developed
TTa3	Blackbrook	0.22	1395	Offices	Yes	No			No access through CW car park
TTa4	Blackbrook	0.54	2270	Offices	Yes	No			Already developed
TTa5	Taunton East Goods Yard	0.35	4580	Offices - Town centre	Yes	3-5 years	4580		Unlikely until Taunton Vision land started
TTa6	Taunton East Goods Yard	0.55	7200	Offices - Town centre	Yes	3-5 years	7200		Waiting for Taunton Vision land and infrastructure
TTa7	Firepool	4.50	60000	Offices - Town centre	Yes	3-5 years	47000		Needs large initial occupier
TTa8	Priorswood	1.80		Light Ind/warehouse	Unlikely	No			Operational land for railway
TTa9	Tangier		8000	Offices/retail	Yes	5-7 years	8000		Upper floor offices not attractive to market. Contamination and flooding a problem
TTa10	Coal Orchard		2000	Theatre	No	No			Existing theatre and car park
TTa11	Morrisons		10000	Supermarket	No	No			Existing supermarket
TTa12	Staplegrave Road		338	Offices - Town centre	Yes	Yes immediate	338		Already refurbished
TCf1	Toneway		625	Storage	No	No			Access and shape difficulties
TCf2	Priorswood landfill	1.39	15354	Light Ind/warehouse	No	Min 10 years			Existing tip
TCf3	Crown Estate	1.95	4875	Light Ind/warehouse	Yes	Yes		1.95	Been around but undeveloped a long time
TCf4	Crown Estate	4.10		Light Ind/warehouse	Yes	Yes		4.10	Same as above. Difficult landlords
Tmh1	Monkton Heathfield	14.00		Light Ind/warehouse	Yes	3-5 years		14.00	Major infrastructure needed. Persimmon yet to commit, unlikely to be suitable for offices.
TNf1	Taunton Trading Estate	6.59	16475	Light Ind/warehouse	Yes	Yes immediate		2.42	Most of site already developed
TNf2	Station Road		2013	Light Ind	No	Yes			Contamination. New build unlikely.
TNf3	Taunton Trading Estate	0.79		Cash and Carry	Yes	No			Being developed
TNf4	Courtlands Farm	0.54	1250	Light Ind/warehouse	Possibly	Yes		0.54	Converted chicken huts. Low value only.
TNf5	Courtlands Farm	0.35	875	Light Ind/warehouse	Possibly	Yes		0.35	As above
TNf6	Former Matthew Clark	0.49		Residential	No	No			Developed for residential
TSt1	Frobisher Way	0.32	990	Light Ind	Yes	Yes		0.32	Small acorn units
RHe1	Henlade	10.00		Light Ind/warehouse	No	No			Council recommends removal
RHe2	Henlade Tarmac	1.41		Light Ind/warehouse	No	No			Council recommends removal
RHe3	Henlade Tarmac	1.00		Light Ind/warehouse	No	No			Council recommends removal. Flooding issues.
							70618	23.68	
WELLINGTON AND RURAL AREAS									
WWe1	Rylands Farm	1.03	2520	Light Ind	Yes	Yes immediate		1.03	Part already built
WWe2	Rylands Farm	0.46	1600	Light Ind	Yes	Yes immediate		0.46	Low value uses
WWe3	Tonedale Mill	1.50	5539	Workshops	Unlikely	Possibly 2-5 years		1.50	Small workshops - low value refurbishment
WWe4	Chelston House Farm	14.90	64476	Offices/Light Ind/ Warehouse/sui generis hotel	Yes	Yes immediate	2230	14.90	Institutional site. Fully serviced.
WWe5	Chelston House Farm	3.44		Light Ind/Warehouse	Yes	Yes		3.44	Institutional site.
WWe6	Milverton Road	0.78		Workshops	Unlikely	Possibly		0.78	Problems with contamination
WWe7	Lowmoor	2.05	5000	Light Ind/Warehouse	Unlikely	Possibly		2.05	Low value uses. Some residential.
WWe8	Chelston House Farm	1.47		Owner occupier	Yes	No			Remove. Own use.
WWw1	Pleamore	1.52		Owner occupier	Yes	No			Own use. Local only.
RCo1	Manor Farm Cothelstone	0.25		Workshops/Storage	Unlikely	Long term		0.25	Listed farm buildings
RM11	Preston Farm	0.51		Light Ind/Warehouse	Unlikely	Yes		0.51	Low value
RW11	Hillsmoor	1.03		Owner occupier	Yes	No			Own use
RW12	Sandys Moor Wiveliscombe	4.94		Light Ind/Warehouse	Unlikely	Medium term		4.94	High infrastructure costs. Low value rural location.
							2230	29.86	

TIMESCALE	OFFICES TOWN CENTRE	BESPOKE OFFICES OUT OF TOWN	LIGHT INDUSTRIAL/ WAREHOUSING
	M²	M²	HA
AVAILABILITY IN TAUNTON			
Immediate 0-2 years	338	3500	9.68
Short/medium Term 2-5 years	58780	NIL	14.00
Medium/Long Term 5-10 years	8000	NIL	-
TOTAL	67118	3500	23.68
AVAILABILITY IN WELLINGTON AND RURAL AREAS			
Immediate 0-2 years	NIL	2230	23.17
Short/medium Term 2-5 years	NIL	NIL	6.44
Medium/Long Term 5-10 years	NIL	NIL	0.25
TOTAL	NIL	2230	29.86



Appendix D

STAGE 1 EMPLOYMENT LAND REVIEW – COMMENTS ON SITES

The Blackbrook sites - we heard from Richard Lloyd that it is highly likely that the whole of the business park will be completed in 12 months' time and therefore realistically should be taken out of the appraisal.

Site TA6, Taunton East Goods Yard – since it is in use, this site should be excluded.

Site TA8, Priorswood – since it is in use, the site should be excluded.

Site TA9, Tangier – what is the deliverability of this site?

All of the in town sites, such as Tangier and Firepool, need an assessment of deliverability and viability.

Are you really going to include the Morrison site, the Brewhouse Theatre site and the land at Coal Orchard when as with the Morrison site as you so clearly say, the owners have no interest in disposing of the site?

Staplegrove Road site, TA12 – ground floor in use.

Toneway, CF1 – site is not available as the owner is quite happy with the site being used for the present open storage use.

Priorswood CF2 and CF3 - there should be some severe question marks including any Crown Estate land for immediate availability because of reluctance for people to acquire leasehold land.

Priorswood Tip CF4 – noted that this former Monkton Heathfield mill is of course long term despite planning permission. Current tipped area is deleted.

Taunton Trading Estate NF1, 2, 3 and 6 - is a reduction in land.



The majority of the Courtlands Farm Site, NF4, is in use. The entirety of the Courtlands Farm Site, NF5, is in use.

Although perhaps not directly relevant since we are talking about Taunton, site WE2 at Rylands, Wellington is occupied, and site WE3 Tonedale Mill is a site that has been around for donkeys year but very little used, and with a housing scheme where work has stopped.

Site WE6, Milverton Road – I am pleased to see this is being removed from the employment land since a housing application is imminent.

With the Lowmoor sites we believe these are in flood land.

WW1, Pleamore – building now fully in use.

HE1 – Pleased to see the removal of the Henlade site at long last. Need for an urgent replacement.

DRAFT

Appendix E

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Employment Land Task and Finish Group - 16 June 2009

Report of Strategy Team and Planning Policy Advisor

Issues to report on:-

1. Review of available sites and whether they should remain as employment opportunities.

The Stage 1 Employment Land Review Assessment has now been completed as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy. This included consultation with a range of agents, developers and other interested stakeholders. Where possible, amendments have been made by the Council to seek to attain common ground between all parties.

The report identifies:-

55.5 ha of employment land available over the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) period (2006-2026) for **industrial and other** employment uses within Taunton Deane, of which;

- 22.2 ha within Taunton SSCT (Strategically Significant Cities and Towns); and
- 25.95 ha within the Wellington area

(The RSS requires c28 ha)

Splitting the Taunton figure;

8 ha immediately and short term available (within 3 years) totals 8 ha. Sites at Taunton Trading Estate (5.2 ha), Crown land (1.95 ha), Courtlands (0.8 ha) and Frobisher Way (0.32 ha);

14 ha available within the medium term (3-10 years). All within Monkton Heathfield.

The Core Strategy will identify land for the medium and longer term opportunities.

With regard to **office** use, the Stage 1 Employment Land Review Assessment identified 100,000 sq.m of commitments within the period 2006-2026. Nearly all of this is within Taunton SSCT and most is identified through the Taunton Town Centre (Area Action Plan) AAP.

(The various RSS background studies indicate requirements of between c60-90,000 sq.m).

Conclusions

Despite RSS 'demand' figures exceeding identified 'supply', the Stage 1 report identifies a number of key areas of concern, including:-

- Lack of short, medium and longer term opportunities within Taunton SSCT for industrial/other land. A range of additional site sizes, tenure and quality is lacking, including a major strategic site with good access to the trunk route network.
- Now that Blackbrook is nearing completion there is a lack of current opportunities for medium sized office suites (300-1000 sq.m). Whilst town centre sites are available immediately and short term (up to three years), it is likely that most regeneration sites will be targeted towards larger office occupiers.

2. Options for short term release outside of Local Plan / Local Development Framework (LDF)

Under Circular 02/2009 sites of up to 5,000 sq.m floorspace outside of development plan areas would not need to be referred to the Government Office for the South West (GOSW) as a departure. This would equate to a site area of c 2ha for non-office use.

Circular 02/2009 also defines 'major development' in terms of town centre uses as 1,000 sq.m. Below this threshold sites would not require to be referred to GOSW as a departure.

If the Council were to adopt the above thresholds, subject to owner and developer interest, the following sites could be brought forward in the short term, outside of the Development Plan process:-

- Crown land at Nerrols (c2 ha)
- Creech Heathfield (part of c8 ha total)
- Walford Cross (c2 ha)
- Additional windfall out of centre office sites may also arise with the higher office 'threshold'.

It is unlikely that larger sites, for immediate release could be brought forward outside of the Development Plan system, especially large 'strategic' sites with infrastructure and other issues. The Highways Agency for example have major concerns for additional development in the vicinity of J25.

3. What could be achieved through the LDF?

The Stage 1 assessment identifies the need for:-

- a range of opportunities in Taunton area for a variety of site size, tenure and quality for (short) medium and longer term development;
- employment uses in sustainable urban extensions in the medium and longer term;
- the retention of lower quality employment land (ie existing sites);
- a strategic employment site with good access to the trunk route network.

All of the above will require a sound evidence base to quantify the apparent need. Whilst discussions with developers/agents have made a start on this, most evidence is fairly 'anecdotal'. Agents/developers will require to be more objective in quantifying need over the coming months.

4. Recommendations

1. In line with Circular 02/2009, the Council initiates discussions with landowners and developers for the release of immediate short term employment land opportunities at Nerrols, Creech Heathfield and Walford Cross for up to 5,000 sq.m (around 2 hectares per site);
2. In line with Circular 02/2009, raising the threshold for out-of-centre office proposals for requiring a sequential assessment to 1,000 sq.m. This should enable additional windfall opportunities to come forward in the short term;
3. A strategic employment site of about 25 hectares (can only) be brought forward in the medium - longer term, through the LDF. (Any attempt to bring forward a strategic site outside the LDF would be blocked by the Highways Agency and possibly GOSW and SW Councils);
4. To progress a strategic site it is also recommended that a working group be set up and led by Economic Development or Project Taunton, involving a Taunton Deane Strategy Officer, Somerset County Council Transport, Highways Agency, Environment Agency, Regional Development Agency/SW Councils, developers and agents, with the purpose of developing an evidence base and proposal for the LDF Core Strategy. As part of this process there should be community engagement with the parishes that would be affected. It is recommended that the strategic employment site should provide opportunities for major inward investment to Taunton. It is accepted that an element of office and non Class B employment generating development (non Class A1) will be necessary to fund the initial infrastructure to open up the site, but the total proportion of floorspace for such uses should remain ancillary (around 10%) and focus on medium sized office suites (300-1,000 sq.m) in order to remain consistent with Government policy and to avoid undermining Firepool as the strategic office site for the SSCT.

Ref:U/TaskFinish0609

