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**To:** [Strategy](#)  
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**Subject:** White Young Green - SWT Local Plan Consultation  
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Hello

Please find attached representations to the SWT Local Plan 2040 Issues and Options consultation on behalf of our client Acorn Developments (SW) Ltd.

We will also supply completed Call for Sites Forms covering our client's interests as part of this ongoing process in the coming days.

If you have any queries regarding this email please do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to being consulted further as the plan preparation process continues.

Kind regards,

**Rebecca Randall**  
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**SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON LOCAL PLAN 2040  
ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF ACORN  
DEVELOPMENTS (SW) LTD.  
16<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2020**

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**Introduction**

WYG has prepared these consultation representations on behalf of our client Acorn Developments (SW) Ltd. in connection with the above.

Our client has interests in land in Taunton and Minehead for residential development. All land interests will be subject to separate Call for Sites submissions which will be issued in due course.

We set out the topics and questions from the Issues and Options consultation in bold/bold-italics with our responses in normal type.

**Section 4: Objectives**

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

We have the following comments on the proposed objectives included within the consultation document:

- Objective 1 – whatever standards/measures are adopted in respect of achieving carbon neutrality, these need to be pragmatic and flexible with clear guidance provided as to how these are to be assessed and evidenced.
- Objective 5 – The delivery and funding of required infrastructure needs to be clear and achievable, having regard to NPPF paragraphs 16b, 20b, 34 and 35.
- Broadly, we support proposed objectives 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9.

**Section 5: Issues and options**

**5.1 Carbon neutrality**

***Question 1a: Should we aim to require that all new development 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?***



While an important issue and aspiration, achieving zero carbon for all new developments is a challenging target with no single or quick solution. Where policies are introduced to require all new developments to be zero carbon, careful consideration needs to be given to the deliverability of such measures, impacts on viability and how these may be balanced with other environmental, economic and social considerations. Such policies will need to be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable (NPPF, paragraph 16) with a degree of pragmatism and flexibility so as not to unduly burden or stifle development coming forward in a timely manner, particularly where development is sustainable and in accordance with the development plan as a whole in all other respects.

Enough time needs to be provided for developers to consider which measure(s) would be appropriate for their operation and product, and where this involves new technology and materials, there needs to be sufficient lead in time for these to be designed and produced. This is particularly true for small and medium sized builders who provide a valuable contribution to housing land supply. This is recognised within NPPF paragraph 68 which requires that at least 10% of the housing requirement is identified on sites no larger than 1 hectare. Based on this, and the time period associated with Local Plan preparation, we consider that a timescale of 2025 is unlikely to be appropriate and would likely stifle housing delivery in the short term.

We would therefore advocate the longer timescale of 2030 (although it is considered that even this timescale may not be long enough) to enable the development industry to consider and implement appropriate measures and for the supply chain to respond.

Any “deadlines” to achieve carbon neutrality should be based upon the latest Government research to ensure that any target reflects national guidance. With this in mind, it may be that zero carbon targets are best achieved through national building regulations rather than area-specific planning policies, given the international scale of the challenge. It should be noted that the Government’s current policy is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, and not before. Any local deadline to bring this target forward must be robustly evidence based.

In our view, it is essential that developers are fully engaged in developing the policy framework to achieve zero carbon through a dedicated forum and ensure that policies are meaningful and implementable in the longer term.

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

No comment.



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

It is assumed that policy approach 1c/1 would require the submission of Carbon Impact/Reduction Statements with planning applications. If this is the case, and as per the comments set out for the overarching proposed objective 1, guidance would be needed to ensure that the policy/ies are unambiguous and it is clear how a decision maker should respond (NPPF, paragraph 16). In this respect, a template or proforma document for such Statements would be useful.

With respect to proposed policy 1c/2 the provision of electric vehicle charging to all new residential parking spaces is achievable for private/individual spaces but can be more difficult on communal spaces due to management and maintenance arrangements. Any requirement therefore needs to be flexible for those cases where it is not feasible.

It is not clear whether the provisions of 1c/7 (good waste and recycling provision) are best placed within the Local Plan. Such a policy would not be a strategic one, and in line with NPPF paragraph 28, non-strategic policies should be used by authorities to set out more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development. We would not support a blanket or ambiguous policy requirement which would impact upon deliverability or other design measures (NPPF, paragraph 16).

## **5.2 Sustainable locations**

***Question 2a: Do you agree with the tiers that identifies Taunton followed by 6 tiers covering the other settlements. If not, what changes would you make and why?***

As identified within the consultation document at page 18, the proposed settlement hierarchy tiers will need to be reviewed with the benefit of an assessment of the role and function of each settlement. We would appreciate sight of this work and the opportunity to comment in due course.

We consider that higher tiers (1-4) could be re-organised and reduced in number with specific place-making policies introduced to establish appropriate levels of growth and objectives for these areas. For example, Minehead could be recognised as a sub-strategic town alongside Wellington, albeit with lower housing targets to reflect its distance from the strategic transport network and more constrained nature in comparison to Wellington specifically.

***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)?***

No comment.



***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 above?***

Given the limitations set out within paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 of the Topic Paper 1: Brief Assessment of Settlement Strategy Options (January 2020) alongside our comments in respect of Question 3a below, the current housing distribution, options set out in the consultation document and indeed the further 6no. scenarios set out in Topic Paper 1 cannot be relied upon. Until these issues are addressed, the impacts of both existing and alternative housing distribution scenarios are unknown.

We would welcome further consultation on forthcoming iterations of the Local Plan 2040 as and when this information and assessment becomes available. We consider that such consultation should form part of a further Regulation 18 consultation and should certainly precede a draft Plan and associated policies in order to evidence meaningful consultation in line with the requirements of NPPF paragraph 16c.

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

With respect to proposed policy 2b/1, location should not be a factor as this will be addressed through the settlement hierarchy. If a town or village is listed in one of the higher tiers, then its location must be considered sustainable and this should not be open to challenge as part of any future application. Further while measures to reduce travelling and car dependency are important, it must be recognised that within the SWT area there will always be an element of private car use. There needs to be a sensible balance struck between reducing travel/improving non car usage and delivering development where it is in demand.

### **5.3 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 standard methodology sets a baseline minimum housing requirement based upon past trends from the Office of National Statistics, but it does not take into account a number of factors that might require a higher housing requirement.

These factors include, but are not limited to, the following:



- Delivery of 702 homes per annum may not deliver sufficient affordable homes to meet the needs of the authority or any backlog of provision. The majority of affordable housing is delivered as a percentage requirement from the overall housing requirement (currently 25% in Taunton Deane and 35% in West Somerset under the existing adopted Development Plans). By lowering the annual housing requirement, affordable housing delivery in the area will also be reduced compared to the current rate. This approach would not deliver upon proposed objective 3 or the significant existing affordability issues experienced in the area and set out on page 11 of SWT's consultation document. It is noted within the SA Scoping Report (page 18) prepared by SWT that 208 affordable homes are needed per annum, it is not clear whether this is a gross or net figure taking into account the existing affordable housing stock and potential "churn" within this market. Furthermore, the SA Scoping Report states that affordable housing completions within the SWT area have historically fallen short of the required 25% and 35% policy targets. On the face of it, and in the absence of further assessment of housing tenure and mix and viability testing to support the Local Plan, it would appear that the lowering of overall housing targets from the adopted development plans to simply accord with the standard methodology will result in unviable levels (policy percentages) of affordable housing required on all development sites and that a greater level of market housing overall is needed to make the Plan deliverable.
- Objective 4 refers to "attracting the most talented workers to the District". Section 5.4 refers to economic growth ambitions and an increase the proportion of higher value jobs. These initiatives are welcomed, however they will no doubt require a shift in population past trends that the standard methodology does not account for. Put simply, attracting more talented workers to the district will require higher migration rates than the district has historically seen. This will in turn require additional housing over and above maintaining past housing trends that the standard methodology relies upon. This is often referred to as an economic-led housing requirement. Within the SA Scoping Report (page 16) it is noted that both the 2014 and 2016 available population projections indicate that all age groups apart from the 65+ group will decline up to 2040 for the SWT area. If the proposed objectives in relation to employment and self-containment are to be delivered within the Plan policies, population projections will need to be reassessed to take into account an increasing number of working age residents and the OAN revised accordingly.
- The standard methodology does not take into account strategic infrastructure improvements required to meet the minimum housing requirement or, for example, carbon neutrality. A shift towards increased use of public transport will require significant investment in the current system. A significant proportion of this funding will come from new homes, however an increase in homes may be required for this to be viable.



- Local housing need assessments may cover more than one area or district. There may be an unmet need in adjacent Districts that serve the SWT housing market area. For example, the North Devon and Torridge Joint Local Plan includes an additional housing requirement to facilitate unmet housing need in Exmoor. There is likely to be a similar requirement for SWT that under the Duty to Co-operate (NPPF paragraphs 24-27, 60) SWT is obliged to investigate and whether its housing requirement meets such a need.

Some of the points listed above are identified as limitations within Topic Paper 1: Brief Assessment of Settlement Strategy Options (January 2020) (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5) along with limited up to date information available on the role and function of settlements across SWT.

The above examples (and other scenarios) are likely to require an additional housing requirement over and above the standard methodology. The Local Plan Review would not be 'sound' if it did not investigate these additional housing needs through an OAN and an appropriate evidence base. In our view, the limited evidence provided to date indicates that the standard methodology cannot therefore be relied upon to significantly boost the supply of housing or to demonstrate a sufficient and varied supply of housing.

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

We do not support option ii because in our view, requiring a proportion of development sites to provide an area for gypsy and traveller pitches does not recognise the inherent challenges of co-locating more traditional housing with the specific cultural and physical requirements of the gypsy and traveller community. Lenders will also not provide mortgages where gypsy and traveller sites are mixed in with open market sites. Such sites should therefore be positively planned for, either through a supportive criteria-based policy (option i) or through site allocations (option iii).

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

Clarity is needed over which category of Part M will be required as there are significant cost and space implications between Category M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwellings and Category M4(3) wheelchair use dwellings. The overall percentage requirement (usually 5%) and the threshold for when this will apply (usually major developments) needs to be clear and reasonable, reflecting an evidence-based need for such accommodation. Policy requirements should also not seek to duplicate or over-ride building regulations.



***Question 3d: Should we allocate sites and/or make sure a percentage of housing developments are for self-built plots for people wanting to build their own homes? Should we allow self-build plots on Rural Exceptions sites provided that they are affordable?***

We consider that option iii is not practical as requiring a proportion of development sites to provide an area for custom and self-build causes difficulties for developers in planning their sites given the uncertainty over when and how these plots will be delivered. Further, such an approach is unlikely to genuinely meet the identified need, which should be evidenced by the self-build register. We would encourage SWT to discuss such an approach with authorities where similar policies have been implemented so that the challenges are understood.

People who have expressed an interest in self and custom build are unlikely to be attracted to a site that forms part of a larger more traditional housing development. Such sites are much better being market led (options i and iv) or being separate allocations on sites that are specifically suited to meet this particular need (option ii). With this in mind, we support all options except option iii.

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

With respect to proposed policy 3e/2, we assume this is referring to the need for a viability assessment where a lower than policy compliant level of affordable housing is being proposed (whatever that policy requirement may be), rather than the affordable requirement for each site being established via a viability appraisal. If the former this is supported, but in any event the policy wording needs to be clarified. If the latter, we would strongly object to this as being inconsistent with NPPF Section 5 which requires affordable housing need to be assessed and addressed within specific and unambiguous development plan policies.

Likewise in relation to 3e/3, affordable tenures should be evidenced and addressed within development plan policies in order to achieve proposed objective 2 and accord with NPPF Section 5.

We will strongly oppose the imposition of a housing size mix for open market units where such requirements are not robustly evidenced. It is not correct to rely upon demographic projections to make assumptions on the size of houses that are needed or will be taken up across the area because this is generally led by the market not by an individual's accommodation needs. With this in mind, we consider that development plan policies to address the significant affordability issues in the district are considered in preference to arbitrary standards for house sizes.



With respect to proposed policy 3e/6, any blanket imposition of standards without flexibility risks preventing or discouraging some forms of development. There may be cases where space standards cannot be complied with, but the development still has adequate amenity and is desirable, one example being the retention through conversion of a designated heritage asset. Therefore, any policy requiring specific standards need to be discretionary where a departure from the policy requirement can be justified.

#### **5.4 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?***

No comment.

***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?***

We consider that option iv, to develop flexible policies which allow for the loss of employment land subject to specific criteria, is the most appropriate because it is aligned closely to the provisions of NPPF paragraph 81 with no adverse impacts on the proposed objectives of the Local Plan. The loss of employment land should be supported where it will facilitate or result in the relocation of an existing business within the District and by doing so overall productivity and sustainability of the existing business is improved i.e. through a more suitable and/or larger re-location.

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

With respect to proposed policy 4c/4 and the requirement for home offices in new dwellings, to be effective there needs to be sufficient lead in time for developers to incorporate this into their standard house types and the threshold and percentage requirement needs to be based on evidenced demand.

Where there is an evidenced demand for home offices and these are accommodated within a development proposal, there should be active policy support for such circumstances so that this benefit and its impact in terms of meeting proposed objectives 1 and 6.

#### **5.5 Infrastructure**

***Question 5a: On what infrastructure should we prioritise developer contributions?***



This is not an appropriate matter to be raised within the issues and options consultation where the identified housing requirement and assessment (refer back to our comments made in response to question 3a) and viability testing has not been undertaken. Until such time as this evidence has been prepared and consulted upon, any responses received are not in our view in any way informed.

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

No comment.

**5.6 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?***

No comment.

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

We consider that policy detail to guide development for car and cycle parking standards should encourage car-free developments in the Taunton urban area which would reflect both existing parking standards (which refer to lower parking levels in very sustainable locations) and help to achieve proposed objectives 1 and 6.

**5.7 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?***

No comment.

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

With respect to proposed policy 7b/1, clarity is needed as to whether this will be applied to commercial/non-residential developments. We would not recommend the use of the Somerset Habitat Evaluation Procedure (SHEP) as the method of assessing biodiversity net gain (BNG) instead of the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric 2.0 (or any subsequent version).



The concept of the DEFRA BNG Metric was to create a standardised approach to measure biodiversity across the country. Within DEFRA's consultation document on BNG there is recognition that "several major developers and planning authorities already set specific biodiversity net gain requirements" but that "a standardised requirement for biodiversity net gain, applied equally to all development within scope, could create a level playing-field for developers". Imposing different/local assessment methods which have not been evidenced or justified would not achieve this aim and will lead to uncertainty for developers. Reference should also be made in the policy to biodiversity offsetting/the purchase of biodiversity credits, both of which are specifically addressed in the DEFRA consultation document and draft Environment Bill.

## **5.8 Thriving coastal and rural communities**

***Question 8a: Should we keep or remove settlement boundaries? Or should we have settlement boundaries in areas where there is higher pressure from development i.e. closer to Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe but remove them in more remote areas to provide more options for development?***

We would advocate option ii whereby there are no boundaries but a sensible list of criteria against which proposals can be considered. It may be useful for these criteria to reference/be framed around the Building for Life principles.

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

No comment.

## **5.9 Wellbeing of our residents**

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

With respect to 9a/7, whilst we agree that new development should enhance the Taunton skyline, this should not be achieved by resisting new, taller buildings but instead by encouraging innovative and high-quality design in line with the NPPF.

## **5.10 Policies for our places: Taunton**

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

We support proposed measures i and ii. With regards to proposed measure iii, we refer to our comments in relation to Question 3e which explains why open market housing mix should be market (not policy) led.



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

We support the redevelopment of key regeneration sites within Taunton.

**5.11 Policies for our places: Wellington**

***Question 11a: Do you have any comments on these policy approaches?***

No comment.

**5.12 Policies for our Places: The Coastal Strip**

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

We consider that placemaking policies for Minehead should include the allocation of residential sites for permanent occupiers to maintain the self-containment and sustainability of the settlement as a potential sub-strategic town in line with proposed objectives 2, 3 and 8 in particular.