

From: [Jenny Mitter](#)
To: [Strategy](#)
Subject: Taylor Wimpey - Email 1 of 4 - Representations to Local Plan 2040 - Issues and Options [NLP-DMS.FID664440]
Date: 16 March 2020 15:48:14
Attachments: [image003.gif](#)

EMAIL 1 OF 4

Dear sir / madam,

Please find attached a copy of our representations to the Local Plan Review on behalf of our client Taylor Wimpey. As mentioned in the attached letter, the following supporting documents are also provided in addition to the reps:

- Summary promotional document – email 1 of 4
- Drainage Technical Note – email 1 of 4
- Transport strategy note – email 2 of 4
- Archaeological desk based assessment – email 3 of 4
- Ecological Appraisal – email 3 of 4
- Landscape and visual statement – email 4 of 4
- Utilities – email 4 of 4
- Ground Investigation – email 4 of 4 (appendices can be provided on request due to file size)

Apologies to send the representations via letter – we didn't realise there was a word limit on the online survey until we tried to submit earlier today. We also couldn't find a way to add a table or provide additional documents.

Many thanks,

Jenny

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Somerset West and Taunton Council
Deane House
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SENT BY EMAIL

Date: 16 March 2020

Our ref: 31657/01/AC/JMi/18319273v1

Dear Sir / Madam

Representations to the Local Plan 2040 Issues and Options Document

On behalf of our client Taylor Wimpey, please find below our comments in relation to the Local Plan 2040: Issues and Options document.

Question 1A

Taylor Wimpey does not support the Council's aspiration for 'zero carbon' by 2025 and would question whether this is a realistic, achievable or viable target. It is considered that the Council should track the Government's proposals for national policy given that any acceleration is likely to negatively impact on the delivery of development and suppress growth.

Question 1C

New homes are already very energy efficient with lower heating bills for residents compared to existing older homes. However, TW would support moving towards greater energy efficiency as long as this is consistent with national policy in terms of both standards and timescales.

As set out by the HBF, whilst Government has not enacted its proposed amendments to the Planning & Energy Act 2008 to prevent the Council from stipulating energy performance standards that exceed the Building Regulations, it is the industry view that the Council should comply with the spirit of the Government's intention of setting standards for energy efficiency through the Building Regulations. As a result, the Council should not be setting different targets or policies outside of Building Regulations.

It is therefore considered that the Council's approach as set out under 1c/1 is unnecessary due to the Government's proposals set out in The Future Homes Standard, which are expected to come into effect mid / late 2020.

Question 2A

Whilst the proposed tiers are helpful, concern is raised that this simplistic approach will restrict development in sustainable villages such as Ruishton, as has been the case in the current Local Plan.

The current tiering system appears to only consider services and facilities within the existing Council defined settlement boundary and makes no allowance for the context in which a village itself sits. Using Ruishton as

an example, while the settlement has a number of existing services and facilities within the defined settlement boundary, there are significantly more services and facilities available within a short walking and cycling distance including Ruishton Park & Ride (with bus services into central Taunton every 15 minutes), the Nexus 25 development (including ancillary facilities) and other facilities along the A358 such as the Premier Inn and Toby Carvery.

In addition, Ruishton has extremely close links to Taunton, with residents easily able to walk and cycle into Taunton to use the extensive services and facilities of the sub-regional centre. Indeed, the Hankridge Farm Retail Park, which includes a Sainsbury’s supermarket, shops and food outlets is located circa 1km from the village.

The current tiering system does not allow for a proper examination of the true sustainability of a settlement. In Ruishton’s case, when only looking within the physical settlement boundary, the village scores as a lower order centre. However, in reality its sustainability credentials are far beyond the Tier 4 centres of Williton, Watchet, Wiveliscombe and Bishop’s Lydeard and arguably, due to its proximity to the M5, Taunton town centre, Taunton train station and Nexus 25, the village is more sustainable as a location for housing than Minehead.

On this basis, the current tier system is flawed which is clearly demonstrated when comparing Ruishton to some of the other villages such as Ashbrittle and Combe Florey. These villages are small with limited facilities and located in very rural areas with a high dependency on the private car. The same cannot be said of Ruishton, which, as demonstrated in the table below, has access by sustainable modes to the significant amount of services and facilities located within the village, the immediate surrounding area and Taunton town centre itself.

Figure 1 Walking Distances and Times versus CIHT Guidance

Facility	Distance	Walking Time	CIHT Maximum Guidance
Bus Stops A358	350m	4 mins	400m
Bus Stops Village	500m	6 mins	400m
Park & Ride	500m	6 mins	400m
Primary School	1,100m	13 mins	2,000m
Village Hall	950m	11 mins	1,200m
Village Pub	450m	5 mins	1,200m
Church	500m	6 mins	1,200m
A358 Pub / Hotel	400m	5 mins	1,200m
Nexus25	650m	8 mins	2,000m
Retail Park	1,500m	18 mins	2,000m
Leisure Park	1,800m	21 mins	2,000m
Business Park	1,000m	12 mins	2,000m

The proposed hierarchy requires reassessment and the Council is urged to consider the context of the villages rather than just what is within the existing settlement boundaries as this is far too simplistic and a very arbitrary approach. An additional tier for ‘Sustainably Located Villages / Villages on the M5 corridor’ should be identified so as not to limit growth opportunities in highly sustainable locations such as Ruishton. This new category should sit above the current Tier 4 ‘Rural Centres’ category and should be a focus for some

housing growth. As considered within Topic Paper 2 (page 8), although not as strategically placed as Ruishton, other villages which may also fit this criteria include Creech St Michael, Henlade and Thornfalcon.

With the development of Nexus 25 to the east of the M5, it is also questionable whether Ruishton can still be considered a separate village or whether it should now be considered to form part of the Taunton urban area. This must also be taken into account when assessing the settlement hierarchy.

Question 2C

As set out under Question 2A, concern is raised that the proposed development hierarchy is flawed, with sustainable villages such as Ruishton being overlooked due to the arbitrary assessment process used. This then has a knock on effect regarding housing distribution and thus the current way housing is being distributed cannot be supported.

It is agreed that Taunton should remain the focus for strategic growth. However, as discussed in the Issues and Options Document, it would appear that settlements such as Minehead, Williton and Watchet are struggling to fulfil their housing requirements and therefore sites in more sustainable locations where people want to live and close to major employment nodes should be identified in the new plan. As set under Option 2c, it would seem more logical to direct a higher proportion of housing towards the M5 corridor as opposed to the coast and this approach would be supported.

The current distribution of growth to villages at just 2.4% is likely be too low. Topic Paper 1 indicates development of circa 10-20 units in the villages. However, sustainable villages such as Ruishton with excellent links to both Taunton and the M5, could successfully deliver far in excess of this figure. There needs to be further differentiation between villages, with those such as Ruishton which are sustainable and capable of delivering higher levels of housing, requiring identification and a new tier in the hierarchy.

Section 5.2.2 of the consultation document alludes to the fact that development options in Taunton are becoming more limited due to infrastructure and viability issues. In order to ensure that Taunton remains the key focus for strategic growth, the Authority will need to ensure that sufficient land is available to meet the identified housing requirements with a range of site options.

There are several existing strategic housing allocations in and around Taunton town centre, although in the longer term, development west of the M5 is becoming more limited as a result of significant constraints including flood risk, landscape and ecological concerns. With the development of the Nexus 25 scheme and improvements to M5 Junction 25 (due to be completed in 2021), it is considered that land to the east of the M5 could be released to meet the growing needs of the town, with Ruishton considered a logical and appropriate location for sustainable development. Indeed, given the timescales for the delivery of Nexus, the provision of new housing at Ruishton would provide an attractive option to the new workers drawn into the area and could therefore deliver a very sustainable form of development.

Nexus 25 is currently being developed adjacent to M5 junction 25. It will provide a range of flexible accommodation for research and development, health, education and digital technology alongside high quality office space, light industrial units and warehouses. Road access will be provided following completion of the Somerset County Council's (SCC) Junction 25 improvement scheme which also significantly benefits Ruishton. It is expected that the development will provide in the region of 4,000 jobs and further enhance Taunton's status as a key economic centre.

Ruishton, as the nearest residential area to this major employment hub, is therefore considered a logical, suitable and sustainable location for residential development which will further complement and support this strategic employment allocation. This area needs a complete review as part of the next stage of the Local Plan preparation process.

Question 2D

In terms of objective 2b/2, Taylor Wimpey supports the Council's aim to make more efficient use of land and the recycling of previously developed land.

A submission has been made to the Call for Sites process relating to land at Brookfield Nurseries, Ruishton. Taylor Wimpey is promoting this site for residential development for circa 160 new homes. Part of the site is currently developed and operational as a plant nursery. Therefore the release of this fully contained and partly brownfield site will allow for a much more efficient use of the site and reduce the need to release more sensitive greenfield sites.

Development of this site at Ruishton would also fully support objective 2b/1 as it will deliver development in an area of mixed use, with access by sustainable modes to the significant amount of services and facilities located within the village, the immediate surrounding area and Taunton town centre itself (see the response to Question 2A above).

A copy of the Call for Sites submission is appended to these representations for the Council's consideration.

Question 3A

Paragraph 60 of the NPPF states that *"...strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment..."* following the standard methodology. However, the PPG recognises that the standard methodology for assessing local housing need *"does not attempt to predict the impact that future government policies, changing economic circumstances or other factors might have on demographic behaviour. Therefore, there will be circumstances where it is appropriate to consider whether actual housing need is higher than the standard methodology indicates"* (Ref ID 2a-010-20190220). To this end, it states that the government *"supports ambitious authorities who want to plan for growth."* (Ref ID 2a-010-20190220).

When considering future housing requirements, the PPG is therefore clear that *"the standard methodology uses a formula to identify the minimum number of homes expected to be planned for"* (Ref ID 2a-002-20190220; Lichfields' emphasis) and that LPAs are at liberty to apply a higher housing requirement figure if they consider this to be appropriate:

"...Circumstances where this may be appropriate include, but are not limited to situations where increases in housing need are likely to exceed past trends because of:

- *Growth strategies for the area that are likely to be deliverable...;*
- *Strategic infrastructure improvements that are likely to drive an increase in the homes needed locally; or*
- *An authority agreeing to take on unmet need from neighbouring authorities..."* (Ref ID 2a-010-20190220; Lichfields' emphasis)

Paragraph 35 of the NPPF requires local plans to be *"positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs"*. These needs will relate to employment as well as housing. Paragraph 81c goes on to consider the issue of alignment of housing and employment growth, stating that planning policies should *"seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing..."*

The implication is that the relevant national policy is very clear in encouraging local authorities to adopt a housing requirement figure that exceeds the LHN baseline. This is important for the purposes of ensuring that local growth aspirations are achieved and that Local Plans are internally consistent. At a national scale,

it is also essential as achieving the government's target of 300,000dpa nationally, is dependent on authorities planning above their LHN figures (which nationally sum to c.273,000dpa).

One of the key influences on any uplift to the LHN figure has been the aspiration of ensuring alignment between employment and housing growth. This is an important NPPF aspiration which is critical to ensuring balanced growth. On this basis, it is considered that SW&T must seek to plan above the proposed minimum LHN figure.

The LHN of 702 dwelling per annum (dpa) is 29.5% lower than the adopted local plan requirement of 995dpa (850dpa in the Taunton Deane Core Strategy and 145dpa in the West Somerset Local Plan). Further, between 2013/14 and 2017/18, Somerset West and Taunton delivered circa 924 dpa. Therefore, housing requirement of 702 dpa would represent a 24% reduction when compared to past delivery. Applying the standard method figure as the housing requirement would therefore only serve to depress growth prospects and would be contrary to the NPPF and PPG requirements.

The Issues and Options document discusses the LEP's ambitions to double the size of the economy of the sub-region over the next 20 years. In addition, the Nexus 25 development is expected to support in the region of 4,000 jobs and Taunton has received Garden Town status. As such, to rely solely on the LHN would undermine the Council's stated aspirations regarding the future of the area, including the Garden Town status of Taunton, and would undermine past levels of housing delivery and job growth. It is therefore strongly recommended that Somerset West and Taunton Council pursue a higher housing figure than the minimum prescribed by the standard method given the significant implications this would have on the emerging Local Plan strategy.

Question 3B

The potential requirement for a proportion of development sites to provide an area for residential Traveller pitches is not supported. It is considered that such a policy would significantly impact on the viability of development schemes and it must be accepted that not all sites are going to be suitable for Traveller provision. It is also commented that such a blanket policy would likely lead to the over provision of pitches at the expense of the delivery of new open market and affordable homes. This requirement is unviable, not appropriate and cannot be supported.

Question 3C

The reference to Lifetime Homes in Policy Approach 3c is out of date and should be deleted.

All new homes are built to Building Regulation Part M Category 1 (M4(1)) standards, which include level approach routes, accessible front door thresholds, wider internal doorway and corridor widths, switches and sockets at accessible heights and downstairs toilet facilities usable by wheelchair users. These standards are not usually available in the older existing housing stock and benefit less able-bodied occupants. M4(1) standards are likely to be suitable for most residents. Option 3c(i) is therefore supported.

3c(ii) requires a proportion of dwellings to meet the optional standards for M4(2) and M4(3). This should only be done in accordance with the 2019 NPPF (para 127f & Footnote 46) and the NPPG. Footnote 46 states *"that planning policies for housing should make use of the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing where this would address an identified need for such properties"*. As set out in the 2019 NPPF, all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up to date evidence which should be adequate, proportionate and focussed tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned (para 31). The NPPG sets out the evidence necessary to justify a policy requirement for M4(2) and M4(3) standards. The Council should apply the criteria set out in the NPPG (ID 56-005-20150327 to 56-011-

20150327) to ensure that an appropriate evidence base is available to support any proposed policy requirements.

The optional standards should only be introduced on a “need to have” rather than a “nice to have” basis. Need is generally defined as “*requiring something because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable*”. If the Government had intended that evidence of an ageing population alone justified adoption of optional standards then such standards would have been incorporated as mandatory in the Building Regulations, which is not the case.

The NPPG sets out that evidence should include identification of:

- the likely future need;
- the size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed;
- the accessibility and adaptability of the existing stock;
- variations in needs across different housing tenures; and
- viability.

Detailed information on the accessibility and adaptability of the existing housing stock, the size, location, type and quality of dwellings needed and variations in needs across different housing tenures in the District should be incorporated into the Council’s supporting evidence.

Many older people already live in the District. Many will not move from their current home but will make adaptations as required to meet their needs, some will choose to move to another dwelling in the existing stock rather than a new build property and some will want to live in specialist older person housing. The existing housing stock is considerably larger than the new build sector so adapting the existing stock is likely to form part of the solution.

It is also important to note that not all health problems affect a household’s housing needs therefore not all health problems require adaptations to homes.

The requirement for a proportion of new dwellings to be built to optional standards for M4(2) and M4(3) may result in the under-occupancy of new family homes by older people or individuals, which runs at odds with the aim of making the best use of the housing stock.

The Council’s Policy Approach should take into account site specific factors such as vulnerability to flooding, site topography and other circumstances, which make a site unsuitable for M4(2) and M4(3) compliant dwellings (NPPG ID: 56-008-20150327).

The Council is also reminded that the requirement for M4(3) should only be required for dwellings over which the Council has housing nomination rights as set out in the NPPG (ID 56-008-20150327).

The Council’s Viability testing should take full account of additional costs. In September 2014, the Government’s Housing Standards Review included cost estimates by EC Harris, which were £15,691 per apartment and £26,816 per house for M4(3). The Council’s own viability testing should include such costs plus inflationary increases since 2014. M4(2) and M4(3) compliant dwellings are larger than NDSS (see DCLG Housing Standards Review Illustrative Technical Standards Developed by the Working Groups August 2013) therefore larger sizes should be used when calculating additional build costs.

Question 3D

Whilst it is accepted that new development should contribute to achieving an appropriate mix of housing, the potential requirement for all housing development sites to include a proportion of plots for self-build is not supported.

Councils have a legal obligation to grant sufficient planning permissions to meet the demand for self and custom build properties. However, passing this responsibility on to developers is not supported as it will not guarantee that the Council's obligation to ensure enough self and custom build properties can be met. It cannot be known what level of provision will be achieved on schemes by market housing developers; and therefore, the Council cannot rely on these sites as their supply for self-build and custom-build housing.

Any requirement for self-build plots should be supported by robust evidence from the Council's custom and self-build register. The Council has not provided any clear evidence of demand and therefore it is not possible to ascertain what level of demand there is for self-build plots in SW&T or the parts of the authority area where this demand is focussed. It is also not clear whether there would be any mechanism to offset this provision against affordable housing contributions, other s106 contributions, CIL etc.

It is recommended that the Council identify standalone sites which are specifically allocated to meet the local demand for self and custom build dwellings.

Question 3E

Point 3e/4 implies that housing mix will be prescribed to reflect need in the area. It is not clear whether this is referring to private market housing as well as affordable. Any prescription of private market housing sizes would not be supported as it is considered that this should be left to the market to determine.

Taylor Wimpey recognises the importance of providing an appropriate housing mix that meets the local requirement, and always seeks to provide a range of home sizes when delivering new development. However, a policy (or other mechanism) which seeks to be overly prescriptive would not be supported as such strict guidance may not adequately reflect likely market demand, resulting in it being overly restrictive in terms of market choice and potentially impactful on viability. Such a policy would also be overly onerous and would not provide opportunity to reflect the character and design of individual sites or the local area.

Point 3e/6 makes reference to a requirement for dwellings to meet Government space standards. The Government's decision to make these standards optional suggests that they do not expect all properties to be built in accordance with them. If the standards are to be applied, the Practice Guidance sets out a clear set of criteria local planning authorities should address in order to justify them, these being:

- need – evidence should be provided on the size and type of dwellings currently being built in the area, to ensure the impacts of adopting space standards can be properly assessed, for example, to consider any potential impact on meeting demand for starter homes.
- viability – the impact of adopting the space standard should be considered as part of a plan's viability assessment with account taken of the impact of potentially larger dwellings on land supply. Local planning authorities will also need to consider impacts on affordability where a space standard is to be adopted.
- timing – there may need to be a reasonable transitional period following adoption of a new policy on space standards to enable developers to factor the cost of space standards into future land acquisitions.

It is thus considered that should SW&T pursue the requirement for Nationally Described Space Standards through the Local Plan Review, this needs to be fully evidenced and justified.

Question 4A

The Issues and Options document discusses the LEP's ambitions to double the size of the economy of the sub-region over the next 20 years. In addition, the Nexus 25 development is expected to support in the region of 4,000 jobs and Taunton has received Garden Town status. As such, to rely solely on the LHN would undermine the Council's stated aspirations regarding the future of the area, including the Garden Town status of Taunton, and would undermine past levels of housing delivery and job growth.

It is therefore strongly recommended that Somerset West and Taunton Council must align with the LEP's ambitions (given that the Council is a partner) and seek to support higher levels of job growth, supported by the required level of housing.

Question 5A

The new Local Plan must be clear on what contributions are expected from developers and the scale of obligations must not threaten the viability of the plan and must be sufficiently viability tested.

Viability assessment should not compromise sustainable development but should be used to ensure that policies are realistic, and that the total cumulative cost of all relevant policies will not undermine deliverability of the plan. It is also important for the Council to provide clarity between CIL and S106 requirements, given the recent changes to the CIL regulations and specifically the abolition of the Regulation 123 list.

The question regarding priorities is difficult to answer. Planning contributions are required to mitigate the actual impacts of development and must meet the statutory tests as listed under regulation 122 of the CIL regulations i.e.

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- directly related to the development; and
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

On this basis, the impacts of each individual site need to be established and a balance then needs to be struck.

Question 6A

Locating development in sustainable locations such as Ruishton, where residents are able to cycle and walk to the main centre of Taunton and its train station will likely be the most effective way of promoting non-car based travel.

As set out within the Call for Sites submission for Land at Brookfield Nurseries, Ruishton, this site provides opportunity to create a predominantly traffic free cycle and walking route through the site towards Taunton.

In addition, the site is located a circa 600m walk from the Nexus 25 development, with enhanced pedestrian facilities being provided as part of the Junction 25 works.

Question 8A

No preference is made to the use of settlement boundaries or otherwise. That said, as discussed under Question 2A, significant concern is raised regarding the proposed settlement hierarchy.

It is noted that Topic Paper 2 regarding settlement boundaries recognises the merits of Ruishton as being closer to jobs and services at Taunton, closer to the M5 and closer to the railway and thus a desirable location

for housing development. However, these merits are not reflected in the settlement hierarchy which seeks to designate Ruishton as a village and limit options for growth. This clear disparity requires significant review through further assessment of the settlement's role and function.

The Council is urged to release land for housing in Ruishton to complement the strategic allocations which are currently being developed in the town to the west of the M5. Housing delivery is optimised where a wide mix of sites is provided, therefore strategic sites should be balanced by a range of smaller non-strategic sites. The provision of housing development in this location will also support the Nexus 25 employment site and promote sustainable travel opportunities, particularly given the proximity of the Ruishton Park & Ride.

Taylor Wimpey's site known as Land at Brookfield Nurseries in Ruishton is considered a sustainable and appropriate location for development.

Question 9A

It is noted that objective 9a/1 requires the need for Health Impact Assessments to be submitted in support of larger developments. No threshold is provided although it is considered that if this requirement is pursued, it should only be for the largest strategic development sites where there is genuine concern regarding the potential impact on health and not simply a blanket requirement. The health impacts of non-strategic developments are likely to be minimal and can be dealt with via a planning application in the normal way, with mitigation through S106/CIL payments where these are justified.

Objective 9a/2 refers to the need for design codes for 'key' development sites. This requirement has the potential to be very onerous and could potentially delay the delivery of housing. These documents should only be required for very large strategic sites where there are multiple phases of development being progressed by different housebuilders.

Land at Brookfield Nurseries, Ruishton

Taylor Wimpey has an interest in the site known as 'land at Brookfield Nurseries' and has submitted information under the Call for Sites process demonstrating the suitability of the land for circa 160 dwellings

As part of the Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan Review 2040, the Council will need to consider options to meet future housing requirements. It is therefore requested that this site be considered for allocation as part of the plan review.

In support of this conclusion and to assist the Council in its assessment of the site, a number of documents are provided which clearly evidence the sustainability of the site and demonstrate that it is suitable, available and deliverable for development. The supporting documents hereby provided are:

- Summary promotional document;
- Transport strategy note
- Archaeological desk based assessment
- Ecological Appraisal
- Landscape and visual statement
- Ground Investigation
- Utilities
- Drainage Technical Note.



We trust that these comments will be given due consideration. Please contact me should you require any further detail or clarifications.

Yours faithfully



Jenny Mitter
Associate Director