

THE VISION, STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC POLICIES

TOWARDS A VISION FOR SOMERSET AND EXMOOR.

3.1 The trends identified in **Chapter 2: Key Trends and Sustainable Development**, relating to the environment, economy and population in Somerset and Exmoor have all influenced land use. Should these trends continue, they are expected to create greater pressures on the environment and resources within the plan area. It is therefore necessary to set out a vision of what the Joint Structure Plan seeks to achieve. This could involve the effective stewardship of the resources of the county for future generations.

3.2 A vision for Somerset and Exmoor will reflect what has happened in the past, current trends and how the future may be shaped to respond to these influences. It should incorporate the views of the residents of Somerset and Exmoor and those organisations having an interest in these areas. Public views have been expressed through the consultation process associated with the development of the Joint Structure Plan Review. These were generally supportive of the aims and strategy of the Plan. In addition to public comments, the vision for the Joint Structure Plan needs to address the three key themes of:

- economic prosperity and diversity;
- conserving the environment and resources;
- enabling access by Somerset and Exmoor residents to facilities and services.

3.3 Taking the trends, public responses and these themes into account, the vision of the Joint Structure Plan for sustainable development for Somerset and Exmoor may be defined by these principles:

- To integrate land use and transport planning and to minimise the need to travel by private car,
- To maintain the rural character of Somerset and Exmoor,
- To safeguard and enhance the natural and built environment,
- To accommodate necessary development in the most sustainable way,
- To maintain a diverse and prosperous economy,
- To maintain access to a wide range of services and facilities,
- To enable efficient use to be made of resources.

3.4 These principles form the basis of the aims adopted for the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan for the plan area which are as follows:

- to conserve and enhance the plan area's wide variety of natural and built environments and develop a more sustainable use of Somerset and Exmoor's resources.
- to secure a diverse and prosperous economy and a variety of jobs available to residents in Somerset and Exmoor.
- to promote a land use pattern and transport system which allows access to a wide range of opportunities, facilities and services for the residents of Somerset and Exmoor.

3.5 The development plan system is the vehicle by which the future land use and transport pattern of the county will be shaped. The guiding principles and the aims of the Plan provide a context for handling the key issues identified in **Chapter 2**. They inform the strategy, which aims to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development and is related to the economic and social needs of the people of Somerset and Exmoor.

THE STRATEGY

3.6 At the Consultation Draft stage of the Joint Structure Plan Review process, three strategic options were identified and what these would imply in terms of the distribution of future development. Briefly, the first option, a continuation of the strategy of the Somerset Structure Plan: Alteration No.2, sought to maintain the existing broad relationships between towns and rural areas; the second was a dispersed approach, which placed great emphasis on development in the rural areas of the county; and the third approach was characterised by the phrase 'focused development' that enhanced the role of the towns in terms of the preferred location for future development. This latter strategic option was considered the principle means, in land use terms, of delivering a more sustainable pattern of development for the Somerset and Exmoor area and closely conformed with the aims of the Plan.3.7 The options were assessed in the Sustainability Appraisal, that was prepared at the Deposit Draft stage of the plan process. The focused development strategy provides significant advantages over other options on many of the appraisal criteria, particularly in terms of transport and resource use, which are at the core of government policy on sustainable development. The aims of the strategy are in close conformity with the aims and development framework of RPG 10: Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (1994), and PPG 13: Transport (1994).

THE PREFERRED STRATEGY

3.8 The Joint Structure Planning Authorities consider that the key elements of the Joint Structure Plan strategy for the development of towns and rural areas should be to;

- focus a higher proportion of development in the towns;
- provide for development well related to existing urban areas and to public transport facilities;
- strictly control development in the countryside, outside settlements, with the aim of protecting the wide range of environmental assets found in Somerset and Exmoor;
- emphasise the key role of established centres, particularly town centres, as locations for shopping and other purposes;
- permit some development in rural settlements to enable diversification of the rural economy and to permit local needs housing; and
- encourage the evolution of a balanced and integrated transport system which emphasises alternatives to the private car, where practical.

3.9 Therefore, in summary, the aim of the strategy is to conserve the environment of the plan area by focusing development on the larger settlements, identified in the strategic policy STR 2: Towns. In terms of the distribution of development, the strategy seeks to achieve a closer relationship between areas of economic expansion and the allocation of housing. Two important considerations arise from this approach involving:

- the relationship between urban and rural areas; and
- the relationship between and within towns and districts.

These considerations have influenced the allocation of housing and employment land to districts.

3.10 The justification for the strategy rests on three main strands - resources, economy and accessibility.

RESOURCES

3.11 The size of each settlement generally reflects its economic importance to the locality it serves. Larger settlements have attracted investment in their infrastructure, services and the range of facilities that they provide for their rural hinterlands. They have, therefore, received resources to develop their roles. To illustrate the importance of towns, about 70% of employment is within the fifteen settlements defined in Policy STR 2: Towns, however they accommodate only about 56% of the population. There is therefore a significant employment imbalance between the towns and rural areas in the plan area, even allowing for the different age structures in each. This imbalance leads to high levels of daily commuting into the towns from the surrounding rural areas. The strategy seeks to build on past investment and to facilitate a closer relationship, in the future, between home and workplace.

3.12 Commuting to the towns usually occurs by car, as do most journeys within rural Somerset and Exmoor. Data from the Census of Population 1991, shows that car ownership in rural areas is higher, average journey lengths longer and that about 75% of journeys to work are by car. By contrast, the towns offer greater opportunity for more sustainable travel modes, such as walking, cycling and public transport. As part of the overall approach, the Somerset County Council and the Exmoor National Park Authority are developing strategies, for managing transport in identified settlements, which place emphasis on alternatives to the car.

3.13 The imbalances, described above, are not confined to the urban/rural relationship. They also exist between the larger settlements. Taunton and Yeovil are increasingly recognised as providing a sub-regional role in the context of the range of facilities, services and employment they provide. This influences an area that extends beyond local authority administrative boundaries and in the case of Yeovil it extends into parts of northern and western Dorset. It also includes complex relationships with larger settlements within these areas of influence. Bridgwater, Ilminster and Wellington experience varying degrees of influence from Taunton whilst Chard, Crewkerne, Sherborne (Dorset) and Wincanton are within the sphere of influence of Yeovil. Any strategy for the plan area involving the provision of development within it must recognise the fact that it cannot be regarded as wholly self-contained. It will have an influence on and be influenced by what happens in neighbouring strategic and local planning authorities outside of Somerset and Exmoor. The strategy for the distribution of housing and employment land reflects the economic trends and projections for each of the districts and seeks to address this imbalance; the approach to distribution is more fully described in **Chapter 5: The Economy** and, **Chapter 6: Housing and Community Services**.

3.14 By focusing development on the towns, through the policies in **Chapter 4: The Environment**, the conservation of the rural nature and character of Somerset and Exmoor will be better secured and their important environmental and cultural assets protected. The strategy will also seek to make greater use of previously developed land and buildings to reduce the demand for greenfield sites on the periphery of the towns.

THE ECONOMY

3.15 The towns within the plan area are the main locations of employment. The strategy of the Joint Structure Plan builds upon the past economic performance of the fifteen larger settlements, particularly those that are on, or well related to, the main transport corridors. The strategy seeks to enhance the current role and function of these towns, both within themselves and in relation to their surrounding areas, as a focus for employment, and takes account of their future potential in order to ensure the economic health of the county as a whole. The strategy also recognises the dispersed nature of the settlement pattern in Somerset and Exmoor and the designation of large parts of the area as a Rural Priority Area. The economic and social needs of the rural areas are provided through the encouragement of diversification in the local rural economy and the re-use of redundant farm buildings for small-scale employment and community purposes. This is consistent with advice from Central Government contained in PPG 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (1997).

3.16 Finally there are significant economic advantages to the strategy:

- By focusing development, economies of scale and location arise. Larger towns tend to offer a wider range of services, so reducing costs to producers of goods and services.
- A larger town can itself act as a self-generating market for the goods and services of many firms within it.
- Larger leisure and educational facilities are more likely to be concentrated in the towns so reducing the costs of training and travel.
- Areas that are perceived to be growing attract more firms and economic development interest, which results in higher levels of economic investment.

ACCESSIBILITY

3.17 The Plan seeks to ensure that all residents of Somerset and Exmoor have reasonable access to a basic range of services, shops and facilities. The towns are an existing focus within the plan area for work, education, shopping, leisure and a wide range of other services and are accessible to a large proportion of the population of Somerset and Exmoor. Focused development will benefit the whole population by ensuring a wide spectrum of services developed in the larger towns, where accessibility by a range of transport modes exists and where over half the population is located.

3.18 Increasingly in the smaller villages, hamlets and the open countryside, residents have lost local services. In general terms, the greater relative affluence that has occurred over time has, in turn, been accompanied by increases in car ownership. This has created the opportunity for large sections of the rural population to gain access to larger centres, which can offer a wider range of facilities and services. The focusing of development on the larger settlements will lead to less new development in rural areas but this should not be equated to the loss of rural facilities or services, which land use planning is not in a position to reverse. In the past many villages have had new housing and other development, yet services have continued to decline. A review of rural bus services, innovative transport solutions or investment through Rural Priority Area initiatives may help to address some areas of need that can be dealt with outside the land use planning system.

THE PATTERN OF DISTRIBUTION

3.19 The methodology for the distribution of development conforms to the principles, aims and strategy of the Joint Structure Plan. The housing distribution reflects the economic scenarios and thus relates the location of new housing to the forecast increase in employment at the district level. In particular, the pattern of distribution reflects, as far as possible, the aim of reducing the potential need to commute. In this respect the distribution seeks to redress the imbalance that exists in the relationship between Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane, in which Bridgwater, in particular, has increasingly provided housing for the Taunton labour market area. This same principle has been applied in allocating housing to South Somerset.

3.20 The policies that follow in this chapter express the strategy of the Plan that should be applied in the selection of development sites and the implementation of specific proposals.

POLICY STR1 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Development in Somerset and the Exmoor National Park should:

- **be of high quality, good design and reflect local distinctiveness;**
- **develop a pattern of land use and transport which minimises the length of journeys and the need to travel and maximises the potential for the use of public transport, cycling and walking;**
- **minimise the use of non renewable resources;**
- **conserve biodiversity and environmental assets, particularly nationally and internationally designated areas;**
- **ensure access to housing, employment and services;**
- **give priority to the continued use of previously developed land and buildings;**
- **enable access for people with disabilities.**

3.21 Policy STR1 sets out the strategic principles for the Joint Structure Plan strategy and for the provision of development, across Somerset and Exmoor that will be developed by the Local Planning Authorities through their district-wide local plans. These are explained further in the following paragraphs.

3.22 It is important that all development is of the highest possible quality so that a better quality built environment can be created for future generations. In this respect, development should make a positive contribution to the wider built environment. The achievement of quality will include the use of traditional building materials, layouts and designs if locally distinctive development is to be provided. However, the policy should not be allowed to stifle innovation in design and layout. In this respect, local plans may include policies to encourage the provision of new pieces of public art.

3.23 Government policy for the better integration of land use and transport planning is set out in PPG 13: Transport (1994). This provides guidance on the distribution of development, which has been taken into account in the development of the Joint Structure Plan strategy. The principles behind the strategy are to develop a pattern of land use and transport which, over the plan period, will help to minimise the length of journeys and maximise the use of transport modes other than the private car. This is an important element of the Joint Structure Plan strategy and an important consideration in the provision and location of land for development.

3.24 The strategy seeks to shape the future pattern of development so as to minimise the use of non-renewable resources. This is related to the increased use of more sustainable modes of transport, the location of development and the recycling of construction wastes.

3.25 A key element of sustainable development is the preservation of the biodiversity and environmental assets that should be maintained for their own sake and for the benefit of future generations. The Joint Structure Plan sets out specific policies in this respect in Chapter 4: The Environment.

3.26 The Joint Structure Plan strategy seeks to ensure access to housing, employment and services for existing and future residents of Somerset and Exmoor. This will be achieved by the appropriate provision of housing and employment land, including the essential provision of affordable housing. Planning obligations, covered within Policy STR7: Implementation of the Strategy, will enable community facilities, affordable housing and infrastructure needs that arise from new development to be sought from that development. In specific locations, provision for development could create conflicts with other objectives of the Plan. A key role of the structure and local plans is to reconcile these conflicts and to provide the best overall distribution and sustainable form of development.

3.27 Government advice contained in PPG 12: Development Plans (1999) and PPG 3: Housing (2000), expects development plans to maximise the potential that can be secured for more sustainable patterns of development through the re-use of previously developed land, especially where this occurs within existing urban areas. In terms of residential development the latter guidance document identifies five criteria against which allocations and proposals should be considered. It also makes clear that preference should be given to the re-use of previously developed land before greenfield sites are considered. An exception can be made where it can be clearly demonstrated that a previously developed site performs poorly when assessed against the five criteria and compared with an alternative greenfield site. The intention of this is to minimise the use of greenfield sites and so to produce a more sustainable pattern of development, for example, by reducing the need to travel. This is reflected in the principles of the Joint Structure Plan strategy. Local planning authorities should seek to increase the proportion of development that reuses previously developed land and buildings. The benefits of this approach include the minimisation of the use of raw materials when existing buildings are put to new uses. Increased development densities and provision of the minimum amount of on site car parking necessary, will assist in maximising the use of urban land, particularly in town centres.

3.28 Central Government has also indicated that it expects 60% of additional housing to be accommodated on previously developed land by 2008. This is a national target and the lack of large urban areas or conurbations within the plan area make it extremely unlikely that this target could be met across the whole of the plan area during the lifespan of the Joint Structure Plan. A study commissioned by the South-West Regional Planning Conference for the draft regional strategy (Strategic Study of Urban Housing Potential in the South West Region: Final Report), has indicated that the whole of the region could only achieve a maximum of 36% of new residential development on previously developed land by 2016. It will be for Local Planning Authorities to determine how much future residential development that can be accommodated on previously developed land, in their area through district-wide local plans. It was estimated that about 27% - 34% of residential development could possibly be accommodated on previously developed land within the plan area up to 2016. The amount of development that will be able to be accommodated on previously developed land will be dependent on the supply of suitable land becoming available. Any such sites that do become available during the lifespan of the Joint Structure Plan would have to be considered in the context of the overall strategy, the requirements of Policy STR 1 and those of other appropriate and relevant policies within the development plan.

3.29 Policy STR 1, provides specifically for improvements in access for people with disabilities and this is further elaborated in Policy 43: Access for the Mobility Impaired. This issue will be taken up through detailed policies in local plans and the Local Transport Plan. It is intended to facilitate compliance with requirements for access to premises that are being pursued by current legislation and, to stimulate easier movement for all around the plan area.

POLICY STR2 TOWNS

Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge, Chard, Crewkerne, Frome, Glastonbury, Ilminster, Minehead, Shepton Mallet, Street, Taunton, Wellington, Wells, Wincanton and Yeovil are identified as Towns. They will function as locations for employment and shopping, cultural, community and education services and residential use. Taunton and Yeovil will provide a sub-regional role for certain services including, shopping and financial & administrative services.

3.30 Policy STR2 forms part of a group of strategy policies relating to the location of development, in and outside settlements, as determined by sustainable development

principles. It takes into account the general nature and potential of the development pattern across the plan area in the context of expected land-use needs. Each policy within this group is intended to set out clearly one part of the overall settlement picture. Policy STR 2 should be considered in conjunction with Policy STR 4: Development in Towns, in terms of how this will best meet the objectives of improving facilities and reducing the need to travel.

3.31 The policy defines as Towns all those settlements that are considered to provide a general service and employment function. The Towns are expected to be the primary location for future growth through the focused development element of the overall strategy. It is expected that the development will be provided in a balanced way, taking into account the need for additional and associated facilities and infrastructure to meet the needs of the development. The specific characteristics of this function in each Town are unique to the settlement concerned and the policy embraces a wide range of settlement size. Taunton and Yeovil have been identified as performing a distinctive sub-regional role and function as a consequence of the wide range of facilities and services within them when compared with the other settlements that have been designated as Towns. This is confirmed by the extent of their influence over the surrounding area which includes neighbouring Towns, such as Bridgwater and Wellington in relation to Taunton and, Crewkerne and Wincanton in relation to Yeovil.

3.32 Ilminster and Wincanton have been included in the list of settlements now defined as Towns. These were not previously so identified, but are now considered as providing a Town function within the terms of the Joint Structure Plan strategy. Through the strategy policies; STR2: Towns, STR3: Rural Centres and Villages, STR4: Development in Towns, and STR5: Development in Rural Centres and Villages, a clear distinction is being drawn in this Plan between the function of a settlement and its physical potential for significant new development.

3.33 The range of services and employment opportunities available in these settlements is a significant asset and is important for the prosperity of the whole county. As a whole these settlements provide comprehensive services within practical reach of most people in Somerset and Exmoor. In the interests of the sustainable development objectives of the Joint Structure Plan, it is important that their function be maintained and a clear indication given to all parties that, in principle, activity to do this will be accepted. This includes investment in the repair, renewal and improvement of the fabric of each settlement concerned and initiatives of all kinds to support day-to-day economic and cultural activity. The County Council, District Councils and the National Park Authority, are developing transport strategies for these settlements in conjunction with district-wide local plans.

POLICY STR3 RURAL CENTRES AND VILLAGES

Settlements which act as focal points for local employment and shopping, social and community activity in their areas should be identified as Rural Centres. Settlements which provide limited local services should be identified as Villages.

3.34 A number of smaller well serviced settlements, more numerous than the Towns, lie across the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan. These provide a range of functions that reduce the need for local people to travel regularly to larger centres for basic services. Some of these settlements also provide services for other smaller settlements nearby. The value of such settlements will become more significant in the future and they should be identified as Rural Centres in order to encourage investment to maintain the local function they perform. This investment will include maintenance of their fabric and infrastructure but can also involve new development. The precise range of facilities they provide will vary from place to place but will usually include a variety of small shops, together with health, cultural, financial, administrative and education services. In the context of the sustainable development

objectives of the Joint Structure Plan, they make an important contribution in rural areas, particularly to limiting the overall need for people to travel. Local Planning Authorities will be expected to identify those settlements they intend to designate as Rural Centres through policies in their respective district-wide local plans.

3.35 Many other small settlements provide individual services, for example a single shop, sub post office, primary school or community hall. Where, it is not expected that the level of services is likely to increase to form a comprehensive range, but it is considered locally important for the current function of the settlement to continue, the Village designation provided for in this policy should be applied. Local Planning Authorities will be expected to identify those settlements they intend to designate as Villages through policies in their respective district-wide local plans.

LOCATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT IN SOMERSET AND EXMOOR

3.36 Particular care will be required to ensure that sufficient provision is made across each of the individual district council areas, as a whole, for the allocation of land for housing and for employment generating activities indicated by the relevant Joint Structure Plan policy. The Joint Structure Plan strategy should guide the location of development within a district. Some settlements have limited scope for new development. The overall opportunities for the accommodation of new development around the Somerset and Exmoor area are not as straightforward as in the past. A realistic view needs to be taken of the potential for individual settlements to accommodate new development that takes full account of the principles behind the strategy. Consequently, local plans are likely to have to provide for significant development only in a limited number of locations. The overall approach to provision, in a particular location, should be sufficiently robust to accommodate changes to the forecast level of housing requirement made beyond this current structure plan period, so that if the level of subsequent allocations is reduced, the effect would not result in a lack of important facilities.

3.37 A balance must be struck between potential function and the pressure imposed by constraints on each settlement, particularly the Towns. Assessment of constraints in individual settlements will be undertaken in detail by Local Planning Authorities as part of the process of preparation of their district-wide local plans. Current difficulties require that proposals need to be more imaginative than ever before, respecting local identity and providing for both care of the environment and future prosperity. Rather than just being tolerated, development should be seen, through its intended nature and quality, to be making a worthwhile contribution to the settlement concerned.

POLICY STR4 DEVELOPMENT IN TOWNS

New development should be focused on the Towns where provision for such development should be made in accordance with their role and function, individual characteristics and constraints. Priority should be given to the re-use of previously developed land and to the encouragement of mixed-use development.

3.38 Through the sustainable development principles of the Joint Structure Plan strategy the majority of new development should be directed to the Towns. Advice from Central Government is that it expects to see greater re-use and development of previously developed land as this would make a useful contribution towards a more sustainable pattern of development within and around settlements. This is included in PPG 12: Development Plans (1999), and PPG 3: Housing (2000). In the case of residential proposals within existing urban areas it is expected that this will be provided at higher densities than has occurred in the past. As much use as possible should be made of land previously developed which has fallen out

of use or is ready for redevelopment. The Joint Structure Plan also seeks the encouragement of, and provision for, a variety of uses, where compatible, in all development areas, especially where sites are extensive and they are in central locations. Further guidance on mixed-use development proposals is provided in Policy 17: Mixed Use Developments. Local Planning Authorities should set out the detailed position for each Town in their area through district-wide local plans.

3.39 In the process of naming of specific Towns, it is recognised that some of the settlements designated are less capable of absorbing development, over a much longer timescale than the Joint Structure Plan provides for, than others for a variety of reasons. Examples of this are Wells and Glastonbury, which are faced with constraints imposed by the existing historic environment and setting, and Minehead, which is surrounded by natural environmental constraints including the national park and the sea. Whilst acknowledging these limitations the settlements concerned are still expected to accommodate some future development, but without compromising their existing historical and/or environmental assets, due to the nature of the role and function they perform to the surrounding area. The future potential of all the settlements that have been designated as Towns, to accommodate development beyond the period covered by the Joint Structure Plan, will be reviewed as an integral part of the monitoring process of the strategies and policies contained within it. Work on this has already commenced through the Strategic Planning Authorities involvement in the national 'market towns' initiative.

3.40 It is apparent that whilst all the settlements designated as Towns are subject to environmental or infrastructure constraints, some are approaching their practical development limits whilst others are at thresholds which it is possible to cross. A study, which included identification and assessment of the environmental capacity (including historic environment) of each of the fifteen main settlements, was carried out in 1998 as part of the development plan process (Somerset Structure Plan Review - Environmental Constraints Project: Final Report). It identified where settlements were approaching thresholds in their environmental capacity in relation to the level of future development that could be accommodated. Those settlements that are approaching their limits, in the context of current conditions and expected resources, should still be encouraged to prosper at their present size. Opportunities for their long-term development should not be seen as being curtailed indefinitely, as conditions in 40 or 50 years time might be very different. Given their limited potential, because of their function, to attract resources, their current opportunities for development, which are not yet committed must be taken up sparingly.

3.41 The ease and degree to which a significant proportion of the population within the Somerset and Exmoor area is likely to travel also has to be recognised. This generally means that in a 'free market economy' provision of jobs and services will tend to favour, and so reinforce the draw of larger settlements. If the requirement to travel is to be minimised, the location and design of new development must take market pressures into account and so be directed to appropriate places. However, if insufficient attention is given to the design and mix of such development, it will not be popular and pressure will increase elsewhere. Each Town needs to be made as attractive as possible as a place in which both to live and work.

POLICY STR5 DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL CENTRES AND VILLAGES

Development in Rural Centres and Villages should be such as will sustain and enhance their role and will be commensurate with their size and accessibility, and appropriate to their character and physical identity.

3.42 Smaller settlements in Somerset and Exmoor, designated in local plans as Rural Centres or Villages, should not be selected as locations for general development. Such an

approach will stimulate or reinforce travel patterns to other centres, increase the overall impact of development on the county and reduce the opportunities to encourage the improvement of services in the Towns.

3.43 In Rural Centres, however, local plans should have regard to the functions such centres perform and provide, through site allocations, for any development that will contain activity primarily related to the Rural Centre concerned, or its surrounding area. This reflects and develops advice from Central Government contained in PPG 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (1997), and, RPG 10: Regional Planning Guidance for the South-West (1994). These documents recognise the importance of smaller settlements as communities and recommend a positive approach to the strengthening of market towns and villages especially where these act as a service and employment centre for a wider rural hinterland. Any allocations for development in Rural Centres, made through district-wide local plans, should be located within the settlement boundary. Large-scale new development that only relates marginally to a centre, in the expectation of spin off support for the local services alone and that is also unlikely to be compatible with its character, should be avoided.

3.44 In Villages, local plans should avoid allocating sites for development except where a specific local need has been identified. The degree of local need involved should be the major consideration in assessing the principle of any private proposals for development.

POLICY STR6 DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE TOWNS, RURAL CENTRES AND VILLAGES

Development outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages should be strictly controlled and restricted to that which benefits economic activity, maintains or enhances the environment and does not foster growth in the need to travel.

3.45 The great majority of Somerset and Exmoor is comprised of open countryside dotted with hamlets, farms and other isolated development. This helps to create the rural character associated with the plan area for which there is a widespread popular desire to protect. The strategy of the Joint Structure Plan is intended to provide for the needs of the whole county and most development will be directed to Towns, Rural Centres and Villages. However Policy STR 6 aims to accommodate development in the countryside when the selection of an alternative location related to an appropriate type of settlement is not possible. Local Planning Authorities through their district-wide local plans should not make provision for general development in the countryside. Where such development is proposed Local Planning Authorities will need to assess whether, the need for it in an open countryside location is essential, it will be of benefit to the local area and, its impact, in terms of cost to the environment and sustainability, is minimised. Development proposals involving the provision of social housing in such locations will be subject to the same assessment criteria, plus the requirements of, Policy 35: Affordable Housing, within the Joint Structure Plan and any relevant policies contained in the appropriate district-wide local plan.

3.46 The strategy of the Joint Structure Plan of focusing new development on settlements, particularly ones with a wider range of services and employment opportunities requires a complementary approach to rural development. A firm countryside development policy is a vital to complement the focused approach. Government advice contained in PPG 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (1997), whilst emphasising the importance of rural prosperity, still firmly discourages acceptance of general building in the open countryside away from established settlements or areas allocated for development in development plans. The balance to be struck involves maintenance of the rural economy as a whole, facilitating the continued use of past investment in buildings and infrastructure whilst ensuring that this process is not so accommodating as to attract

development which should be readily related to settlements both to enhance the function of the settlement concerned and contribute to the objective of reducing growth in the need to travel. Policy STR 6 reinforces and provides the strategic policy framework to the control of development that would be deemed inappropriate in the terms of the focused strategy of the Joint Structure Plan. The reference to the term 'the environment' used in this policy embraces issues of biodiversity, pollution and congestion as well as visual amenity.

3.47 Policy STR 5: Development in Rural Centres and Villages, and Policy STR 6: Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages, do not seek to inhibit the maintenance and development of rural prosperity but to ensure that where development is proposed, it is preferably located within existing settlements and will be of benefit to, and enhance the local community. This is consistent with Central Government advice contained in PPG 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (1997), which states that;The guiding principle in the countryside is that development should both benefit economic activity and maintain or enhance the environment. (para. 2.3)

3.48 Provision for development that will provide economic and/or social benefits to rural communities should also be considered in the context of the requirements of Policy 19: Employment and Community Provision in Rural Areas, of the Joint Structure Plan and any relevant policies contained in the appropriate district-wide local plan.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The Development Plan

3.49 The benefits to the community of a land use planning strategy will be realised through a suitable system of plan implementation. The Joint Structure Plan draws together a wide range of planning objectives, focuses them through policies for the county area and so forms the strategic framework of the development plan.

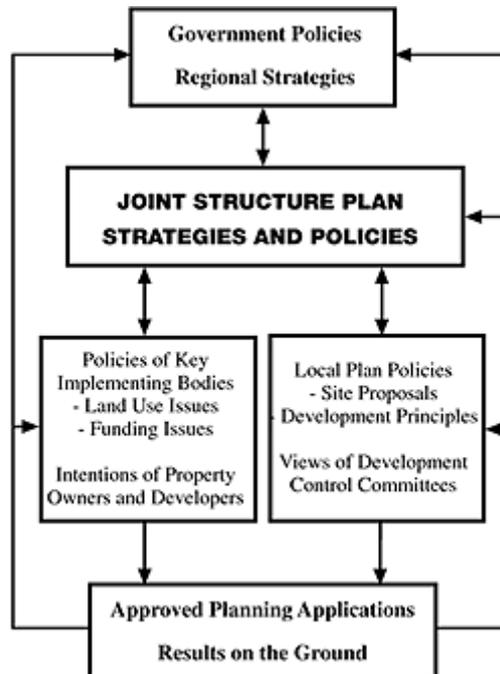
Consensus

3.50 The foundation of successful plan implementation is laid by establishing consensus among contributors. Over issues where this is not possible, a plan must justify its position clearly so that bodies and individuals, who will play a major part in the development process, accept the Joint Structure Plan's strategy, objectives and policies more readily when making their investment decisions. However planning authorities must in turn recognise changing concerns and new issues. They must be prepared to introduce alterations to their plans if necessary, as well as take these concerns and issues forward at a further review stage. The types of organisations and bodies considered to have a significant role to play in implementing the Joint Structure Plan are listed at the end of this chapter.

THE JOINT STRUCTURE PLAN

3.51 The position of the Joint Structure Plan in the development process is complex. The diagram below (figure 3.1) illustrates its relationship to other elements of the process particularly of encouraging, guiding and controlling development on the ground. While the diagram shows the Joint Structure Plan in a central position, it emphasises that the process is multi-directional. The success of Joint Structure Plan measures as a whole depend as much on feedback from planning decisions as from the careful interpretation of principles in local plans.

Figure 3.1 The Development Plan Process



**POLICY STR7
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY**

To ensure that development in Somerset and the Exmoor National Park is implemented in a way that meets the sustainable development aims of the strategy, development should fairly and reasonably contribute towards the provision of relevant community services and facilities, environmental improvements and infrastructure, that are directly related to and necessary for the development to proceed.

3.52 Policy STR 7 is concerned with the implementation of the sustainable development aims of the overall strategy. In the process of allocating larger sites for development in district-wide local plans, consideration should be given by Local Planning Authorities to the reasonable contribution that may be expected from developers to implement the infrastructure and facilities associated with the development within the context of the plan strategy. This can be done in the form of planning obligation agreements. Policy STR 7 reflects Central Government advice on the appropriate use of such agreements that is provided in Circular 1/97: Planning Obligations. Matters concerning the level of detail, the type of facilities and, the criteria to be used to determine those items that will be expected to be provided via planning obligation agreements will be for Local Planning Authorities to specify through their district-wide local plans, planning briefs and/or at the planning application stage, as appropriate. Details concerning the provision of various types of social housing as part of such agreements are covered through DETR Circular 6/98: Planning and Affordable Housing, and PPG 3: Housing (2000). The effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy will be assessed through the monitoring process of the Joint Structure Plan policies which is explained in further detail below.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

3.53 Approved planning proposals are the basic building blocks of land use change within the remit of the development plan. Having put the whole development plan in place by achieving conformity of local plans with the Joint Structure Plan, the critical matter to monitor over time will be the support of planning application decisions for the strategy. It will be important to compare planning applications and their general locations with the role of such locations in the strategy. Decisions on planning applications which may detract from the strategy should particularly be identified and consideration given to their implications. Important aspects of this analysis will include their overall significance compared with those that support the strategy, and the degree to which they indicate a need for policy change.

Monitoring Reports

3.54 To be sensitive to constant change, the implementation and monitoring process must collect and review information regularly. The Joint Strategic Planning Authorities propose that an implementation and monitoring report be produced annually. Such a report will provide the means of drawing attention to implementation progress, giving the opportunity to emphasise success achieved on the ground as well as highlighting policies that need review. The views of developers, agencies and any other interested bodies or members of the public, provided on an informed and regular basis, will add value to the analysis work. Comparable monitoring reports for each district wide local plan, particularly indicating progress on local plan proposals and discussing the local environmental achievements of application decisions, would, if produced by district councils, considerably strengthen this process. The Joint Structure Plan monitoring report will provide valuable information for the process of monitoring Regional Planning Guidance. Finally, the sustainability appraisal, which accompanied the Deposit Draft version of this plan, is part of a continuous process that includes review of the aims, proposals and policies of the Joint Structure Plan, in preparation for review of the plan itself.

RESOURCES

3.55 Development of the participation process over the years has led to the involvement in plan preparation of most bodies that control resources necessary for implementation. Some of these resources comprise funding from Government through various bodies and agencies, for example for public and community infrastructure such as schools or for specific strategies or projects. However, the vast bulk of resources are provided by private sector organisations and individuals, which now include major utility undertakings, through the normal pursuit of their activities.

3.56 In directing resources, the role of the Joint Structure Plan is primarily to co-ordinate resources rather than to direct them specifically in the form of a business plan. Thus the main activity of the Joint Structure Plan in directing resources has been to create a realistic strategy, ensure that it is widely understood and is supported both by investment attitudes in the private sector and by planning application decisions. Both Somerset County Council and the Exmoor National Park Authority will endeavour to liaise closely with bodies they consider to have a key role in implementing the Joint Structure Plan so as to ensure that it is widely understood and their resources are appropriately applied.

Key Implementing Organisations

3.57 The County Council and the National Park Authority consider that the bodies and organisations listed below have an important role to play in guiding resources to implement the Joint Structure Plan:

Somerset County Council and the Exmoor National Park Authority

District and Parish Councils.

Government departments and government funded agencies.

Local chambers of trade & commerce and business organisations.

Local conservation bodies.

The Somerset Skills and Learning Council

Private manufacturing, retailing and servicing companies

Land and property developers

Transport and utility undertakings.