

Response ID ANON-8CC9-KDXR-G

Submitted to **Local Plan Issues and Options**

Submitted on **2020-03-15 21:24:45**

Your details

What is your name?

Forename:

Michael

Surname:

Baker

Are you making an individual response or on behalf of an organisation?

Individual

If individual, please tell us what type:

Resident of Somerset West and Taunton

Name of organisation:

Please choose one from the drop-down list:

What is your (personal/organisational) address?

██████████

██████████

██████████

What is your email address?

██████████

██

1. Overview and objectives

Do you agree that these are the right Objectives for the Local Plan?

Agree

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

In principle, these Objectives are fine.

I am concerned that Objective 7 may be lost in trying to achieve Objectives 3, 4, and 5: I believe development should be focused in the centre of Taunton, on brownfield sites, and be kept within settlement boundaries to meet Objective 7.

2. Carbon neutrality

Question 1a: Should we aim to require that all newdevelopment is 'zero carbon' by as soon as possible (e.g. by 2025) or give slightly more time (e.g. by 2030) for developers to adapt their design approaches, materials and suppliers?

As soon as possible (e.g. by 2025)

Question 1b: Should we allocate sites for specific renewable energy development or identify broad areas which we consider suitable?

A combination of both of the above

Question 1c: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

There are a reasonable number of listed buildings in Somerset West and Taunton, and it would be helpful towards achieving policy approach 1c/3 if regulations were relaxed so that listed buildings could be more easily modified to help achieve Carbon neutrality. For instance, allowing the fitting of double-glazing that has the appearance of single-glazing, or the use of solar panels that maintain the appearance of the current roofing tiles.

3. Sustainable locations

Question 2a: Do you agree with the tiers that identifies Taunton followed by 6 tiers covering the other settlements?

Yes

If not, what changes would you make and why? (200 words max):

Question 2b: Do you think Watchet and Williton should be seen as associated settlements for the purposes of the Local Plan due to their close proximity and in complementing the services of each other (and therefore be in a higher tier to Bishops Lydeard and Wiveliscombe)?

Not Answered

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

Question 2c: Do you think we should carry on with the way housing is currently distributed across our area (see pie chart) or should we be doing something different, such as one of the three options suggested below?

Leave housing distribution the same

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

What else do you think about housing distribution in our area?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

Specifically with reference to Taunton, point vi) should not allow for development on both sides of the M5: the M5 should remain as the Eastern and Southern boundary of Taunton.

The Blackdown Vale (the valley covered by the parishes of Stoke St Mary, Neroche, Corfe, and Pitminster) to the East and South of Taunton is an area of high natural beauty, and should be preserved as much as is possible. For Taunton, being able to cross the Motorway and immediately be in the countryside is an irreplaceably unique part of its appeal, and should not be undervalued. The potential mental health benefits of escaping the urban environment and visiting the countryside are beginning to be understood, and this places an even higher value on preserving our rural landscapes and habitats.

Question 2d: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

Additional policy approach 2b/2 could be more strongly worded. To meet the climate objectives will require concentrated development on brownfield sites, and potentially active discouragement of greenfield development.

4. New and affordable homes

Question 3a: Should our housing requirement figure match the Government's minimum figure of 702 dwellings per year or should we have a higher figure?

The housing requirement should be the Government's minimum figure of 702 dwellings per year

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

There is no evidence that a figure higher than 702 houses per year is needed, and a lower total will allow for higher quality, more considered developments.

There may be an argument for the council to provide affordable housing by itself, rather than sub-contracting to large developers whose interests are, understandably, more focused on turning a profit.

Question 3b: How should we proactively plan for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople pitches?

Allocate sites specifically for pitches.

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

Any decision should be made in consultation with the Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople communities, but allocating sites seems like the best way to provide a safe location for pitches.

Question 3c: Should we require that all new housing developments include a percentage of new homes that are designed to be accessible, adaptable and wheelchair accessible?

Require a proportion of dwellings to meet the category standard as set out in Building Regulations Part M.

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

And/or include a requirement where houses can be easily retro-fitted to be accessible, and any developer has to take responsibility for that retro-fitting if the buyer of a new property requires those amendments to the house.

Question 3d: How should we provide for custom self-build plots? Should we:

Identify and allocate specific sites for self-build plots in locations related to where people want to live according to our self-build register; and/or

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

Possibly a combination of options 1, 2, and 3.

Question 3e: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

5. A prosperous economy

Question 4a: Should we ensure the growth of our local economy through an increase in the proportion of higher value jobs (with limited increase of jobs overall) or through a significant increase in the number of jobs?

Develop bespoke and realistic growth ambitions linked to the Council's Economic Development (Prosperity) Strategy (i.e. increase the proportion of higher value jobs within existing overall job numbers and not pursue a significant increase in job numbers overall); or

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

Question 4b: Should we keep all of our existing employment sites and allocations in employment use or should we allow the loss of some to other uses? How should we decide which ones to lose?

Develop flexible policy allowing for the loss of any existing/ proposed employment site subject to specific criteria

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

Either one or four, depending on the overall local strategy decided upon.

Question 4c: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

6. Infrastructure

Question 5a: On what infrastructure should we prioritise developer contributions? (Please rank in order of priority)

IO - 5a - ranking - Affordable housing:

IO - 5a - ranking - Designing for the Climate Change Emergency:

IO - 5a - ranking - Accessible, Adaptable and Wheelchair Accessible homes:

IO - 5a - ranking - Strategic Infrastructure (schools, transport, community facilities):

Question 5b: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

This is an odd question. These points of infrastructure should be Council-led to meet the local need for an individual development.

That said, all developments should be designed in the most environmentally friendly way possible, and affordable housing should possibly be Council-developed to suit the local requirement.

7. Connecting people

Question 6a: How can we encourage people not to use their car when travelling into our towns for shopping and work? How can we provide more opportunities for using public transport in rural areas?

Please provide comments (200 words max):

- Concentrate urban development to minimise distances that need to be travelled
- Provide high-speed broadband, particularly in rural areas, to facilitate working from home
- Build more cycle paths connecting rural areas to the main urban centres
- Improve rail links, and subsidise the cost of local rail travel
- Encourage people to Park-and-Ride

Question 6b: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

8. The natural and historic environment

Question 7a: Are there any specific measures that you would like to see new developments deliver to improve biodiversity locally?

Please provide comments (200 words max):

Ideally, new development should occur entirely on brownfield sites: any greenfield development will damage local biodiversity, not improve it.

Somerset West and Taunton is defined by its rural landscapes/habitats, and these should be robustly defended. Designating rural areas as Areas of High Landscape Value would help with this, as would the extension of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to include more of the surrounding countryside.

The damage done by new developments, where these are completely unavoidable on greenfield sites, should be minimised with the inclusion of woods, shrubs, hedgerows, wildflower meadows, and natural watercourses, not simply grassed areas. Provision could also be made for local wildlife, for example: owl and bat boxes, hedgehog houses, beehives etc...

Question 7b: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

Preserve the Green Wedges, do not allow development in open countryside (i.e. outside of settlement boundaries), and designate Areas of High Landscape Value. The Blackdown Vale (the valley covered by the parishes of Stoke St Mary, Neroche, Corfe and Pitminster) seems to be the valley under the most pressure from development, and needs to remain protected.

9. Thriving coastal and rural communities

Question 8a: How should we manage development in rural areas? Should we:

Have settlement boundaries across the District; or

Question 8b: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

Settlement boundaries are an important line of defence against development for the under pressure villages around Taunton. They and the open countryside regulations must be maintained. For Taunton Deane, development must not be allowed outside of settlement limits.

Criteria-based planning seems to be open to abuse. Developers have greater resources to exploit loopholes and push development through. The council needs a firm defence that cannot be wriggled around.

For the villages of West Somerset there may be different needs, and these should be allowed for in a way that is local and appropriate to those communities.

10. Wellbeing of our residents

Question 9a: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

Policy approach 9a/7 should be extended to include requirements for developments to enhance the views from, and local scenery neighbouring, existing Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Particularly given the prevailing winds, any development to the East of the M5 will more than likely fail to meet air quality requirements.

11. Policies for our places: Taunton

Question 10a: How do you think we could introduce more housing into Taunton Town centre?

Positively encouraging taller buildings (subject to impact upon the skyline); or

Please provide reasons for your answers (200 words max):

A combination of all three of these approaches may be most appropriate for increasing the housing density in Taunton town centre.

Question 10b: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):

These look good. I think Taunton needs to withstand, as much as possible, pressure for new housing developments outside of brownfield sites, and focus on consolidating around the developments already approved at Monkton Heathfield, Staplegrove, and Comeytrowe:

- improve infrastructure
- make sure NHS and school provision meets demand
- have a clear plan for Taunton town centre, which is not an easy thing to produce given our changing shopping habits

With regards to the town centre:

- moving towards a more compact town centre makes sense
- reducing the size of some of the larger retail units (to reduce their business rate and provide room for flats) could potentially improve unit viability nearer the town centre
- it is always pleasant to be able to visit different shops, and shops run by local businesses, so these should be encouraged
- if the unit exterior (signage style and height etc...) fits into an overall style for the centre, or for different parts of the centre, then that may increase the overall

attractiveness of the town centre

13. Policies for our places: the Coastal Strip

Question 12a: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?

Please provide comments (250 words max):