

## **THE ECONOMY**

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5.1 The strength and robust nature of the Somerset and Exmoor economy has been demonstrated in recent years by its high level of employment growth and relatively low rates of unemployment. Some parts of the economy have been experiencing significant structural change and this has had, and will continue to have, varying degrees of impact on the future performance of the economy. At a local level, in some parts of the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan, there is a high level of dependence on one employer or type of employment for the continuing prosperity of that local area. Government guidance indicates that the planning system should not interfere in the operation of market economies but that it can help to provide a degree of certainty through policies contained within the development plan.

5.2 The Joint Structure Plan provides the strategic policy framework that should help to sustain the economy of Somerset and Exmoor and foster its future development. The plan aims to ensure that future development will be more sustainable by minimising its impact on the existing built and natural environment through the strategy of focused development. To assist the strategy and a diverse economy the Joint Structure Plan will:

- ensure adequate provision of land for employment generating purposes;
- provide guidance on the location of land for business, industrial, retail, tourism and warehousing development, including opportunities for the re-use of previously developed land;
- encourage diversification of economic activities and employment opportunities particularly in rural locations and those areas that are dependant on one employer or type of employment; and
- provide guidance on the development and extraction of the mineral resources of Somerset and Exmoor.

5.3 District-wide local plans will develop these framework policies by taking into account, local economic conditions and requirements, allocating sites and providing greater detail in terms of the physical development of land.

### **PAST PERFORMANCE**

5.4 The local economy of Somerset and Exmoor has performed well since 1971. It has seen steady growth in the number of people employed throughout the period up to 1998. The number of businesses in the plan area has also increased since 1971, although there was a gradual decline in the number of VAT registered businesses during the mid 1990s. The rate of growth in these two areas has been equal to, or greater than that of the South West region over the same timescale. This has been achieved without the benefit of a large urban centre within the plan area to act as a focus for investment and development.

### **FUTURE PROSPECTS**

#### **Context**

5.5 The Somerset and Exmoor area is perceived to be predominantly rural in character but this is not wholly reflected in the composition of its industry structure. The area has a significantly greater proportion of its employment provided by the manufacturing sector compared with the South West region and nationally. The economy is dominated by a few

very large employers and, numerous, very small businesses. This latter factor is reflected in the fact that a higher proportion of total, employed, workforce within the area is self-employed when compared with its national equivalent. Also, the rate of unemployment that has been experienced in the County of Somerset has been consistently lower than that of the South West region and nationally since 1976.

### **Forecasts and Projections**

5.6 There is little published information on future economic performance below a regional level. Most forecasts and projections are restricted to national and regional level and can vary, depending on the base date from which they operate and the period for which the forecast or projection applies. The usual indicator of overall economic growth used in these forecasts is the annual rate of change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross Value Added (GVA), but this is seldom disaggregated down to smaller geographical areas such as county and other types of local government administrative area level. Cambridge Econometrics conduct an annual review of economic forecasting for the regions. They suggest that, for the period 2001 - 2010, the South Wests economy will grow by 2.8% per annum compared with a national rate of 2.6% per annum for the same period.

5.7 Due to the complex network of variables that influence a local economy, it is difficult to make long-term detailed projections as to how it will perform. It also requires historical statistical data covering as long a time-span as possible and consistent in its compilation throughout. In terms of the timescale over which the Joint Structure Plan operates, economic projections have been developed based on a combination of previous trends, current known changes and expectations and, local knowledge.

### **Employment**

5.8 The general expectations of the Somerset and Exmoor economy, throughout the Joint Structure Plan period, are that it will continue to grow but at a lower average rate than that which was experienced between 1971 and 1991. The growth will not be equal and consistent throughout the plan area. Some parts, such as West Somerset and Exmoor, will see smaller rates of business and employment increase. Other parts, such as South Somerset and Taunton Deane are expected to continue to attract development and generate employment opportunities, especially the settlements of Yeovil and Taunton that are expected to develop their respective sub-regional roles. The service sector is likely to be the main source of future business and employment generation throughout the plan area, although the manufacturing sector, particularly defence and agro-food, will continue to provide significant levels of employment within the overall economy.

### **Unemployment**

5.9 This is expected to continue the general trend that has been experienced in Somerset alone, and remain below the regional and national rates, providing that none of the key industries experience any unexpected structural or other change. It is accepted that there will be fluctuations in the rate of employment for the plan area throughout the period up to 2011. This will reflect the changes that occur both in performance of the national economy and local factors. Due to the lack of precision that can be applied to future economic performance, at all levels, it is difficult to predict what the rate of unemployment will be in 2011. It is expected that the average rate for Somerset and Exmoor during the plan period will be about 5%. It is recognised that there will obviously be variations to this rate, at the more local level, as has occurred in the past. Unemployment in and around Yeovil has consistently been lower than the rest of the plan area throughout the 1990s, whilst the coastal settlements of Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge and Minehead experience significant fluctuations throughout each year due to the high dependence of their economies on the seasonal tourist industry.

### **Occupational Change**

5.10 The restructuring that has been occurring in many industrial activities over the past two decades is expected to continue although the impact, in terms of employment and occupations will vary. The composition of the Somerset and Exmoor economy, in this context, is similar to that of the South West region. Any changes that do take place in the plan area are expected to be a reflection of what is happening at a regional level. It is anticipated that there will be a continuing decline in the proportion of unskilled jobs particularly amongst manual occupations in all sectors, especially primary and manufacturing and, to a lesser extent, in some service industries. There will continue to be a loss of some types of semi-skilled occupations, particularly those related to the more traditional manufacturing activities, such as machine operators. This will partially be offset by growth in semi-skilled jobs in the service sector such as sales representatives. The biggest growth area in terms of occupations is expected to be amongst skilled specialists and craft jobs, especially those related to professional niche service and/or consultancy work and those who are self-employed.

## **CONSTRAINTS TO FUTURE ECONOMIC GROWTH**

5.11 Although the economy of the plan area has, in general, performed well in recent years and is expected to continue to do so in the immediate future, it is difficult to predict what may happen over a longer timescale. There are a number of areas of particular concern for the future performance of the Somerset and Exmoor economy, which include:

- Whether the increasing proportion of small businesses and the employment they provide can be sustained;
- The relative dependence on manufacturing, which has been in long-term decline;
- The increasing level of part-time employment that is created;
- Whether the levels of gross and net commuting out of the plan area are likely to increase; and,
- The dependence of some towns and areas on, a limited range of industries and/or employers.

5.12 Although, during the period 1991 - 2011, the number of people in employment in Somerset and Exmoor is expected to increase, the composition of the types of industry will be expected to change. The most noticeable of these changes will be a continuation of the long-term trend of declining levels of employment in manufacturing activities. The loss in these types of employment activity is expected to be compensated by growth in service sector opportunities. Detailed forecasting over such a long period is difficult but the general expectations of employment change, at and within sector level, are given below.

### **Primary**

5.13 Agricultural employment within Somerset and Exmoor is expected to continue to decline for the remainder of the plan period up to 2011. Many of the farm holdings in the plan area are small-scale family operations, whose individual employment levels are already at a low point, with a high dependence on casual and/or seasonal labour. The impact of reforms to the agricultural policy of the European Community and the world-wide ban on British beef in the late 1990s has seriously affected the economic viability of these smaller farm units. Some units have been forced out of business and the consequence of this has been to add to the economic and employment difficulties confronting many rural communities.

5.14 The utilities element of the primary sector is likely to see further job losses in the short-term. This will be primarily due to the effect of rationalisation initiatives resulting from privatisation of the various industries in the mid 1990s. Also, the gradual decommissioning process involving the Hinkley A, nuclear power facility will have a significant local impact during the remainder of the plan period.

### **Manufacturing**

5.15 In common with the national trend, this sector has been in long-term decline, in terms of the numbers employed in the various types of manufacturing industry, in Somerset and Exmoor. This is expected to continue for the remainder of the plan period although the rate of decline will probably be more gradual and will be determined by the future economic performance of three groups within it.

- The agro-food industry has been experiencing internal restructuring and parts of it have been seriously affected by the problems that have confronted the cattle industry as a consequence of the BSE crisis in the late 1990s. This is expected to stabilise, although there is still the possibility of further job losses. This will ultimately be determined by whether consumer confidence in the products returns and on whether the overall meat industry is able to win back some of the market share it has lost in recent years.
- Employment in the defence and related engineering industries is expected to remain relatively static for the short to medium-term. Beyond this timescale, future employment will be dependent on maintenance contracts and the success of the companies in winning new large orders in both the national and international market places.
- The clothing and related industry is expected to see continued employment decline due to competition from low labour-cost economies in other parts of the world. Employment by companies in Somerset and Exmoor traditionally associated with this activity are expected to continue to transfer their manufacturing operations to other locations. The local operations of these companies is likely to concentrate on administration, storage and, distribution. The decline in employment in the clothing industry through the traditional employers is likely to be partially offset by growth in the small craft related clothing businesses which concentrate on producing high quality goods for specific local and/or specialist niche markets.

## **Construction**

5.16 The future employment levels in this industry will closely reflect local and national economic performance. In the absence of any clearly identified major construction projects within, or immediately adjoining, the plan area, much of the growth will be dependent on the level of confidence in local housing and commercial development markets. There is a high level of self-employment in this industry in the area. The Census of Population 1991, identified over 50% of employment in this industry, in Somerset alone, being self-employed. The industry is particularly sensitive to changes in economic confidence and this is likely to continue in the future.

## **Service**

5.17 The service sector of the economy of Somerset and Exmoor is expected to see continued growth in the short to medium-term, although beyond this point it is difficult to predict due to the diverse nature of this sector. There will be significant differences in the performances of the various types of industry included within it

- Retailing is expected to continue to grow in overall employment terms with significant numbers of part-time jobs being created and much of this will most likely occur in the larger settlements. This will be in contrast to the overall number of retail businesses that will continue its long-term decline.
- The performance of the hotel and catering industry is closely related to and forms an integral part of the tourism industry. This is expected to continue to grow, but at a slower rate than in the past.

- The warehousing and distribution industries in Somerset and Exmoor are closely related to the transport industry and there is some interdependence between them. The first two are not expected to experience significant employment growth during the remainder of the plan period.
- There could be a decline in the overall level of employment in the transport industry if there is increased emphasis, incentives and capacity for the transport of goods, especially high-volume low-value goods over long distances, by rail.
- The private sector personal business industries are expected to experience slight overall growth in employment although some activities will perform better than others.
- Employment amongst the financial and banking services is expected to decline slightly over the whole of the plan period. This will primarily be due to mergers, take-overs and rationalisation initiatives by the major operators in the industry. This will affect larger settlements where there are multiple outlets. Increasing use of remote based technology, such as cash dispensers at out-of-town supermarkets and leisure facilities may also contribute to a shrinking workforce.
- Professional advice and consultancy services are likely to generate employment growth as these are significantly under-represented in most of the larger settlements in the plan area.
- Leisure orientated businesses are expected to experience significant growth but this is likely to be influenced by the performance of the tourist industry with which it is closely linked.
- Amongst the social services provided by the public and private sector, it is anticipated that the change in employment up to 2011 will be broadly neutral. Central and local government administration may see a slight decline as services are subject to scrutiny under the 'Best Value' process.
- Education and health services are likely to see some employment growth at least in the short to medium-term as a consequence of changes in the way some of their activities are organised and funded.

## **LOCAL ECONOMIC PROSPECTS**

5.18 Amongst the Local Planning Authorities, past trends provide an indication of the rates of employment growth that could be expected in each but these are likely to vary due to the nature and potential of each economy at this level. A general assessment of the prospects of each of these economies, for the remainder of the plan period, is given overleaf.

### **Mendip**

5.19 It has been projected that Mendip will see employment growth, during the plan period, at a rate just below the average for the whole of Somerset and Exmoor. Whilst the area is not ideally located in relation to the strategic communication corridors, it has some well-established indigenous industries including minerals and publishing. With the exception of Frome, the other four main settlements are relatively isolated from other major employment centres, therefore the loss of any major employer in any of these towns is likely to have a significant impact and is unlikely to be quickly replaced. Street and Shepton Mallet are particularly dependent on either one major employer and/or type of industry. Frome's economic prosperity will be closely linked to that of the West Wiltshire towns of Trowbridge, Warminster and Westbury. It is expected to perform an increasingly dormitory role in relation to Bath.

5.20 Amongst the main industrial activities associated with Mendip, the future employment potential of the minerals and related industry remains uncertain. The absence of major construction projects within the South-West, and in adjoining regions, generating a demand for construction aggregates, has meant that production and output has been significantly lower throughout the 1990s than in the late 1980s. There is little indication that this will change in the short to medium-term time frame. Manufacturing is a significant provider of employment in the district and this likely to remain the situation although the overall number of jobs is expected to continue its slow decline. Within the service sector, employment growth will be led by the retail and tourism industries, especially with the expansion of the facilities at Clarks Village in Street. Other service industries are expected to maintain the employment levels or experience more modest rates of growth.

### **Sedgemoor**

5.21 The rate of employment growth in Sedgemoor is anticipated to be significantly lower than the average for Somerset and Exmoor. This can be attributed to two main factors. The decline in labour-intensive manufacturing industries operating in the area, which continued throughout the 1990s. Also, the proximity of the two main settlements, Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge and Bridgwater, to the M.5/A.38 corridor has led to them acquiring an increasingly dormitory role in relation to their respective larger neighbours, Weston-super-Mare and Taunton. In the absence of any significant constraints on an individual's ability to travel, this trend is expected to continue.

5.22 The decline in employment in manufacturing is expected to continue for the remainder of the period up to 2011. The main employment generating activities in the future are expected to be in the service sector industries, especially tourism and warehousing & distribution. The district has been particularly successful in attracting these latter types of industrial activity in recent years but, although it has substantial requirements in terms of land, it is a low-density employment generator.

### **South Somerset**

5.23 Economic and employment growth in South Somerset is projected to be at a similar, or slightly higher, rate than that for the whole of the plan area. The local economy for the district has performed well throughout the 1990s and this has been reflected in lower rates of unemployment in many of the towns and the area as a whole compared with the rest of Somerset and Exmoor and the South West region. The five main settlements are well located in relation to the strategic transport corridor comprising the Waterloo - Exeter railway and the A.303 Trunk Road. This provides good potential for future employment generating opportunities for businesses with links between London and the South West.

5.24 The district continues to depend on manufacturing, for employment, to a much greater extent than other parts of the plan area and this is likely to remain an important contributor to the health of the local economy. Of the main industrial activities within it, the agro-food industry has been experiencing a restructuring, the effects of which were compounded in the late 1990s by the BSE problems affecting the various elements of the beef industry. The future employment opportunities in this and related industries will be dependent on the ability of the meat industry as a whole winning back the markets that were lost during the world-wide ban on British beef. The district is also dependent on defence related manufacturing industries whose employment potential for the remainder of the plan period is at best expected to remain static or, experience a slight decline. The developing role of Yeovil as a sub-regional centre is expected to generate employment growth in much of the service sector activities. Business, financial and, professional services are considered to be under-represented in the town that acts as an important focus for an extensive rural hinterland. The retail and tourism industries are expected to see some employment growth up to 2011 but not at the same rate that was experienced in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Taunton Deane**

5.25 This district has experienced the greatest rate of economic and employment growth since 1971 and this is expected to continue for the remainder of the plan period. The primary reason for this growth is the location of the two main settlements, Taunton and Wellington within the transport corridor that includes the M.5 motorway, A.38 and London/Midlands to South West main railway line. Taunton is the largest settlement within the plan area and functions as an important administrative centre. The location of Wellington close to Taunton has resulted in the town increasingly performing a dormitory role in relation to its larger neighbour. The local economy has become increasingly dominated by service sector activities in recent years and this is not expected to change.

5.26 The two main urban areas in the district are expected to become the main sources of continued employment growth, particularly Taunton as it develops its sub-regional role and functions. A combination of the size of the settlement, its function as the administrative centre of Somerset and, the comprehensive range of facilities that already exist in the town, make it an attractive location for other service sector industries, especially those that are office based, such as, financial, business and professional activities. Other service sector activities that are expected to generate additional employment include retail and tourism.

### **West Somerset and Exmoor**

5.27 Due to their relative isolation from the strategic transport corridors, the economy of these two inter-linked areas has developed much more slowly than other parts of the Joint Structure Plan area. This low rate of growth is not expected to change for the remainder of the timescale covered by the plan, up to 2011. Much of the employment growth that has been achieved in the past has been in the tourism and related industries. In the absence of any large settlements, other than Minehead, or large and accessible catchment populations for other industrial activities, the local economy will remain dependent on a limited number of industries for its future prosperity.

5.28 Agriculture makes an important contribution to the local economy and will continue to do so despite the problems that have beset the industry in the late 1990s. Employment in this industry is expected to decline over the course of the plan period and some of this may be replaced by employment initiatives in leisure and tourism activities, although the scope for such employment generators in the more remote parts of the area may be limited. The decommissioning of the Hinkley A power station will take a number of years to implement but this may have a significant impact on the economy in the eastern part of West Somerset in particular.

### **EMPLOYMENT LAND**

5.29 The composition of the local economies within Somerset and Exmoor and their expected future performance, in terms of business and employment creation, will be influenced by the amount of suitable land for development that is made available and its distribution. The Joint Structure Plan seeks to quantify the overall amount of additional land that will be required during the plan period in three groupings of industrial activity as defined in, Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. These comprise; B.1 - Light Industrial and General Office; B.2 - General Industrial, and; B.8 - Storage and Distribution. It also identifies the contribution that each Local Planning Authority will be expected to make towards this total through allocations in their respective district-wide local plans. The calculation of the land required for the types of industrial activity covered by the Order has been determined in the context of three objectives.

#### **Objectives**

- To allocate sufficient employment land to encourage the development of a diverse and prosperous economy

- To distribute employment development in a way which reflects the anticipated growth in the labour force
- To ensure that employment land is allocated which meets the requirements of businesses in terms of location, accessibility and environment

**POLICY 16  
PROVISION OF LAND FOR INDUSTRIAL, WAREHOUSE AND BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT**

**Provision will be made for about 405 Hectares of land for industrial, warehouse and business development purposes over the period 1991 - 2011. This will include activities within classes B1, B2 and B8 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987. The distribution of the overall allocation will be as follows:**

<b>District</b>	<b>Hectares</b>
<b>Mendip</b>	<b>about 60</b>
<b>Sedgemoor</b>	<b>about 95</b>
<b>South Somerset</b>	<b>about 125</b>
<b>Taunton Deane</b>	<b>about 115</b>
<b>West Somerset</b>	<b>about 10</b>

**Provision should be made for the inclusion of such uses in mixed-use development sites where appropriate. Where such uses are included, only those allocation elements that are within Use Classes; B1, B2 and/or B8 can be counted against the relevant allocation total for that District.**

**In the Exmoor National Park provision should only be for an appropriate scale of development to meet local social and economic needs.**

5.30 The amount of land required for employment purposes during the plan period, and its distribution, has been calculated on the combination of past trends of land take-up and development, the composition and performance of the respective local economies and their expected future performance. The employment land allocations do not cater for all of the anticipated employment growth that is expected to be generated during the Joint Structure Plan period, 1991 - 2011. However, it is estimated that about 66% of all existing jobs, within the plan area, are provided by industrial activities that would be covered by the three main categories covered by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 included within Policy 16. Those that have been selected are expected to provide the majority of future new jobs generated in the county up to 2011.

5.31 The Joint Structure Plan provides an overall allocation of employment land for Somerset and Exmoor, including its distribution amongst the Local Planning Authorities. It is the latter, through their respective district-wide local plans, that are expected to determine the exact location of where future employment generating development will take place within the context of the focused development strategy. Allocations that are made in district-wide local plans would have to take into account the strategic policies of the Joint Structure Plan

(Policies STR 4: Development in Towns, and STR 5: Development in Rural Centres and Villages) in terms of the distribution and location in settlements. Also the requirements of Policy 17: Mixed-Use Developments, Policy 18: Location of Land for Industrial, Warehousing and Business Development, Policy 19: Employment and Community Provision in Rural Areas, and Policy 49: Transport Requirements of New Developments, may need to be considered.

5.32 It is expected that the Local Planning Authorities will include some allocations on under-used and redundant land, within existing settlement boundaries, for employment and/or mixed-use developments, where appropriate. It is also expected that a range of sites in different locations will be identified, to serve the needs of different employers and industries. This will be consistent with advice from Central Government set out in PPG 4: Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms (1992).

5.33 The conditions within which exceptional releases of land for employment generating purposes need to be made cannot be easily predicted and provided for within the development plan. Although the Joint Structure Plan covers a timescale of twenty years, Government advice contained in PPG 12: Development Plans (1999), makes it clear that all parts of the development plan process should be continually monitored for their effectiveness. It also states that it expects plans to be reviewed at least once every five years. The continuous process of monitoring and review should permit Strategic and Local Planning Authorities to respond to issues caused by changes in the demand for, and provision of, land for employment generating purposes at the local level within this five-year cycle.

5.34 It is recognised that within the National Park, whilst there is a requirement in Policy 2: Exmoor National Park, to foster the economic and social well being of the communities, the allocation of sites for development by general employment generating activities may not be desirable. This would apply where development proposals of this nature would conflict with the purpose of the national park as set out in the Environment Act 1995. In this context, the use of the term appropriate would be for the allocation of land for existing businesses that require it in order to expand or, for local businesses to relocate because their existing facilities and site have become constrained. The identification and allocation of such sites is a matter for the Exmoor National Park Authority to determine through its own local plan for the area.

5.35 Central Government has stressed the need to monitor development plan policies within its new regime of Plan, Monitor and Manage especially those policies that provide clearly identified allocations and/or targets that apply for the whole of the plan period. The take-up and development of land for business, industrial and warehouse purposes is such a policy which can be readily monitored on a regular basis and this will be included as part of an annual monitoring report of the Joint Structure Plan. In calculating the amount of employment land that needs to be included in district-wide local plans, sites that have been developed since mid 1991 and those that are allocated in existing, adopted, local plans or have a current planning permission, can be counted against the allocation figure (see Table 5.1).

## **POLICY 17 MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENTS**

**Industrial, commercial and business activities which are major generators of travel demand and are part of a mixed-use development should be provided for in town centre locations and sites which are highly accessible by means of transport other than the private car.**

5.36 Increasing references on the need for mixed-use developments have been provided in policy guidance from the Government. Policy 17 seeks to provide guidance, at a strategic level, on the type of sites that may be considered suitable. A key consideration would be the accessibility of such developments to potential employees, with the emphasis on high-density employment generators being located close to high volume transport routes to improve accessibility by modes of transport other than private car. Also it provides the potential for

mixed-use developments to include both residential and employment provision within the same site, where such activities are compatible. Such developments could, thereby, provide the potential opportunities for people to minimise the distance they may need to travel to work. The policy also provides a framework whereby a mix of activities could be considered on a site where previous use of the site had been restricted to a much narrower range of activities, and these, in turn, had inhibited its potential development, and/or re-development, because it was not deemed to be economically viable.

**TABLE 5.1**

**ALLOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LAND FOR B1, B2 & B8\* PURPOSES  
(Hectares)**

Local Planning Authority	Allocation	Developed#		Residual
		Area	%	
<b>Mendip</b>	60	11.4	19.0	48.6
<b>Sedgemoor</b>	95	16.3	17.2	78.7
<b>South Somerset</b>	125	20.6	16.5	103.6
<b>Taunton Deane</b>	115	14.5	12.6	100.5
<b>West Somerset</b>	10	2.0	20.0	8.0
<b>Joint Structure Plan Area</b>	405	64.8	16.0	340.2

**Notes**

\* As defined by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended)

# As at 1st April 1998

No specific allocation is made for the Exmoor National Park.

5.37 The inclusion of other types of uses within a mixed-use development does not imply that these are exempted from the requirements of other related policies within the Joint Structure Plan (e.g. the sequential testing process in Policy 21: Town Centre Uses, and site selection for retail development). Only those elements of a mixed-use development that are within the activities covered by Classes, B.1, B.2 and B.8 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 can be counted against the respective Local Planning Authority's allocation figure provided for in Policy 16: Provision of Land for Industrial, Warehouse and Business Development.

**POLICY 18**

**LOCATION OF LAND FOR INDUSTRIAL, WAREHOUSING & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**When determining the location of land for employment generating activities, in the context of other policies in the plan, consideration should be given to the following:**

- **where significant levels of freight traffic are likely to be generated, sites should be located close to the existing County or National road network or rail facilities;**

- **activities which are environmentally compatible with other land uses may be located within or adjoining such existing or proposed uses;**
- **activities which are not compatible with other land uses should be located where their impact on the local environment can be mitigated;**
- **large developments with high employment density activities should be located close to established public transport nodes.**

5.38 It is essential that opportunities for business to develop within, or locate to, the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan is supported by the provision of suitable employment land in appropriate locations. The identification of sites for employment generating purposes should be those locations where potential operators can benefit from economies of scale, access to markets and, close proximity to a pool of labour but without compromising the objective of achieving a more sustainable pattern of development. Consideration has to be given to the impact on the local environment through, the processes involved on the site, traffic generation as a result of delivery of goods and commuter traffic taking people to and from their workplaces. The type and functional nature of employment generating activities can vary considerably and this influences the size and location of the accommodation they require. This varies across the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan, with some settlements becoming associated with certain types of activity. Examples include the publishing industry in Frome, aerospace and electrical engineering in Yeovil, large office operators in Taunton and, more recently, the warehouse and distribution activities in Bridgwater.

5.39 Any land for employment generating purposes that is allocated and developed will generate additional movements of people and goods on the transport network close to the site. The purpose of this policy is to emphasise that, where possible, such developments should be located where they can maximise the efficient use of the existing infrastructure whilst minimising the impact it is likely to have on the environment. The location of developments that generate a significant number of movements whose origins and/or destination are not local to the area, should be sited where they can easily access the strategic route network with the minimum of environmental impact on the surrounding area especially where this is residential. The policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant policies within the Joint Structure Plan, including Policy 49: Transport Requirements of New Development. This provides the framework of transport requirements that should be met through new development. This is consistent with and develops upon the advice from Central Government contained in PPG 13: Transport (1994).

5.40 Central Government advice, contained in, PPG 4: Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms (1992), states that development plans should take account of the locational requirements of businesses by providing a wide range of sites to meet the different needs of existing and potential operators. The guidance also stresses the need for such sites to be located so that their direct or indirect impact on the local environment is minimised.

5.41 Policy 18 seeks to reconcile these requirements in Somerset and Exmoor within the context of the focused development strategy and in accordance with, sustainable development. Emphasis is made on reducing the need for people to travel to and from their workplace. This can be achieved by the encouragement of compatible land-use activities such as, commercial offices and light industrial which come within use class B1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, within, or adjoining, existing/proposed, residential areas. It is accepted that not all types of industrial activity can be accommodated in this way and that sites would also have to be provided in locations where their impact on the local environment could be minimised. Where appropriate, the redevelopment of existing redundant sites within settlements for employment purposes would be encouraged providing that the potential uses would not adversely affect the local environment or conflict with the requirements of other relevant development plan policies.

## THE RURAL ECONOMY

5.42 Government guidance in PPG 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (1997), recognises the changing nature of economic activity in the countryside. This was confirmed by publication of the document, Rural Economies, by the Cabinet Office, in 1999, which highlighted the economic problems and opportunities that currently exist in the rural areas of Britain. The need to assist, through the planning process, the diversification of the rural economy to provide a wide range of employment opportunities for local people is a government priority. However the means through which new economic activities are encouraged must be consistent with the need to protect the built and natural environment of rural Somerset and Exmoor particularly within the national park.

5.43 The Joint Structure Plan strategy seeks to focus a higher proportion of development towards the fifteen main settlements. This strategy needs to be implemented sensitively to ensure that investment is not unduly drawn away from rural areas. The maintenance of rural employment opportunities will also minimise the need for commuting to work in larger, more distant centres.

5.44 The objectives and policy set out below provide balance to the overall strategy by ensuring that the future development needs of the rural economy are addressed. In doing so, it is recognised that the rural economy is undergoing considerable change and needs support to diversify. The fact that the local economies of parts of rural Somerset and Exmoor are relatively disadvantaged is a further influence upon policy. In addition the vitality of rural communities often reflects the range of social facilities on offer locally. There is a need to ensure that proposals to enhance provision are assisted by the development plan.

### Objectives

- To support rural areas
- To enable the rural economy to respond to changes in the economic base of the rural areas.

### **POLICY 19 EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY PROVISION IN RURAL AREAS**

**In rural areas provision should be made for development which creates or enhances local employment, shopping or community facilities, including development necessary for the purposes of agriculture and development associated with the diversification of agricultural units.**

5.45 It is essential that employment opportunities are maintained and created in rural areas to help sustain rural communities and reduce the need to travel. Furthermore, throughout the plan area there are pockets of economically and socially vulnerable rural areas. These include locations both within and outside formally designated areas covered by the Joint Structure Plan, known as Rural Priority Areas. Also parts of West Somerset and Exmoor receive priority for European Union structural funds under their Objective 2 status.

5.46 The land based industries, particularly agriculture, are experiencing continued employment change. A number of settlements are excessively dependent upon a single industry or key employer. By ensuring the allocation of sufficient land and sympathetic consideration of appropriate development proposals in economically vulnerable areas, this policy provides for further diversification of the rural economy and hence continued employment opportunities both in farm-based and other sectors of the rural economy. Within the National Park the provision of facilities for community and employment purposes will also be subject to the requirements of Policy 2: Exmoor National Park, and any relevant local plan

policies. This seeks to ensure that any development is essential to the economic and social well being of the affected community. Within the National Park, Local Plan policies will seek to retain existing employment land and buildings for such purposes to foster living and working communities in the longer term.

5.47 Provision should be made for employment development and facilities within existing settlements. Local plans should set down strict policy criteria for the release and development of land for these purposes outside of settlements, as well as detailed development control policies. Development proposals for the conversion of rural buildings for employment or community use, particularly local shopping provision where these currently do not exist or are at risk within a settlement, should be favoured in preference to those for residential purposes. As with urban areas every attempt should be made to maximise the re-use of previously developed land in the interests of reducing the need for greenfield development. However, this should not be interpreted as permitting any form of development on previously developed land in the open countryside. Where such sites become available any development proposal will have to clearly demonstrate that the activity is both appropriate and needed in that location and cannot be accommodated within existing settlement boundaries. Provision for development in rural areas should be made in accordance with the requirements of the relevant strategy policies (STR 5: Development in Rural Centres and Villages, and STR 6: Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages) and the natural environment policies (Policy 1 - Policy 7).

## **SHOPPING AND TOWN CENTRES**

5.48 Shopping is an activity undertaken by all sections of the population. The full range of shopping facilities must be as available for the young, the old and the less mobile members of the community as for everyone else. Whilst town centres have traditionally provided the locations where the full range has been readily available and accessible to all, congestion and the evolution of new forms of retail development have led to the establishment of new retail locations in areas of redevelopment within towns or on their outskirts.

5.49 Central Government policy for shopping is set out primarily in PPG 6: Town Centres and Retail Development (1996). This highlights the value of sustaining or enhancing the vitality and viability of town centres that serve the whole community. They can provide a focus for retailers and other financial and commercial users where the proximity of competing businesses facilitates competition from which consumers benefit. The intention of the Government is to ensure the availability of a wide range of shopping opportunities to all and maintain an efficient and innovative retail sector. A balance must be struck that makes the most of town centres without creating unnecessary journeys, congestion and pollution or stifling the development of modern facilities. A strong relationship can therefore be drawn between government shopping policy and the Joint Structure Plan's aims, so leading to the following objectives.

### **Objectives**

- To secure the long term future of town centres by maintaining, enhancing and promoting them as principal areas for general retail activity
- To maintain accessibility to retail facilities for all sections of the population

## **POLICY 20 THE RETAIL FRAMEWORK**

**Retail development should be well related to settlements. The overall scale of retail facilities in, or adjacent to, any particular settlement**

**should be commensurate with the strategic importance attributed to that settlement by the strategic policies of the plan.**

**In providing for development which has the potential to create change in the pattern of shopping centres, the vitality and viability of existing town and local centres, including centres providing local shopping facilities in rural areas, should be prime considerations.**

5.50 The settlement pattern in Somerset and Exmoor involves a fairly even spread of settlements of different sizes across the plan area, each serving a slightly different purpose depending upon its size and its relationship to its hinterland. Most retail provision in the plan area is located in existing settlements. This situation has prevailed through the period of retail modernisation, which saw the construction of large new stores in many towns across Britain over the last 20 years. The larger towns in Somerset and Exmoor have experienced this modernisation. In the smaller ones this has taken the form of new precincts and redevelopments, including, typically, a large convenience store and new parking. The larger towns have been provided with new convenience and durable retail space both in the town centre and in new accessible locations in or on the edge of the settlement.

5.51 In general terms the relatively steady provision of new space in the towns covered by the Joint Structure Plan, compared to more intensive construction in heavily populated parts of the country, has helped to maintain a retail balance between settlements. However, the greater provision in the larger settlements, particularly in Taunton and Yeovil and a rise in mobility has encouraged a decline in small centres and in the number of village shops. The provision of modern retail facilities has had a fairly even distribution across the plan area and this has helped to supplement the existing retail units in those shopping areas that perform a role and function of more than just very local influence. As a whole, the shops located within the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan, therefore, provide a major retail facility for the population. This has built up over a long period of time and has been integrated with other intensive land uses and the transport network.

5.52 The nature of this relationship with other uses has been closely examined more recently through joint working of the County Council, the National Park Authority and the District Councils on a series of 'town studies'. Through these joint town studies, the transport needs of the identified individual settlements, consistent with a sustainable approach to development, are being established and will take full account of the prime role of town centres in retail provision. In the context of retailing, they will help to implement improved pedestrian, cycle and public transport access to shopping and an up-to-date approach to parking, on a consistent basis across the towns of Somerset and Exmoor so that an even pattern of shopping facilities can be maintained. Retail development in those settlements covered by the town studies will have to be considered in the context of the appropriate strategy policies (Policy STR 2: Towns, and Policy STR 3: Rural Centres and Villages), and the relevant district-wide local plan policy where appropriate that identify their designation. It will also have to take into account the requirements the relevant strategy policy (Policy STR 4: Development in Towns, or Policy STR 5: Development in Rural Centres and Villages) and the sequential test framework for the location of retail development provided in Policy 21: Town Centre Uses, of the Joint Structure Plan.

5.53 The Joint Structure Plan strategy seeks to focus new development in such a way that it relates well to existing settlements. The strategy to focus development on the fifteen larger towns will maintain a structure, across the plan area, of retail facilities in which the scope for major new retail developments in towns will relate closely to the growth and functions of the town concerned. This will be determined ultimately in district-wide local plans and so influence the potential for new major retail proposals in particular settlements. The management and promotion of the shopping facilities of individual settlements by local authorities will help to clarify the potential for significant new retail developments.

## **POLICY 21 TOWN CENTRE USES**

**The functional centres of Towns and Rural Centres will be the primary focal points of new facilities particularly for shopping, leisure, entertainment and, financial and administrative services, which need to be accessible to a wide range of the population and are suitable for access by a choice of means of transport. In identifying sites for such development, a sequential approach, that respects the sustainable principles of this plan, should investigate opportunities in the following order:**

- 1. in town centres,**
- 2. in edge-of-town centre locations,**
- 3. in local centres, and only then,**
- 4. in new locations within or well related to the settlements concerned, that are accessible by a choice of means of transport.**

**Consideration should be given to the impact that the development might have on the vitality and viability of the existing Town or Rural Centre and other similar settlements nearby, and to measures necessary to maintain a balance between them.**

5.54 Central Government policy seeks to establish the location of sites for new retail and related development through the development plan process. Town centres are now being recognised as long standing assets not to be indiscriminately undermined. They can take many different forms in individual settlements. Policy 21 is intended to ensure that development supports existing viable town and local shopping centres in those settlements designated in the strategy policies (STR 2: Towns, and STR 3: Rural Centres and Villages) as Towns and Rural Centres, which provide a broad range of facilities and services, in order to sustain their vitality and viability. This objective will also be secured by work, co-ordinated with the private sector by local authorities through town centre managers. This activity should develop individual visions for the centres of each town, so dealing with their problems, building on their characteristics and stimulating mixed uses and evening activity.

5.55 Within Somerset and Exmoor only the largest of the settlements, Taunton and Yeovil, have more than one clearly identified centre for shopping and related town centre activities. With the exception of these two towns, the sequential test contained in Policy 21, should be applied at the settlement level. It should also be considered in the context of the requirements of Policy 20: The Retail Framework. Details on the type and scale of retail and related development that would be considered in each settlement may be provided through policies contained in the relevant district-wide local plan. Retail development proposals affecting town centres will have to also take account of the requirements of the scale of development appropriate to that settlement as determined through the strategy policies STR 4: Development in Towns, and STR 5: Development in Rural Centres and Villages, of the Joint Structure Plan.

5.56 Shops in town centres are also part of a wider range of activities including social, leisure and cultural facilities that are required for the needs of the whole community. The role of other shopping areas is also provided for in this policy, particularly those serving everyday needs at a more local level and a wide range of smaller settlements. The nature and purpose of the sequential approach to site identification is set out in PPG 6: Town Centres and Retail Development (1996). Within the plan area, the relatively even spread of town centres dictates that their fortunes are inter-related and any change in their relative ranges of facilities should preferably be planned. Policy 21 refines the concept in PPG 6: Town Centres and Retail

Development (1996). It sets the principle of the sequential approach for Somerset and Exmoor in order to encourage local authorities to have regard to the retail needs and prosperity of other nearby centres, within the plan area and in neighbouring areas, in the selection of locations for retail and related activities.

## **TOURISM**

5.57 Government advice and a national policy framework for tourism development is provided through PPG 21: Tourism (1992). It recognises that this type of activity creates its own distinctive development and land-use planning issues that need to be addressed. Tourism is seen as an important part of the economy throughout the South West. It is considered to embrace not just holiday making, whether long or short term stays, but all other forms of visit, such as business conferences or specialist events where individuals will also have an opportunity to enjoy the general attractions and facilities of an area. The overall profile of visitors is changing, with a greater proportion of tourists being in the older age groups. The extent of the active tourist season has been gradually expanding, with increasing numbers of people taking holidays and/or short breaks in the early spring and late autumn. In some parts of the plan area, especially the coastal settlements, the local economy is highly dependent on the tourism industry for employment. Any extension in the tourist season would not only help to consolidate and stabilise the benefits of tourism for a local economy but also help to justify investment in the better quality facilities that visitors to the area are increasingly expecting to be available.

5.58 In the more inland parts of Somerset and Exmoor, tourism promotion is primarily concentrated on conservation and the rural image of the area, especially in the Exmoor National Park and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The scope for new large-scale tourist attractions is, therefore, rather restricted. It would, however, be consistent with the overall strategy to encourage sustainable tourism initiatives to emerge that maintain the health of existing local economies providing that they do not conflict with the requirements of other relevant policies within the Joint Structure Plan. The profile of lesser-known parts of the plan area could be raised so long as their character and local distinctiveness are safeguarded.

5.59 Along the coast of Somerset and Exmoor, tourism continues to comprise a mix of rural recreation, water sport and, traditional seaside holidays. The countryside and coastal policy requirements are set out elsewhere in the Joint Structure Plan. Any new and/or extended tourism related development would be expected to conform to these requirements. Appropriate tourism development would primarily be expected to take place within or adjoining the coastal settlements and is expected to play an important part in ensuring the needs and maintenance of existing the facilities of traditional seaside resorts are met. The objective for tourism, under which these various requirements above may be reconciled, is set out below.

### **Objective**

- To accommodate the development of good quality tourist facilities and accommodation

### **POLICY 22 TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SETTLEMENTS**

**Provision should be made for the development of tourist attractions and accommodation in settlements or defined Tourism Development Areas. New developments which would generate substantial transport movements should be accessible by public transport.**

## **POLICY 23**

### **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

**Outside of settlements or defined Tourism Development Areas, the priority is to improve existing attractions and accommodation and to mitigate the environmental impact of existing development. This should be set in the context of the following considerations:**

- **provision for the extension of existing tourism development should be made where net environmental improvement would result by way of the relocation of sites away from sensitive areas or by the provision of better layouts or landscaping;**
- **provision for tourism development that facilitates farm diversification should be made where it is compatible with the rural location;**
- **new development which would generate substantial transport movements should normally be accessible by public transport.**

5.60 Policy 22 and Policy 23 establish the land use strategy for tourism across the plan area by setting a framework within which district-wide local plans can bring forward appropriate initiatives and encourage private proposals for any particular area. These policies have been framed so as to provide guidance on the location of tourism development in the strategic context and are relevant to all tourist facilities and all types of accommodation. These policies should be read in conjunction with Policy 15: Coastal Development, and Policy 19: Employment and Community Provision in Rural Areas, of the Joint Structure Plan which establish the development criteria for the coastal areas and open countryside respectively, and, Policy 49: Transport Requirements of New Development, which is concerned with the generation of new and additional traffic movements arising from new development.

5.61 Provision for tourism development should, in the first instance, be made in settlements or in the defined Tourism Development Areas. A Tourism Development Area is a planning tool that can be used through district-wide local plans. It can be used to identify an area, or extension to an existing designated area, where tourism related development and activities in that location would be encouraged but other forms of development would be considered inappropriate. The boundaries of these areas will be clearly defined in district-wide local plans. Provision for the extension of existing tourism development should not be made in the countryside, except where it would bring about the net environmental improvement of existing facilities. In the case of new facilities, provision is likely to be small scale and should involve facilities to which a rural location is essential, such as where it would facilitate farm diversification or the provision of local heritage or countryside attractions in accordance with countryside policy. Exceptions may be made for small-scale tourism development in the remote rural parts of the plan area where the economic benefits can be demonstrated as outweighing the potential environmental damage that would result from additional car use. Where tourism development is proposed in the open countryside consideration will need to be given to the requirements of the relevant natural environment policies (Policy 1 - Policy 7) within the Joint Structure Plan plus the appropriate policies in the district-wide local plan. It is important that any new facilities are adequately related to the transport network &, where possible, made accessible by public transport. Local plans should provide detailed policies to set out the criteria for development control.

## **MINERALS**

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MINERALS EXTRACTION**

5.62 Somerset and Exmoor have a variety of mineral resources that are of value to manufacturing, construction and horticulture and that are raw materials for many products in use on a day-to-day basis. Mineral working is important to the local economy of Somerset and Exmoor because of the revenue generated and the people employed.

5.63 The County of Somerset is nationally important as a supplier of crushed rock aggregates and has traditionally been a major supplier of hard rock to the South East region. Peat extraction and building stone quarrying are also locally important. However, mineral extraction is environmentally damaging and it is the role of the Joint Structure Plan to set down a framework for future mineral development that minimises environmental impact whilst recognising the economic importance of minerals.

## **MINERAL RESOURCE**

5.64 Somerset and Exmoor have many mineral resources. The most significant of these are Carboniferous limestone from the Mendip Hills and peat from the Somerset Levels. There is also a diverse range of minerals used as local building materials.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

5.65 The Government has set objectives for sustainable development of minerals planning in, MPG 1: General Considerations and the Development Plan System (1996). These objectives are set out below:

1. To conserve minerals as far as possible, whilst ensuring an adequate supply to meet needs;
2. To ensure that the environmental impacts caused by mineral operations are kept, as far as possible, to an acceptable minimum;
3. To minimise production of waste and to encourage efficient use of materials, including appropriate use of high quality materials and recycling of waste;
4. To encourage sensitive working, restoration and aftercare practices so as to preserve and enhance the overall quality of the environment;
5. To protect areas of designated landscape or nature conservation from development, other than in exceptional circumstances where it has been demonstrated that development is in the public interest; and,
6. To prevent the unnecessary sterilisation of mineral resources.

5.66 The Department of the Environment Transport and Regions commissioned research on the sustainable use of minerals as part of its Geological and Minerals Planning Research Programme. Part of the research focused upon examination of the potential for increased recycling of mineral and construction waste. The research also considered the standards and specifications for various uses of minerals in order to identify possibilities for the use of alternative materials.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

5.67 The Joint Structure Plan sets the strategic context for minerals development. **The Somerset Minerals Local Plan** and the Exmoor National Park Local Plan will develop this strategic guidance to provide a detailed framework.

## **THE CRUSHED ROCK STRATEGY**

5.68 The strategic aim of the Somerset Structure Plan Alteration No.2 was to acknowledge the role of Somerset in meeting national demand for minerals while reducing the environmental impact of extraction. The scope of the Strategic Planning Authorities to change the patterns of mineral working is constrained by Government planning guidance, as set out in Mineral Planning Guidance notes (MPGs). In the case of Somerset it is also constrained by the scale of existing permitted reserves, many of which date back to the 1940s. Therefore, while reductions in the output of some minerals would bring environmental benefits, the reality is that the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan, will continue to be a significant supplier of crushed rock aggregate. The supply of crushed rock will continue to make up the major share of the regional supply because of the extensive permitted reserves, regardless of any attempt to constrain the future provision of sites. The question for the Joint Structure Plan, in relation to crushed rock, is how best to secure the supply in a way which minimises the impact on the environment.

5.69 It is considered appropriate to continue the previous strategy, as expressed in the Somerset Structure Plan incorporating Alteration No.2, but with greater emphasis on environmental protection. National policy also seeks the retention of policies to safeguard mineral resources and identify broad areas where extraction will occur. These will be set out in the plan policies.

5.70 Recent proposals by quarry operators to extend existing limestone quarries in the Mendips have proven to be very controversial. There is no reason to believe that future proposals will be any less controversial but each case will have to be determined within the context of detailed policies and criteria in the Somerset Minerals Local Plan.

## **PEAT**

5.71 Peat extraction is in two limited areas between Glastonbury and Wedmore. The Peat Local Plan, published in August 1992, applied detailed controls over extraction. However, since that plan was prepared, there has been an agreement that has turned large areas of peat working over to nature conservation use and has lengthened or shortened the life of the remaining individual reserves with planning permission.

5.72 Central Government guidance contained in MPG 13: Guidelines for Peat Provision in England (1995), gives advice in respect of the extraction of peat. This guidance states that the future extraction of peat in England from any new sites should be restricted to areas which have already been significantly damaged by recent human activity and are of limited or no current nature conservation, or archaeological value. The aim of the structure plan is to secure a more sustainable future for peat extraction on the Levels and Moors at the lower production levels currently being experienced. The approach for peat will be influenced significantly by the overall strategy for the future of the Levels and Moors. To further this strategy, policies will ensure higher standards of reclamation and after-care in recognition of the unique landscape and ecological value of the Moors and its complicated hydrology. Peat extraction should therefore continue at this lower level within the production zones to be defined in the proposed Somerset Minerals Local Plan. This local plan will consider the production of peat in detail. Supplementary Planning Guidance is being prepared in respect of land use planning and land management issues in the Somerset Levels and Moors.

### **Objective**

To secure the production of minerals to make an appropriate contribution to local, regional and national requirements consistent with the principles of sustainable development for minerals planning through optimum use of the mineral resource and by reducing the net environmental impact of planned mineral extraction.

#### **POLICY 24 MINERAL SAFEGUARDING**

**Significant known or locally important mineral resources and the infrastructure for, and associated with, the transport of minerals should be safeguarded from sterilisation by other development.**

5.73 The aim of this policy is to safeguard known mineral resources from development that would seriously hinder their extraction. In Somerset and Exmoor, any new mineral resources that are likely to be worked in the life of the Joint Structure Plan are overlain by open countryside. Existing mineral workings are generally unlikely to be affected by new development because they are protected by settlement and countryside policies. This policy sets out to safeguard significant resources rather than all known deposits, and locally important mineral resources such as building stone quarries, some of which may not be viable during the life of the Joint Structure Plan. A safeguarding policy is considered to be necessary in order to protect existing operations and known resources that are or could be of importance. It allows for non-mineral development to occur where it is possible to extract the minerals prior to implementation of the proposal, although it is considered that this will not happen very often, or where there is an overriding need for the development. The reference to 'sterilisation' in the policy is included as it is also important to protect the sites for wharves, depots and transport infrastructure such as rail links that may be necessary for the movement of materials. The loss of such areas to other development could constitute a serious hindrance to mineral supply and have significant traffic implications. The Somerset Minerals Local Plan will consider the safeguarding of specific sites.

#### **POLICY 25 AGGREGATE PRODUCTION**

**The working of limestone and other hard rocks for the production of construction aggregates will be centred on the East Mendip Area. The release of further resources will seek to achieve a balance between the environmental impacts and economic and other benefits of extraction.**

5.74 The quarrying of limestone within Somerset and Exmoor is concentrated in the Mendip Hills area where primary aggregates are produced in the form of crushed rock. The concentration of the quarrying industry in that area is largely dictated by geology. Considerable benefits accrue from such concentration such as new rail links that must be funded by the long-term returns from cost efficient extraction. Finance is available in the form of grants under Section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 and the Railways Act 1993 (Track Access Grants). No bids have been made to date but funding from the private sector and Railtrack would be necessary.

5.75 The strategy of the plan is to continue to concentrate extraction of aggregates in the East Mendip Area where most of the existing commitments are located. The background research for the Somerset Minerals Local Plan has critically examined the specific area that must be identified. Nevertheless, extraction will be concentrated in the east Mendip area for some time in view of existing commitments there and the scope for further new extraction. Furthermore, much of the Mendip Hills to the west of the concentrated working, is designated as the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where the additional exploitation of mineral resources will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances as set out in the policy below.

**POLICY 26  
MINERAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AND  
AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

**Provision for the extraction of minerals in the Exmoor National Park and Areas Of Outstanding Natural Beauty should only be made where it is in the national interest or meets the local requirement for traditional building materials. Any such provision will be considered in the context of:**

- **the need for the development in terms of national considerations of mineral supply and the supply of traditional building materials;**
- **whether alternative supplies can be made available at reasonable cost or that the need can be met in some other way;**
- **the environmental impact and the extent to which impact can be minimised.**

5.76 The Government considers that major development should only occur in National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in exceptional circumstances and this is developed in Policy 2: Exmoor National Park, and Policy 3: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, of the Joint Structure Plan. The policy above sets the framework for the provision of mineral extraction in these important landscapes. This consideration will consist of an assessment of the need for the provision in national and local terms, taking account of minerals supply and economic considerations and the environmental impact. The availability of alternative sources of supply in less sensitive areas is also a valid consideration.

**Mineral Working and Sites of Special Scientific Interest**

5.77 Somerset will have several sites which are of international wildlife significance designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the European Wildlife Directive and approximately 160 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The sites are designated to conserve wildlife by the protection of habitat upon which it depends. They are protected from damage, with their important scientific features conserved by appropriate management. The Government will usually call in proposals for the Secretary of State to determine which are likely to significantly affect sites of international importance and recognised national importance. Where a proposal will affect an SSSI, either directly or indirectly, the Minerals Planning Authorities will consult English Nature. Policy 1: Nature Conservation, of the Joint Structure Plan sets down policy for considering development proposals that affect SSSIs.

**Mineral Working and the National Heritage**

5.78 Minerals working, by its very nature is capable of damaging or destroying irreplaceable sites of importance to the national heritage, such as listed buildings and archaeology. The Government advises that important features or remains should be physically preserved wherever practical. The Joint Structure Plan sets the strategic framework in respect of development and archaeology and listed buildings. The Somerset Minerals Local Plan and the Exmoor National Park Local Plan will include detailed development control policies as appropriate.

**POLICY 27  
MINERALS LANDBANKS**

**A landbank of permitted reserves of aggregate minerals will be maintained in accordance with national minerals policy guidance.**

5.79 Central Government advice contained in, MPG 6: Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England (1994), states that policies should be included in development plans which provide for the maintenance of a landbank for all aggregate minerals. The guidance defines a 'landbank' as; "*A stock of permissions for the winning and working of minerals*". A landbank of sand and gravel should aim to be sufficient to meet seven years supply. The advice in respect of crushed rock is that a longer period may be necessary. The existing stock of permissions for crushed rock production in Somerset alone was about 650 million tonnes (1999). A proportion of these reserves are within currently dormant units which the Somerset Minerals Planning Authority does not wish to see reactivated. This matter is considered further in the Somerset Minerals Local Plan.

**POLICY 28  
LEVEL OF MINERAL OUTPUT**

**Subject to acceptability on environmental, transport and economic grounds, land will be made available for mineral working to maintain an adequate supply of minerals to contribute to national, regional and local needs.**

5.80 Regional guidelines for the provision of aggregates are contained in MPG 6: Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England (1994). The provision of land won aggregates for the South West region, in the period 1992 to 2006, is given as 105mt of sand and 610mt of crushed rock. It is anticipated that 14% of the sand and gravel and about 32% of the crushed rock production will be exported, principally to the South East. Somerset is the major crushed rock producer in the region and has, as of February 1996, an approved maximum output of 20.38 million tonnes of aggregate per annum. During the period 1992 - 1998 the average production rate was approximately 13 million tonnes per annum. In order to meet the overall target provision included in MPG 6, demand for minerals originating from Somerset for the remainder of the period, 1999 - 2006, would have to be at the average rate of production of 27.87 million tonnes per annum. The absence of major construction projects in those geographical areas where the minerals from Somerset are usually demanded suggests that this rate of production is unlikely to be attained, and sustained, during the remainder of the period. The Somerset Minerals Local Plan will review the likely demand over the period to 2011 and allocate areas for mineral working where necessary. Somerset is not a significant sand and gravel producer.

5.81 The Joint Structure Plan covers the period to 2011. Therefore, it will be necessary to review future mineral output levels in a future review of the Joint Structure Plan because there is currently no guidance on forecast requirement beyond 2006. The Somerset Minerals Local Plan will review the likely demand over the period to 2011 and allocate areas for mineral working where necessary.

**POLICY 29  
PEAT WORKING**

**The working of peat will be limited to designated production zones between Glastonbury and Wedmore where;**

- **the site has little or no nature conservation or archaeological value;**
- **the deposits are economically viable;**
- **the site is likely to become available during the plan period.**

5.82 The peat reserves in central Somerset are located in a unique area, rich in wildlife habitats and archaeology that has been recognised in numerous international, national and local designations. The working of peat will continue to be concentrated in production zones that will be reviewed and defined in the Somerset Minerals Local Plan. The production arising from these workings will be time limited as Peat is a finite resource. The full extent of the timescale over which peat will continue to be extracted will be determined by a combination of;

- the areas where extraction has and will be approved, and,
- the volume of the approved resources and, the rate of extraction.

5.83 It is intended that future peat production will occur on a more sustainable basis as defined in MPG 1: General Considerations and the Development Plan System (1996), by concentrating development on sites where environmental impact can be minimised. Future provision should only be made for the extraction of peat where it is economical and is likely to be implemented during the life of the plan and where the working will not damage or destroy important habitats or archaeology. The Somerset Minerals Planning Authority will continue to require measures for the reclamation and aftercare of peat workings to make them environmentally acceptable and fit for after-use in accordance with policy set out in the Peat Local Plan, which is to be replaced by the Somerset Minerals Local Plan. This will usually be achieved by means of planning conditions. Within Somerset and Exmoor the predominant after-uses will be nature conservation and agriculture.

### **POLICY 30 RECLAMATION AND AFTER-USE**

**Proposals for the extraction of mineral resources should provide for a reclamation scheme which must be beneficial to the local area and be environmentally acceptable.**

5.84 Government guidance in respect of the reclamation and after-use of mineral workings is contained in MPG 7: The Reclamation of Mineral Workings (1996). Reclamation and after-care must follow extraction and will be a material consideration in the evaluation of proposals. The policy embodies these strategic requirements and the need for reclamation proposals to benefit the locality or the local environment. The policy will also form the basis for resisting new proposals where acceptable reclamation schemes are not forthcoming. Reclamation schemes can make a valuable contribution to the environment by developing new and different landscape features and by the creation of new wildlife habitats, thereby increasing biodiversity.

### **POLICY 31 RECYCLING MINERAL WASTE**

**The recycling of mineral waste for use as aggregate, where not otherwise required in connection with future reclamation or landscape proposals, and the provision of necessary plant should be favourably considered in the provision for minerals extraction.**

5.85 Past experience in Somerset and Exmoor indicates that most mineral waste has been required for reclamation or landscaping purposes. The policy recognises this but seeks to secure the most beneficial use of quarry wastes in order to reduce the need for primary extraction in the future. Recycling should be pursued where net environmental benefits could accrue. More efficient use of materials quarried could be made, for example the washing of scalplings. This is consistent with the environmental aims of the Joint Structure Plan and with

central government advice contained in MPG 6: Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England (1994). The re-use of construction wastes, referred to in policy STR1: Sustainable Development and, Policy 68: Use of Inert Wastes Arising from Development, also has a role to play in reducing the need for primary aggregates. Active and former mineral workings provide opportunities for the siting of facilities needed to process such materials.

## **POLICY 32 EXTRACTION CRITERIA**

**Provision for the extraction of minerals other than crushed rock or peat should be made where they:**

- **can be carried out consistently with objectives of sustainability for mineral planning;**
- **achieve an acceptable balance between the environmental costs and economic benefits of extraction;**
- **take account of what planning controls should be imposed to minimise any adverse impacts on the environment;**
- **are adequately related to the highways network and other transport infrastructure, where only a small number of lorries require access.**

5.86 Outside Exmoor National Park and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty there is some mineral working which falls outside the policies for aggregates and peat above. This includes small-scale extraction to provide building stone, essential for maintaining the fabric of historic buildings and for development that accords with local distinctiveness. The provision of such development should be considered against the criteria in Policy 32 and other relevant development plan policies.