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The first three chapters of the LTP identified the importance of a number of wider quality of life issues in Somerset, including sustainable communities, environmental issues such as climate change; biodiversity; landscape and historic environment, and public health. This chapter sets out our approach to these issues.

8.1 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES - TRANSPORT & NEW DEVELOPMENT

8.1.1 Transport and New Development

Delivering the following LTP2 Objectives:

- Improve safety for all who travel;
- Reduce social exclusion and improved access to everyday facilities;
- Reduce growth in congestion and pollution and improve health; and
- Support sustainable economic growth in appropriate locations.

One of the most effective ways we can tackle problems of congestion, pollution, safety and accessibility is to work closely with our District Council partners in planning the location of new development through Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). We are already starting to use our new Accession accessibility mapping tools to help Taunton Deane Borough Council make locational decisions as they prepare their LDF, and we will shortly be extending the use of these tools within the other Districts.

Similarly we can also tackle these problems by working closely with developers on the likely impacts of proposed planning applications. In this way we can ensure that existing problems are addressed and new problems are not created.

We have therefore set out the following requirements, which should be considered in the preparation of LDFs and proposals for new development.

All development proposals should be expected to contribute positively to improving access to basic services, and managing the demand for transport by bringing about a shift towards more trips being made in the most environmentally, socially and economically appropriate way. To be acceptable, proposals for development should be compatible with the existing transport infrastructure, or if not, make provision for improvements to infrastructure to enable development to proceed.

To enable the development to be satisfactorily accommodated proposals should:

- Provide access for pedestrians, people with mobility difficulties, cyclists and public transport;
- provide safe access to roads of adequate standard within the route hierarchy, but not derive access directly from a National Primary or County Route⁽ⁱ⁾ ;

i The route hierarchy is currently defined in the adopted structure plan review however further work is required to rationalise the route hierarchy nomenclature with the recently published regional freight map route hierarchy



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- in the case of development which will generate significant freight traffic, be located close to rail facilities and/or National Primary Routes or suitable County Routes subject to satisfying other planning policy requirements; and
- Construct assets in accordance with the County's emerging asset management plan.

Willingness to pay for additions to the highway network should not favour development that is not of the right type in the right place according to the overall Spatial Strategy.

The following issues will need to be considered for all planning proposals, and a detailed transport assessment will be required for proposals of a significant scale.

Walking and Cycling

Facilities for pedestrians and cyclists should be improved by maintaining and extending the footpath and cycle network, particularly between residential areas and basic services such as health, education, employment and shops, and by ensuring that street design and improvements to the highway provide for safe and convenient use. New development should achieve good connections into the existing cycling and pedestrian networks, and add to the facilities available as identified in the LTP, LDFs and where other appropriate opportunities arise. Cycle parking facilities should be provided, following the standards set out in the countywide parking strategy.

Public Transport

Appropriate infrastructure should be provided to ensure there is suitable access to public transport services and if necessary financial contributions will be required to ensure infrastructure and service frequency are acceptable. With residential developments, developers will be expected to provide as a minimum £400 per dwelling in the form of a redeemable voucher against the cost of a season ticket. Developers will also be expected to fund any necessary infrastructure and contribute towards the cost of materials to be distributed with new houses in the form of a travel plan kit. Retail and employment development areas will be expected to contribute to the overall travel plan for the community in which they are situated and/or serve.

Travel Plans

All significant development proposals will be required to submit a travel plan with their planning application. We currently use criteria set out in national planning policy guidance (PPG13) to determine when travel plans should be submitted, and we are developing our own supplementary planning guidance to set out our travel plan requirements locally.

Access and Parking

- Developments which would generate significant transport movements should be located where provision may be made for access by walking, cycling and public transport;
- As set out in the countywide Parking Strategy, the level of parking provision in settlements should reflect their functions, the potential for the use of alternatives to the private car and the need to prevent harmful competitive provision of parking;
- The level of car parking provision associated with new development should be minimised having regard to the need for access and the availability of alternatives to the private car and the availability of alternative public parking, using the maximum parking standards and appropriate reductions set out in the countywide parking strategy. (Table 8.1 shows the agreed appropriate reductions to parking requirements, which will be based on the location and accessibility of the proposed development);

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- Parking facilities for cycles and powered-two-wheelers should be provided following the standards set out in the countywide parking strategy;
- Car clubs will be encouraged as part of new developments, particularly in Taunton, and any proposals should form part of one co-ordinated operation for the area.

Once the acceptability of a particular development type at a proposed site has been determined on wider planning grounds, the following locational hierarchy is used to assess the appropriate reduction in parking spaces that should be considered. Site accessibility is scored by the case officer according to the walking, cycling, bus and public car parking facilities, which will be available.

Table 8.1 Proposed Reductions in Maximum Parking Standards

Percent reductions to be applied to maximum parking standards		Taunton		Yeovil, Bridgwater		Other Towns & Suburban Areas	Elsewhere
		Town Centre	Edge of Centre	Town Centre	Edge of Centre		
Accessibility	High (6-8)	>50%	30-50%	30-50%	20-30%	20-30%	10-20%
	Medium (4-5)	30-50%	20-30%	20-30%	10-20%	10-20%	10-20%
	Low (0-3)	n/a	10-20%	n/a	0-10%	0-10%	0-10%

The current measure of accessibility is a simple scoring process set out in the Parking Strategy document. In the near future we hope to use our 'Accession' accessibility model to provide quantifiable accessibility information to help set appropriate parking standards.

This system should be used with a certain degree of flexibility. It will be used to advise on the majority of planning applications although there will occasionally be exemptions. Each case must be considered on its own merits and this does not preclude the use of professional judgement by the case officer.

District Councils currently operate a variety of approaches to setting parking standards which are set out in their Local Plans. We will use the Countywide Parking Strategy as a basis to work closely with the District Councils to bring more consistency of approach across the County as Local Development Frameworks are prepared.

Rail Operation

Rail operations should be improved by:

- identifying and protecting development sites, particularly for high trip generating activities including employment purposes, adjacent to or well related to the rail network;
- strictly controlling development which would prejudice the future use or expansion of the rail network;
- identifying and promoting opportunities to build or reopen stations and freight terminals; and
- influencing the improvement of rail services in order to support the implementation of the Spatial Strategy.

Roadside Facilities

Provision should be made for roadside facilities on National Primary Routes where they are not in conflict with other planning policies.

Ports and Wharves

Existing port and wharf facilities should be safeguarded from development that would prejudice their potential in the transport network. Any proposal for new facilities should be within or related to settlements.



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Major Road Schemes

The following development-funded or part development-funded major road schemes are currently identified in adopted Local Plans (not including schemes proposed solely to access new developments):

- Bridgwater Colley Lane Southern Access Road (Policy TM2b);
- Taunton 'Third Way' (Policy T2(A));
- Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR) (Policy T3(A));
- B3227 Norton Fitzwarren Southern Relief Road (Policy T4(J));
- A3259 Monkton Heathfield Eastern and Western Relief Roads (Policy T8(L));
- A358 Chard Distributor Road (Policy KS/CHAR/1); and
- A30 to A356 Crewkerne East (Policy KS/CREW/1).

The following road schemes being considered in the context of new development through LDFs:

- B3187 Wellington Relief Road; and
- Taunton Northern Outer Distributor Road.

Asset Creation

When considering scheme design, even at conceptual stages, the LTP strategies should be taken into account. We have checks in place to ensure that schemes do deliver benefits to the community in accordance with our LTP requirements. Designers will need to consult the Transport Asset Management Plan to ensure that whole life costs are minimised, ensuring that ongoing maintenance needs will be taken into account at design stage. In this way sustainable asset management practices will be developed in the County. This should include new developers' scheme proposals and District Council works.

Planning-gain Supplement

The current process of obtaining transport improvements related to new development is through the negotiation of 'Section 106' agreements, a legal agreement between the developer and the local authorities. This results in approximately £5m of transport improvements and funding contributions per year in Somerset which plays a significant role in helping deliver the objectives of the LTP.

The Government is currently consulting on proposals to amend this system by introducing a 'planning-gain supplement' which would involve the Government capturing a proportion of the land-value increase created by the planning process, and returning a proportion of the resulting revenue to local authorities. The details of how this would work in terms of the proportions taken and how sufficient funding would be returned to the local authority have yet to be determined.

Our requirements for transport and new development, set out above, will be reviewed along with any implementation of a new planning-gain supplement or similar process. In the mean-time we will continue to use planning gain to help deliver the national shared priorities for transport.



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8.1.2 Tourism

Due to Somerset's proximity to the coast, and its unique landscape and heritage, it has naturally become host to a number of popular tourist destinations including Exmoor National Park, Minehead including Butlins, Burham-on-Sea, Cheddar Gorge, Wells and Clarke's Village retail complex in Street. There is a need to ensure that the environmental and congestion impacts of tourism in these areas is managed, and that there is appropriate transport in place to serve tourists, residents and employees during the high and low tourist seasons.

Through the process of accessibility planning we and our partners will continue to:

- Ensure appropriate access is provided to all local economies and employment areas;
- Improve the choice of transport available to the visitor and offer alternatives to the private car;
- Improve information provision to cater for the needs of tourists and Somerset residents; and
- Promote more sustainable access to tourist areas.

8.2 ENVIRONMENT

LTP2 Objective:

Protect and enhance the built and natural environment:

- Seeking opportunities to increase species and habitat diversity through transport scheme implementation;
- Preserving and enhancing the character of the countryside; and
- Preserving and enhancing heritage centres and areas of historic interest.

8.2.1 Climate Change

Under the terms of the Kyoto Conference and in a joint agreement with EC member states, the Government agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5% of 1990 levels by 2008-2012 and to reduce CO₂ emissions by 20% of 1990 levels by 2010. Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10) states that local authorities, energy suppliers and other agencies should support and encourage the region to meet these national targets.

Our congestion strategy focuses on the need to manage the increasing levels of congestion in Somerset's urban areas, which in turn will help to reduce the growth of carbon emissions. However, these policies are solely aimed at reducing traffic growth rather than absolute traffic levels. Therefore the LTP proposals on their own are unlikely to generate an actual reduction in carbon emissions.

Somerset Biofuel Project

Biofuels, however, do have a key role to play in a low carbon economy with the potential to deliver significant savings in greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector. We are working with a variety of partners and the Government to implement an EU funded Biofuel project in Somerset within the BioEthanol for Sustainable Transport (BEST) programme coordinated by Stockholm City Council.



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The Somerset project draws on Swedish experience in successful establishment of regional bioethanol distribution networks and the market tested introduction of bioethanol vehicles. Somerset is at the leading edge of this technology in the UK.

As the UK coordinating partner in this venture, we are proud to have successfully brought the first manufactured bioethanol powered car in Europe to Somerset. Bioethanol is currently imported but this will change in 2007 when the bioethanol production plant at Henstridge, Somerset, is expected to be fully operational.

The Somerset Biofuel project will:

- Establish a local fuel distribution network of five forecourt pumps for the supply of E85, a 85% (V/V) ethanol: petrol mixture during 2006;
- Blending, storage and distribution of E85 fuel will be managed for the Project by Wessex Biofuels, a subsidiary company of Wessex Grain who are developing simultaneous proposals for a bioethanol production plant in Somerset using grain grown in the South West region;
- Ford Motor Company will make available the Ford Focus Flexible Fuelled Vehicle (FFV), engineered to run on any mixture from pure petrol up to 85% ethanol content;
- Somerset County Council, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Wessex Water and Wessex Grain will kick start a promotion campaign to introduce the FFV by using the cars in their respective vehicle fleets, initially about 40 vehicles in 2006 rising to at least 200 vehicles within 18 months;
- A key deliverable from the project will be to establish monitoring and accreditation procedures for the practical determination of carbon emissions offset from production and utilisation of bioethanol; and
- A mechanism will be outlined for fuel price support for a range of low carbon transport fuels based on carbon emissions offset achieved.

Our Natural Energy Strategy and Climate Change Strategy

We are developing a Natural Energy Strategy including an energy review and development of a Climate Change Strategy which will be complete in 2007. The Climate Change Strategy will focus on how we need to adapt to climate change and we ran an initial conference to obtain stakeholder views on this in 2005. This work will inform the development of our transport plans and programmes once complete.

We already have a renewable energy strategy as part of our plans to reduce the impact of our operations on global climate change. The aims of our renewable energy strategy are:

- Support and encourage the installation of 75MW of new renewable electricity generating capacity, utilising a range of renewable energy resources and technologies, in Somerset by 2010;
- Integrate appropriate renewable energy technologies within the property and transport infrastructure managed by Somerset County Council (e.g. solar panels);
- Achieve these objectives within existing budgets by the promotion and utilisation of appropriate, proven and commercially viable technologies;
- Create a 'renewables friendly' culture to encourage the location of pre-commercial and developing renewable energy technologies within the County; and
- Support and encourage the development and implementation of renewable heat and transport energy technologies in Somerset.

We are also currently identifying more energy efficient methods of delivering street lighting and traffic signals as part of the renewal of our energy contracts for this infrastructure.



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8.2.2 Biodiversity

In order to preserve Somerset's biodiversity, we have developed a Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan (SBAP) that will be implemented throughout the LTP2 period. This is a guide by which biodiversity is taken into account in the planning and carrying out of all maintenance operations on county roads, new highways schemes and the rights of way network in Somerset. It is also an important part of our Highway Management Network Plan (HNMP) and will be included in the Asset Management plan as it could affect the programme of works and limit the timing to coincide with seasonal requirements or preparatory work. One of our Elected Members is specifically charged with championing biodiversity across the work of the Council.

The objectives of the Action Plan are as follows:

- Set out practical and realistic activities so that Somerset Highways' contribution to biodiversity can be maximised in carrying out our role;
- Raise awareness and understanding of the importance of biodiversity among our staff and contractors and the general public; and
- Provide specific habitat and species action plans that are relevant to our work and that support local, regional and national biodiversity objectives.

8.2.3 Landscape

The vision and priorities set out in the early chapters of the LTP made it clear that one of our key aims is to celebrate and protect our unique natural environment. In Somerset there is a threat that the countryside can become urbanised through a proliferation of signs and by insensitive use of kerbs, road markings or street furniture. A steady rise in rural traffic levels also has an impact on landscape character and on non-motorised users. These impacts are often small but are cumulative in nature so we will ensure that all new developments are in keeping with the surrounding environment where possible.

The LTP aims to increase public access to the countryside through the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RowIP), and this could potentially lead increased damage such as erosion of paths and trails. The RowIP will set out how we can manage this increased access to protect the countryside whilst also realising potential economic benefits.

Alternative modes of transport will be promoted to local tourist attractions. Impacts on landscape character must therefore be a consideration in the preparation of schemes, such as new cycle/ multi-use paths, and local safety scheme in order to minimise the degradation and integrate them into local surroundings. This may often involve planting schemes with native species and or design that fits in with the local character of the built environment. The Somerset Highways Biodiversity Action Plan will support this process. The County Council will be preparing a Landscape Strategy during the period of LTP2, which will also aid implementation of schemes.

8.2.4 Historic Environment

Another of our key aims is to celebrate our cultural heritage. Congestion and any new transport infrastructure have the potential to cause direct damage to our unique historic environment due to vehicle collisions, vibration and poor air quality. To combat these potential impacts English Heritage has developed a vision for a long-term transport policy concentrating on reducing impacts on the historic environment. Our LTP and particularly our approach to route management and management of heavy goods traffic in our historic villages clearly helps deliver this vision, and we will ensure our schemes are designed to be visually sympathetic to their surroundings.

The English Heritage vision for a long-term transport policy includes:



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- Encouraging a switch to less damaging forms of transport and promoting planning policies that help to reduce the need to travel;
- Seeking imaginative solutions to transport problems;
- Ensuring that transport appraisals properly assess the impacts on the historic environment to an appropriate level of detail;
- Taking account of the wider historic environment;
- Continuing to promote sympathetic design and push hard for proposals that recognise local and regional distinctiveness; and
- Encouraging innovative transport management strategies.

8.3 PUBLIC HEALTH

Delivering the following LTP2 Objectives:

- Reducing traffic accidents with a particular emphasis on killed and seriously injured casualties and rural main roads;
- Improving access to work, learning, healthcare, food-shops and other services;
- Facilitating the better co-ordination of activities of other authorities to improve accessibility of services;
- Influencing travel behaviour;
- Widening travel choice;

As discussed in the Challenges, Issues and Opportunities, the LTP plays a key role in helping improve public health in Somerset, particularly through:

- Promotion of physical activity by walking and cycling to help reduce the risk of lifestyle related health problems;
- Improving local air quality to reduce the risk of respiratory health problems;
- Improving access to healthcare services; and
- Reducing road casualties.

Our proposals for tackling these issues are set out in the Chapters Congestion and Air Pollution, Improving Accessibility, and Safety.

Two key processes for working jointly on health improvement are:

- Local Area Agreement (LAA), discussed in Chapter 1, where we are working closely with the health service to deliver LAA objectives and targets for improving physical activity; and
- Accessibility planning, discussed in Chapter 5, where we are working closely with the health service and others to improve access to healthcare.

We currently have a number of well-developed initiatives for improving the health of our workforce and our customers:



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Healthy Schools Initiatives

Our Healthy Schools Co-ordinator works closely with all our schools to help them obtain the National Healthy Schools Status (NHSS), which replaces our own Somerset Health Promoting School and College award that has been running since 1993. By December 2006, 50% of schools are to have achieved the new NHSS with 100% of schools to be engaged by 2009. Within this status there are many criteria of which some relate to transport issues, significantly, each school developing a travel plan.

Criterion 3.7 of the NHSS states that each school will need to provide evidence that it "encourages pupils, parents/carers and staff to walk or cycle to school under safe conditions, utilising the school travel plan - where it exists".

In Somerset it has been agreed that to receive Healthy Schools accreditation schools must have an approved Travel Plan in place.

The kind of evidence that schools may provide includes:

- Use has been made of the Safer Routes to School and School Travel Plan staff;
- Newsletter articles/letters and other material aimed at increasing parental participation;
- Pupils can describe how they have been encouraged to walk or cycle to school; and
- The school can show the use it has made of School Travel Plans (STP) surveys.

School Travel Plan Team and Road Safety Education Training and Publicity

It is important to work in partnership to encourage travel to school by sustainable modes (primarily walking and cycling) in safety. When looking to health, the combined approach is best summed up as "Putting in place the infrastructure, training and support that enables parents and pupils to take the healthy option for the journey to and from school".

Somerset County Council Healthy Active Workplace

We have successfully bid for £149k from Sport England, which is being match funded by partners, to implement a three year project aiming to encourage the County Council's 17,000 employees to make physical activity an integral part of their work lives. This will also raise awareness of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle for their lives outside of work.

Specific work to encourage the use of active transport through walking and cycling will be a prominent feature of some of the marketing campaigns that are planned. It is hoped that driving to meetings of less than 2 miles within the working day can also be reduced as more use is made of the cycle and walk ways across the county. The project also hopes to have a positive impact on changing the way in which people travel to work through better promotion of alternative active transport methods particularly outside the county town of Taunton.

This is being undertaken in partnership with Somerset's Primary Care Trusts, Learning & Skills Council, training consultancies, marketing consultancies and other interest groups and agencies.