Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan Review

August 2019
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1 Introduction

The new Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) came into being on Monday 1 April 2019. The Council was created by The Somerset West and Taunton (Local Government Changes) Order 2018 which combined the former West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council into a new single lower-tier district council. The new council is preparing a Local Plan. This Sustainability Appraisal (SA), incorporating strategic environmental assessment (SEA), is a key piece of the evidence base supporting the development of the plan.

1.1 The geographical area

The Local Planning Authority area covers the Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) district but excludes that part of the district covered by the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) – Figure 1.1. The scope of the Local Plan and the SA and Scoping Report does not include the National Park.

SWT is a mixed urban and rural district located centrally within the South West Region in the County of Somerset. It covers 192 square miles (excluding 267 square miles of the Exmoor National Park) and serves a population of approx. 152,000. SWT is bordered by the authorities of Sedgemoor (north east), and South Somerset (south-east), North Devon (west), Mid Devon (south west) and East Devon (south).

Figure 1.1 Somerset West and Taunton
The district is predominantly rural in character although nearly half of the population lives within the County town of Taunton (population around 70,000). The seaside resort town of Minehead, together with the smaller adjacent settlement of Alcombe, has a population of 12,000; and Watchet and Williton are significant coastal settlements. The market town of Wellington also represents a significantly-sized settlement within the district with a population of around 13,000, and there are major rural centres of Wiveliscombe and Bishops Lydeard. In addition to rural centres, the district contains a large number of small villages and hamlets which are scattered around the district.

1.2 The new Local Plan

There is a statutory requirement for Local Planning Authorities to have an ‘up-to-date’ Local Plan. This is primarily concerned with ensuring Councils have a housing requirement figure based on up-to-date evidence/guidance. The West Somerset Local Plan was adopted in Nov 2016 and is deemed up-to-date at present as it is based upon the most recent housing need assessment guidance and adopted within the past 5 years.

However, the Taunton Deane Core Strategy was adopted in September 2012 and its housing requirement figure was not based on the most recent housing need assessment. The Core Strategy is also more than 5 years old which is a threshold in the National Planning Policy Framework for determining whether a Plan is up-to-date. Given the position of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy, and the introduction of the Government’s Standard Method for calculating housing need, there statutory need to produce a new Local Plan.

Furthermore, the creation of the new Council administrative area provides a justification to producing a new Local Plan to reflect the aims, aspirations and direction of travel for the new Council. In accordance the Local Government (Boundary Changes) Regulations 2018, SWT must adopt a local development document for the whole of the area within 5 years of the re-organisation date. The new plan will run to 2040.

The current Local Plan documents are:

Taunton Deane Borough Council:
- Saved policies of the Taunton Deane Local Plan (2004)
- Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (Adopted 2008)
- Taunton Deane Core Strategy (Adopted 2012)
- Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (Adopted 2016).

West Somerset Council (excluding Exmoor National Park):
- Saved policies of the West Somerset Local Plan (2006)
- West Somerset Local Plan (Adopted 2016).
1.3 Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to carry out a sustainability appraisal (SA) of their emerging Local Plan. SA is a systematic process that aims to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives. The SA process is an opportunity to consider ways by which the Local Plan can contribute to improvements in environmental, social and economic conditions, as well as a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that the plan might otherwise have.

In addition to the SA requirement, local planning authorities are also required to conduct a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) in accordance with the requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the ‘SEA regulations’). This SA also covers the requirements of SEA, and the term SA in this report means ‘SA incorporating the requirements of the SEA Directive’.

Appendix 1 outlines where this draft SA Scoping Report (subsequent SA Reports) fulfils the SEA Directive’s requirements.

This Scoping Report is the first stage in the SA process and determines the scope of the SA/SEA of the Local Plan. The Planning Practice Guidance states that the scoping stage (Stage A) must identify the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the SA report. It should set out the context, objectives and approach of the assessment; and identify relevant environmental, economic and social issues and objectives. A key aim of the scoping procedure is to help ensure the sustainability appraisal process is proportionate and relevant to the Local Plan being assessed.

The SA stages are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage A:</th>
<th>Setting the context, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope (the Scoping Report represents this stage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage B:</td>
<td>Developing and refining options and assessing effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage C:</td>
<td>Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage D:</td>
<td>Consulting on the Development Plan Document and Sustainability Appraisal Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage E:</td>
<td>Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the Development Plan Document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Scoping Stage (Stage A) is divided into the following tasks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoping task</th>
<th>Aim of scoping task</th>
<th>Addressed in this report at:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1: Identifying other relevant plans, policies, programmes, and sustainability objectives</td>
<td>To document how the plan is affected by outside factors and suggest ideas for how any constraints can be addressed.</td>
<td>Chapter 2 and Appendix 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2: Collecting baseline information</td>
<td>To provide an evidence base for sustainability issues, effects and monitoring</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3: Identifying sustainability issues</td>
<td>To focus the SA and streamline subsequent stages, including the development of the SA framework, prediction of effects and monitoring</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4: Developing the SA framework</td>
<td>To develop a means by which sustainability of the plan can be appraised</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5: Consulting on the scope of the SA</td>
<td>To consult with statutory bodies to ensure SA covers key sustainability issues</td>
<td>Chapter 5 explains how this will be carried out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scoping stage was carried out in June 2019. The statutory consultees – Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England – were given five weeks to comment. Only the Environment Agency responded. All of its recommendations were included in the revised scoping report.

1.4 Difficulties encountered

Wherever possible, the most up to date data and information has been used for this scoping report. In some instances, however, data is presented separately for parts of the SWT covering previous local authority boundaries (i.e. Taunton Deane and West Somerset), and some data extends into the National Park area. This is due to combined data being unavailable, or it not having been broken down from the National Park area. Some information such as baseline data on minerals and to a lesser degree on waste and recycling is only available at County level.

Where the council’s GIS data are limited, this could affect the site appraisals planned for later stages of the sustainability appraisal.

1.5 An integrated approach to Sustainability Appraisal

Sustainability Appraisal incorporating SEA is not the only form of assessment that Development Plan Documents will be subjected to. We have also considered the relationship of our Sustainability Appraisal process to the following assessments:
**Habitats Regulations Screening**
Plans also need to be assessed under another important piece of European legislation: Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. So-called Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) assess whether the plan is likely to have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of any wildlife site of European importance. There are several protected European sites within the district as well as several outside of the Planning Area which could be directly or indirectly affected by the proposals set out in our Local Development Framework. A separate HRA will be prepared for the plan, and will inform the Sustainability Appraisal.

**Health and Equality Impact Assessment**
Increasingly Local Planning Authorities have sought to assess the health and well-being implications of plans, and their impacts on different equalities groups. We consider that by including a Sustainability Appraisal objective on health and well-being we can adequately identify and assess any likely impacts arising from plans, policies and proposals. We also consider that our Sustainability Appraisal objectives are sufficiently inclusive to help to ensure we meet the needs of all sectors of the community.
2  Policy context (Task A1)

The emerging Local Plan is informed and shaped by many national and international plans and policies related to sustainability and environmental protection. The key of these are the European Water Framework Directive\(^1\), Air Quality Directive\(^2\) and Habitats Directive\(^3\); and the national level National Planning Policy Framework 2019, Housing White Paper 2017\(^4\), and 25 year environment plan\(^5\). The Local Plan is also informed by the Somerset Future Transport Plan 2011-2026\(^6\), which promotes sustainable forms of transport; the emerging Somerset Waste Plan\(^7\); the Somerset Minerals Plan of 2015\(^8\) which sets policies and identifies sites for the extraction of certain minerals; and the management plans for the Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills AONBs\(^9\). Table 2.1 sets out main messages from these plans.

Table 2.1 Main messages from policy documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainability topic</th>
<th>Main messages from policy documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Population, health and deprivation | • Reduce deprivation and inequality  
• Improve access to open space, and develop new green infrastructure  
• Increase levels of walking and cycling  
• Provide for the needs of the ageing population |
| Housing | • Provide enough housing to meet local needs  
• Provide adequate amounts of affordable housing  
• Deliver an appropriate mixture of housing  
• Address homelessness |
| Economy and retail | • Provide enough employment land to support economic growth of the district  
• Encourage high value, high growth and knowledge industries  
• Support tourism  
• Improve skills to reduce unemployment and deprivation  
• Improve educational attainment |
| Transport | • Reduce the need to travel by siting development appropriately and increasing access to broadband  
• Reduce traffic and congestion  
• Ensure good access to local facilities by walking, cycling and |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainability topic</th>
<th>Main messages from policy documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>public transport</td>
<td>• Ensure timely provision of adequate transport infrastructure to support new development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air quality</td>
<td>• Protect and improve air quality, particularly in Air Quality Management Areas&lt;br&gt;• Consider the health implications of air pollution generated by new development; and the implications of existing air pollution on residents of new development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity</td>
<td>• Protect and enhance designated biodiversity sites, and biodiversity more widely&lt;br&gt;• Protect and enhance ecosystem services (the benefits provided by ecosystems)&lt;br&gt;• Provide biodiversity net gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>• Minimise emissions of greenhouse gases (national target is net zero emissions by 2050(^\text{10})) through e.g. energy efficient development and reducing the need to travel&lt;br&gt;• Support renewable energy&lt;br&gt;• Protect flood plains&lt;br&gt;• Reduce the risk of flooding caused by new development, and protect existing development from flooding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage</td>
<td>• Protect and enhance heritage assets and their settings&lt;br&gt;• Respect, maintain and strengthen local character and distinctiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>• Protect AONBs, National Parks and more local designations from inappropriate development&lt;br&gt;• Protect and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of landscapes and townscapes&lt;br&gt;• Promote high quality design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soils, minerals and waste</td>
<td>• Prioritise development on previously developed land over greenfield land&lt;br&gt;• Protect best and most versatile agricultural land&lt;br&gt;• Promote the waste hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>• Protect and enhance surface and groundwater quality&lt;br&gt;• Improve water efficiency&lt;br&gt;• Ensure timely provision of adequate water resource and wastewater treatment infrastructure (including phosphate stripping) to support new development&lt;br&gt;• Address high levels of nitrates in farmland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{10}\) The council's target is to achieve net zero by 2030
The Local Plan is unlikely to have significant impacts on neighbouring authorities, but ‘duty to cooperate’ discussions will be held. The status of adjacent local authorities’ Local Plans in July 2019 was:

- East Devon: Local Plan 2013-2031\(^{11}\) was adopted in 2016
- Exmoor National Park: Local Plan 2011-2031\(^{12}\) was adopted in 2017
- Greater Exeter Strategic Plan 2040\(^{13}\) is due to consult on an Options document during summer 2019
- Mid Devon: Local Plan review 2013-2033\(^{14}\) was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in 2017
- North Devon and Torridge: Local Plan 2011-2031\(^{15}\) was adopted in October 2018
- Sedgemoor: Local Plan 2011-2032\(^{16}\) was adopted in February 2019
- South Somerset: Local Plan 2006-2028\(^{17}\) was adopted in 2015

The Local Plan will set the framework for neighbourhood plans in the district. Four neighbourhood plans have already been made: Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone, Stogumber, Trull and Staplehay, and West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine. Other neighbourhood plans are in the process of being developed. Figure 2.1 shows how the SWT Local Plan links to the other plans.

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\(^{11}\) https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/1772841/Local-Plan-Final-Adopted-Plan-2016.pdf
\(^{13}\) https://www.gesp.org.uk/
\(^{14}\) https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/planning-policy/local-plan-review/
\(^{15}\) https://consult.torridge.gov.uk/portal/planning/localplan/adoption/
Chapter 3 provides more information on environmental objectives and policies that affect the plan.

Taunton was awarded Garden Town status in 2017. This will involve (Figure 2.2)\(^{18}\):

- Building 13,000 new homes in and adjacent to Taunton, including three new garden communities delivering over 8,000 homes
- Associated schools, leisure and other infrastructure
- A new 25 hectare employment site, ‘Nexus 25’, at junction 25 of the M5. This is expected to provide up to 4,000 new jobs.
- Enhancement of Taunton rail station, junction 2 of the M, and a new A303/A358 ‘expressway’
- Investment in Taunton town centre, including development of prime riverside sites.

\(^{18}\) [https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/garden-town/](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/garden-town/)
3 Collecting baseline information (Task A2) and identifying sustainability issues (Task A3)

The collection and interpretation of baseline information allows a better understanding of the area. This helps to make sure that the plan deals with existing and likely future problems, and makes a positive contribution towards quality of life. For the purposes of SA, the scoping report must include information about

- the current state of the area,
- the likely future of the area without the plan (‘business as usual’),
- the characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected, and
- any existing problems (‘sustainability issues’) which are relevant to the plan.

The third of these will be covered in more detail at the later site assessment stage; the rest are covered in this chapter.

The information which we have collected is focused on the social, environmental and economic characteristics of the area that could be addressed to some degree in the Local Plan. The key policies, plans, programmes and sustainability objectives identified at Chapter 2 and the baseline information from this chapter have led us to the identification of sustainability issues. These have been summarised under the relevant sustainability themes in this section.

3.1 Population, health and deprivation

Population and demographics

SWT had a population of about 152,000 in 2017, of which almost half live in Taunton. The new district of SWT shows a marked difference between the former District areas: 23% of former Taunton Deane population are of state pension age, whilst 34% of former West Somerset are of state pension age\(^\text{19}\). The District is not particularly ethnically diverse when compared to the national picture. In 2011, the percentage of white population in the District was 94% compared to the national average of 86%, and comparable to the Somerset average\(^\text{20}\). The percentage of white population in SWT has decreased slightly since the 2001 Census.


\(^{20}\) http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/district-community-profiles.html
Health, open space and sport

The health of the SWT population is mixed. In the 2011 census, 78% of residents from the former Taunton Deane and 81% of residents from the former West Somerset classified themselves in very good or good health, compared to 81% nationally\textsuperscript{21}. Life expectancy is similar to the England average for both men and women, but is 7.7 years lower for men and 5.1 years lower for women in the most deprived areas than in the least deprived areas\textsuperscript{22}.

The day-to-day activities of about 20% of SWT’s population are limited by ill health, and slightly over 10% of people provide unpaid care. This is very similar to the Somerset average. The key health problems for residents of the former Taunton Deane area are smoking, alcohol-specific hospital stays, hospital stays for self-harm and hip fractures in people aged 65 and over (for which it is the worst in England). For the former West Somerset, the key health problems are dementia diagnoses (for which it is the worst in England), diabetes, alcohol-specific hospital stays for under-18s, and hip fractures in older people. The prevalence of obesity is also increasing. Overall, this points to the health issues associated with an ageing population and rural isolation. Overall health in SWT improved in 2001-2007, but has levelled out since then\textsuperscript{23}.

The main acute hospital covering SWT is Musgrove Park in Taunton, and several community hospitals deal with outpatient clinics, maternity and minor injuries. The population of SWT fluctuates during the year, and tourists can double the population in some areas during the summer. This puts pressure on health services.

In Taunton Deane\textsuperscript{24}, the total amount of open space in Taunton Deane per 1000 population is higher than the National Playing Field Association figure of 2.4 ha per 1000 head of population. However, a significant proportion of this (1.42 ha per 1000) is country parks and natural green space (not included in the NPFA standard), much of which is not maintained. The amount of useable maintained formal parks, amenity areas and green spaces (excluding allotments) is 2.53 ha per 1000, which is only slightly above the NPFA standard. Whilst the overall provision for active recreation is good, at 1.78 hectares per 1000, there are particular deficiencies in active recreation opportunities in certain communities.

Access to sports provision and community facilities in SWT is relatively good. However various studies\textsuperscript{25} have identified a need for:

- A number of football (15) and rugby pitches (19), grass and artificial, as well as longer term cricket grass pitches in the former Taunton Deane area. Other pitch sports:

\textsuperscript{21} Office of National Statistics, 2011 Census, General health, local authorities in England and Wales
\textsuperscript{22} Public Health England (2018) Taunton Deane Local Authority Health Profile 2018, and Public Health England (2018) West Somerset Local Authority Health Profile 2018, both at https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/area-search-results/E12000009?search_type=list-child-areas&place_name=South%20West. The inequality figures are for the former Taunton Deane only, as Public Health England could not calculate them for the former West Somerset.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} No comparable data exist for West Somerset
baseball, hockey, American football and rounders may have expansion needs later in the Local Plan period;

- an artificial grass pitch in the eastern part of SWT, for example in Stogursey, to respond to the lack of provision in that area and absorb demand from the non-home-based workers working at the Hinkley Point C development;
- a large hall to serve the former West Somerset area outside the catchment area of the Minehead leisure centre;
- a badminton court sized hall in the eastern and southern part of the former West Somerset area;
- Youth facilities, particularly given the withdrawal of funding for youth clubs since 2012;
- Allotments in Wellington, Ruishton, West Monkton and the new Garden communities to the north, north-east and south-west of Taunton;
- Children’s play areas and youth provision for 0-18 years of age, both informal and formal spaces;
- Community Halls in south-east of Wellington, Taunton town and the new Garden communities to the north, north-east and south-west of Taunton;

There also remains a community desire to see a new 25m swimming pool in Minehead, but evidence suggests that, even if a pool could be built, it would not be financially viable to run.

**Deprivation**

Deprivation in Somerset is generally lower than the England average, with crime being particularly low. However the western part of SWT is comparatively deprived, primarily because of barriers to housing and services and indoors living environment (Figure 3.1). There are also hot-spots of deprivation in Taunton (Taunton Lambrook and Taunton Roman Road are in the top 20% of deprivation nationally) and Wellington North. Between 2010 and 2015 there was a significant increase in areas with a poor indoor living environment. Overall, in 2015, the former West Somerset ranked 56 out of 326 local authorities (‘rank of average rank’, where 1 is most deprived), and the former Taunton Deane ranked 193.

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27 This is defined as the proportion of private and social homes that fail to meet the decent homes standard, and the proportion of homes that do not have central heating.

Educational attainment in SWT is slightly below the South West and Great Britain average. In the former Taunton Deane area, 35% of the population had achieved NVQ4 or better qualifications in 2018, and in the former West Somerset area 17%, compared to 39% nationally. On the other hand, the former Taunton Deane also has fewer people with no qualifications (5.4%) than the national average (7.8%)\(^{29}\). The academic performance in rural areas is generally better than in the urban areas, but there are pockets of hidden deprivation in some rural communities, particularly in the northern part of the district, where academic performance is below the district average\(^{30}\).

The main issues in relation to schools in SWT seem to be:

- The continued viability of some small rural schools;
- The fact the some more popular schools are oversubscribed and others are under subscribed; and
- Difficult access to some schools by public transport.

There is also an issue of young people going to college and not returning to SWT. The district’s proportion of people aged 20-24 is relatively small, particularly compared to Exeter and Bristol, reflecting the relative lack of higher education institutions in Somerset.

\(^{29}\) Nomis (2017) Labour market profile – Taunton Deane, www.nomisweb.co.uk

Likely future without the plan

Government has published two sets of population projections: ‘2014-based’ and ‘2016-based’: see Table 3.1. The latter is based on more up-to-date data, but Government expects the former to be used to identify local housing need for planning purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projection year</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2025</th>
<th>2030</th>
<th>2035</th>
<th>2040</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2014-based</strong></td>
<td>149,000</td>
<td>152,000</td>
<td>157,000</td>
<td>161,000</td>
<td>165,000</td>
<td>168,000 (in 2039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2016-based</strong></td>
<td>151,400</td>
<td>154,300</td>
<td>159,300</td>
<td>163,700</td>
<td>167,500</td>
<td>170,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Population projections for SWT

Both projections indicate that all age groups apart from the 65+ group will decline over the period up to 2040. In former West Somerset, by 2040 there are expected to be almost 9 retired people for every 10 working people; in former Taunton Deane this ratio is 5.4 retired people for every 10 working people.

The evolution of Hinkley Point C from a construction site to a working power station (from about 2025) will also change demographics, from one with more single workers to more settled families.

**Population: Existing problems**

- Deprivation, particularly in Taunton and Wellington but also in rural parts of the district, limits people’s life chances and health
- Educational attainment is below the regional and national average

**Key sustainability issues**

- Fewer people in the area means businesses find it more of a challenge to attract the talent and workforce that they demand and may choose not to locate here. A lack of labour over the forecast period is likely to act as a constraint to growth.
- The ageing population – particularly in the west of the district - will continue to put pressure on GPs and adult social care services, and creates a challenge in how to drive the local economy forward to support the growing numbers of people in retirement.
- The implications for future growth and development in the district in terms of open space provision are still significant, and will require the protection and enhancement of existing sites as well as additional provision of land for public use, to accommodate additional usage from population increases. Open space includes a range of typologies: both informal and formal, multi-use and single use.

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31 2014 based and 2016 based: https://www.ons.gov.uk/
32 ibid.
3.2 Housing

Housing numbers

The National Planning Policy Framework expects local authorities to follow the Government’s ‘Standard Method’ to calculate the local housing need figure, which is a minimum (incorporating the average annual housing growth and an affordability ratio)\(^\text{33}\).

As Taunton Deane district has a plan that is older than 5 years, its housing requirement figure is calculated using the Standard Method which equates to 612 dwellings. With a 5% buffer applied (due to past delivery exceeding 85% of the requirement), this equates to an annual requirement figure of 643 (3,213 over 5 years). West Somerset Council has an up-to-date Plan therefore its strategic housing requirement figure can be applied at present. The adopted Local Plan establishes a target of at least 2,900 new homes over the period 2012-2032 where the annualised rate for 2012/13 – 2017/18 is 122 dwellings per annum, and the rate for 2018/19 – 2031/32 is 155 dwellings per annum.

The Government published the Housing Delivery Test 2018 Measurement in February 2019. This assessment is calculated from the number of homes required (using the Standard Method) over the last three years against the number of homes delivered for the last three years. The Housing Delivery Test 2018 measurement for West Somerset is 130%; for Taunton Deane is 191%; and for SWT as a whole is 182% (see Table 3.2). Therefore SWT will only be required to incorporate a buffer of 5%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LPA</th>
<th>Number of homes required 2015-16</th>
<th>Number of homes required 2016-17</th>
<th>Number of homes required 2017-18</th>
<th>Total number of homes delivered 2015-16</th>
<th>Number of homes delivered 2016-17</th>
<th>Number of homes delivered 2017-18</th>
<th>Total number of homes delivered</th>
<th>Housing Delivery Test: 2018 measurement</th>
<th>Housing Delivery Test: 2018 consequenc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taunton Deane</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>2,766</td>
<td>191%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Somerset</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>130%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset West and Taunton</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>1,707</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>1,115</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>182%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Housing required and delivered

Housing affordability

The ratio of house prices to earnings is one measure of how affordable it is to buy a property. ‘Lower quartile’ price provides an indication of the entry level house price in a local market, typically those purchased by first-time buyers. The ratio of lower quartile house price to lower quartile earnings in 2016 in Taunton Deane was 8.02 and in West Somerset was 10.10,

compared to 6.95 for England and Wales. The higher the ratio, the less affordable it is for households to get onto the property ladder. The NPPF sets out a range of tenures deemed ‘affordable housing’. However, a combination of high local house prices and low incomes mean some tenures do not meet the needs of many households.

The most recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Somerset suggests that SWT needs about 208 affordable homes per year. The Authority Monitoring Reports for the former Taunton Deane and West Somerset areas show that affordable housing completions have been falling short of targets. Over the five years from 2013/14 to 2017/18, in the former Taunton Deane area the average proportion of affordable housing delivered was 21.4% compared to a 25% target. The former West Somerset area achieved 24.5% compared to a 35% target. (Table 3.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
<th>2016/17</th>
<th>2017/18</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taunton Deane</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Somerset</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Affordable housing targets and achievement

**Housing size**

The most recent comprehensive analysis of housing stock and demand in the former West Somerset area was published in 2013. The fundamental housing issues in West Somerset are that market housing is overvalued relative to local incomes, and that there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing, especially for families, exacerbated by a historically high demand for and low supply of affordable housing. The area has many larger and detached homes, which don’t best meet the identified need for smaller homes.

In the former Taunton Deane area, there is a need for 2 and 3 bedroom market housing, and for 1 and 2 bedroom affordable housing. Single older people have a much lower level of owner-occupation than larger older person households, suggesting a need for market and affordable specialist housing.

**Likely future without the plan**

Taunton was awarded Garden Town status in 2017. This will involve building about 13,000 homes in and around the town by 2028, including three new garden communities providing

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34 Somerset Intelligence, Housing affordability, [www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/affordability.html](http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/affordability.html).


36 JG Consulting (Oct. 2016) Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and Taunton Deane: Strategic Housing Market Assessment, [www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/1229/somerset-housing-market-assessment-2016.pdf](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/1229/somerset-housing-market-assessment-2016.pdf). The report also gives the total for Somerset in Figure 7,11 (which includes West Somerset), so that a figure for Taunton Deane + West Somerset can be calculated.

over 8,000 homes. This allows the opportunity for large scale urban and neighbourhood design. Figure 3.2 shows the main components of the proposed new garden communities.

Monkton Heathfield and Nerrols
- 5400 new homes
- New district centre
- 32ha employment land
- 3 new primary schools
- Secondary school
- Country park and community woodland

Staplegrove
- Around 1500 new homes
- New local centre
- Primary school
- Extension to the green wedge, new open space and recreational opportunities
- Cycle and pedestrian improvements

Comeytrowe
- Around 2000 new homes
- New local centre
- Primary school
- New green wedge, open space and green infrastructure enhancements
- Park and bus site

Figure 3.2 Planned Taunton garden communities

The Government, though the NPPF, removed the ability to take contributions from sites of 10 dwellings or fewer in areas which are not Designated Rural Areas (which are generally the more urban areas). Going forward this reduces the anticipated number of affordable dwellings coming forward.

As the proportion of older people increases, and as health and mobility are impaired with age, many older people will find that their homes and/or their location are increasingly

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unsuitable. Specialist and smaller accommodation will increasingly be needed. Older residents’ decision to stay or move will depend on viability, personal choice and practicality; but if older households do not move and downsize, existing housing will be increasingly under-occupied, effectively ‘home blocking’ family housing. If housing more suitable to older households’ requirements is provided, it will have to be of the right type and quality in the right locations. Bungalows are very popular with older people downsizing, but have cost implications for developers. However providing some bungalows in new developments may remain viable to allow family housing to be freed up for younger households.

Additional demand for housing from employees at Hinkley Point C will also affect the housing market and generate additional competition for smaller homes. The additional demand generated by HPC workers could create market conditions that make housing less available and affordable for local people attempting to gain their first step on the home-ownership ladder.

### Housing: Existing problems

- Much of the district’s housing is not affordable, due to a combination of high house prices and low incomes
- Affordable housing targets are not being met.

### Key sustainability issue:

- The tenures provided may not be best meeting the widest range of households in housing need.
- The growing proportion of older people needs to be fully considered when determining the size and type of dwellings to be provided.
- The number and proportion of affordable homes delivered needs to increase.

### 3.3 Economy and Retail

#### Economy

SWT does not have a single dominant industry or industrial sector, although the tourism industry and Hinkley Point are significant employers. The majority of businesses are oriented towards serving nearby communities. This differs from neighbouring South Somerset which is home to a significant aerospace manufacturer, and Sedgemoor which has become a preferred location for the logistics industry, especially around Bridgwater. Whilst not as significant a contributor to the economy as it is for other local authorities in the south west, tourism makes an important contribution towards the local economy of SWT.

Of the 67,200 total jobs in Taunton Deane in 2018, by far the highest proportion were in the public sector (approx 14,000 in health and residential care & social work and 11,000 in

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education and public administration), followed by professional and private services (solicitors, accountants etc), followed by warehousing and retail. No other sector achieves a double digit share, and manufacturing accounts for a relatively small proportion of total jobs\textsuperscript{40}. This break-down of occupations is similar to national and Somerset figures, except for the caring, leisure and other service jobs, where the proportion is notably higher (Taunton Deane 12.7%, Somerset 9.1%, national 9.0\%)\textsuperscript{41}. This reflects the high number of older people in the area, and the tourist economy.

The former West Somerset has a much smaller economy with just 16,500 jobs, which is a quarter of the jobs in Taunton Deane. The largest sector is accommodation, food and recreation, reflecting the importance of tourism in the District. The public sector accounts for 20\% of all jobs and the share of professional and private services, wholesale and retail and construction are all 10\% or above. Again, manufacturing accounts for a relatively small proportion of total jobs\textsuperscript{42}.

The construction of two nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point C, which started in 2017, is providing a significant number of new jobs in the district. By autumn 2018, it was providing 3,200 jobs, and the peak construction workforce is expected to be 5,600. Developer EDF Energy claims that the power station will provide more than 25,000 job opportunities, including 1,000 apprenticeships\textsuperscript{43}.

Wages are lower in SWT generally than the national average, with wages in the former West Somerset being only three-quarters of the national average (Table 3.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Former Taunton Deane</th>
<th>Former West Somerset</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross weekly pay for full-time worker</td>
<td>£520.50</td>
<td>£429.80</td>
<td>£571.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly pay for full-time worker</td>
<td>£12.52</td>
<td>£11.51</td>
<td>£14.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4. Average pay in SWT in 2018\textsuperscript{44}

The per capita gross value added (GVA) in Somerset as a whole has been at about 80-85\% of the UK average for several decades. The former Taunton Deane’s GVA is similar to the Somerset average, and the former West Somerset’s GVA slightly exceeds the national average\textsuperscript{45}. This suggests that the workforce of SWT is overall less productive than its comparators nationally.

\textsuperscript{40} Employment, Retail and Leisure Study for Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council (October 2018)
\textsuperscript{41} Nomis (2017) Labour market profile – Taunton Deane, www.nomisweb.co.uk
\textsuperscript{42} Employment, Retail and Leisure Study for Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council (October 2018)
\textsuperscript{43} https://www.edfenergy.com/media-centre/news-releases/two-years-construction-hinkley-point-c; http://constructingexcellence.org.uk/hinkley-point-c-construction-project/
\textsuperscript{44} Nomis (2017) Labour market profile – Taunton Deane, www.nomisweb.co.uk
\textsuperscript{45} Somerset County Council (2017) Somerset’s Economy, www.somersetintelligence.org.uk
Retail

the district plays a role in meeting needs in the wider South West economy, with Taunton as the largest centre. Exeter and Bristol compete with Taunton, as do out-of-centre facilities at Cribbs Causeway (existing and proposed), and this will continue to limit the proportion of retail expenditure retained within the district.

Online shopping and other factors are affecting the health and vitality of the district’s town centres. Taunton’s retail stock needs to be improved to provide the type of floorspace sought by modern, higher-quality comparison goods retailers. Such additional retailers would enhance the attraction of the town centre as a destination. Improving the existing retail stock could include modernisation and reconfiguration of the existing floorspace to provide modern large-footprint stores, alongside the development of new modern large-footprint stores on suitable town centre opportunity sites.

A key consideration for several town centres – notably Minehead and Watchet, but also Taunton and Wellington - is their joint role for both residents and visitors. Wellington performs well in both sectors and underlines the importance of strong branding to promote the visitor offer. The district’s rural centres on the whole do not need significantly more retail offer. Instead, growth should be directed towards supporting, maintaining and, where possible, the modest enhancement of current village services and facilities.

Likely future without the plan

A 25 hectare strategic employment site, ‘Nexus 25’, is planned at Taunton. Access will be through the M5 (Junction 25) improvement scheme – see Figure 3.2 – whose construction started in 2019. A Local Development Order (LDO) has been prepared for the site.

SWT is unlikely to require significant additional employment floorspace over the plan period, the main reason being low population growth:

- Employment: the current available workforce is fully employed and is unlikely to grow significantly. With very low unemployment, there is no significant need for more jobs to support the population.

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47 ibid.
• Retail: the low population growth, slower expenditure forecasts and significant existing planned retail development, particularly for Taunton, combine to show little need for additional floor space in the short to medium term.

There is merit in re-assessing the allocated employment sites to ensure provision of suitable, available and deliverable sites to meet the aspirations of the Council. Excess undeveloped land could be released for other uses, especially in the former Taunton Deane area where the supply of land exceeds the likely demand by a considerable margin.

There is also, if anything, over-provision of retail provision in the district in the short to medium term. The expected increase in the district’s population, especially that associated with Taunton Garden Town, may generate some new requirements. However this is counterbalanced by the fact that per-capita spending has generally been level for the past years, and by the possible economic shock of Brexit. As such, it is considered that there is no need for any further retail or leisure allocations in the district. However, there are place-making benefits associated with small-scale convenience, comparison and leisure uses including food and drink as part of new settlements/extensions which should be considered in their merits as proposals come forward.

### Economy, Employment and Retail: Existing problems

- Lack of a dominant industry in the district compared to neighbouring districts
- High economic dependency on public sector jobs
- A low proportion of young people staying in the area

### Key sustainability issues:

- The need to improve productivity by developing a niche sector to attracting new business and retain young people in the area
- The need for Taunton specifically to improve its retail and leisure offer to compete with Bristol and Exeter and to adapt to the challenges of online shopping
- The need to review existing employment land allocations to determine if they are required
- In view of the District’s location as a gateway to attractions within much of the region, consider diversifying and developing its tourism offer.

### 3.4 Transport

SWT is a primarily rural authority which acts as a gateway to the south west peninsula. It has a substantial road network, including the M5 and many A-roads. High-speed trains run from Taunton to Reading and London. The nearest airport is at Bristol.

The small number of strategic transport routes accessing the south west peninsula through Somerset present an inherent lack of resilience. The south west peninsula has, at times, been entirely cut off due to flooding events which closed off road and rail routes in Somerset. There is no suitable alternative road route when the M5 is closed due to traffic incidents or other events. Additionally, the rural nature of the western part of SWT poses challenges with
regard to accessibility to key services and employment centres, especially on foot and by public transport\(^{49}\): most of SWT is in the national worst 20 in terms of barriers to housing and services\(^{50}\).

Car use in SWT – a rural district with an ageing population - is unsurprisingly above the national average. In 2011, the percentage of people with no car in both areas for SWT was 17.5-17.6%, compared with an England and Wales average of 25.6%.\(^{51}\) In 2011, the former Taunton Deane’s residents owned 568 vehicles per 1000 people, West Somerset’s residents owned 609, and the national average was 487\(^{52}\). Table 3.5 shows the mode of travel to work in 2011. Again, car use was higher than average in the former Taunton Deane. It was lower than average in West Somerset, but presumably because of the high proportion of people not in employment. Public transport use in both former districts was much lower than the national average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Travel</th>
<th>Taunton Deane</th>
<th>West Somerset</th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Car or van (driving or passenger)</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport (bus, train, etc.)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work mainly from home</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in employment</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 Mode of travel to work in 2011\(^{53}\)

One way of reducing the need to travel is to provide efficient broadband connections. This allows people to work from home, and to access services from home. Large parts of the district, particularly in the west, are at risk of ‘digital exclusion’ based on five risk indicators (older age, low income, disability, low adult skills, and poor broadband speed)\(^{54}\) – see Figure 3.3.

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\(^{49}\) Somerset Intelligence (nd) Travel and access, \url{http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/travel-and-access/}.


\(^{52}\) RAC (2012) Car ownership rates per local authority in England and Wales, \url{https://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/car%20ownership%20rates%20by%20local%20authority%20-%20december%202012.pdf} and \url{https://www.racfoundation.org/data}.


\(^{54}\) Somerset Intelligence (2015) Digital inclusion, \url{http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/digital-inclusion/}.
Highways England is proposing to dual and re-route a stretch of the A358 between the M5 at Taunton and the A303 (Figure 3.4). In June 2019, it announced its preferred route for linking the A358 to the M5.\(^{55}\)

The preferred option (along with the rejected options) will increase traffic and thus general air pollution in the area, as drivers are likely to use the new A358/M5 route rather than the existing A303/A30 route through East Devon. However at Henlade, the preferred route will substantially reduce traffic flows through Henlade from 33,500 without the scheme to 4,000 vehicles with the scheme in 2038.

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The M5 is forecast to experience increasing stress during the period up to 2028, in peak hours and adjoining periods, and all day during the summer holiday. Traffic modeling for the former Taunton Deane Core Strategy\(^56\) showed that it was not possible to accommodate the proposed level of development in Taunton without a significant shift from car travel to other modes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transport : Existing problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High car use and low public transport use in the district</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key sustainability issues:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congestion is likely to increase with future development, particularly as existing allocations in Taunton are built out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need to plan development in the district, particularly at Taunton and Wellington, to minimise car journeys, and particularly to minimise use of the strategic road network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageing population may struggle with more active modes of transport (walking, cycling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for improved broadband connectivity, particularly in the west of the district</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Air Quality

There are two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in SWT: Henlade and East Reach\(^57\). Both AQMAs were designated in February 2003, both for NO\(_2\). The Henlade AQMA area covers the A358 through Henlade village, providing the link between the A303 (London to South-West) and M5 (Birmingham to South-West) highways. The East Reach AQMA covers the main route into Taunton town centre from the east. Figures 3.6 and 3.7 show the location of these AQMAs.

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Figure 3.8 shows annual average NO$_2$ levels at East Reach and Henlade. Average levels exceeded the NO$_2$ standard of 40µg/m$^3$ in several years to 2014, but have been below the standard since then.

Figure 3.6 East Reach AQMA

Figure 3.7 Henlade AQMA

Figure 3.8. Annual average NO$_2$ levels at the Henlade and East Reach AQMAs
Likely future without the plan

Air quality is improving nationally, in part because of the roll-out of increasingly stringent Euro standards for vehicles. The proposed re-routing of the A358 at Henlade will also remove a large proportion of vehicles from the village, helping to improve air quality in the current AQMA. On the other hand, the additional traffic using the new route between the A303 and M5 will worsen air pollution in areas near the new road.

### Air Quality: Existing problems

- Two AQMAs remain at Henlade and East Reach

### Key sustainability issues:

- Whilst planned transport schemes may resolve some existing air quality issues, new issues could arise as a result of from the development of existing housing allocations, and dualling of the A358.
- Depending on their location, new allocation may be in the vicinity of existing AQMAs and worsen their status.
- Need for modal shifts to more sustainable modes of transport

### 3.6 Biodiversity

#### Biodiversity designations

SWT boasts a wide range of habitats and species, some which have been afforded international level protection (Figure 3.9):

- **Exmoor and Quantock Oak Woodlands** SAC is designated due to the presence of old sessile oak woodland and barbastelle bats. It is one of the best areas in the UK for old sessile oak woods rich in bryophytes, ferns and epiphytic lichens. The SAC also hosts Bechstein’s bats and otters. Threats to the site include grazing, forest plantation and management, air pollution and invasive species. Technical guidance[^58] exists for development potentially affecting this SAC.

- **Hestercombe House** SAC acts as a maternity roost for a colony of Lesser Horseshoe bats. Although only a small proportion of the UK population, this site has been included as representative of the species in South West England. Threats to the site include changes to hydraulic conditions, recreational activities and urbanisation. Technical guidance[^59] exists for development potentially affecting this SAC.

• **Holme Moor and Clean Moor** SAC is a small but important site that is as an outlier of calcareous fens in south-west England, where *Cladium* is a local and rare species. The site occupies an unusual ecological situation on the spring line at the foot of a scarp slope. Threats to the site are pollution to groundwater, modification of cultivation practices, and air pollution.

• **Somerset Levels and Moors** SPA and Ramsar site is one of the largest and richest areas of traditionally managed wet grassland and fen habitats in lowland UK. The site attracts important numbers of wetland birds (swans, ducks and waders) in winter. Parts of the site are in poor condition. Threats include cultivation, modification of cultivation practices, and changes to hydraulic conditions.

• **Severn Estuary** SPA, SAC and Ramsar site is a major site for wintering and migrating wetland birds. It is considered to be one of the best estuaries, mudflats, sandflats and Atlantic saltmeadows in the UK. It is one of the best places for sea lampreys, river lampreys and Twainte shad in the UK. It also supports more than 80,000 overwintering waterfowl, and significant populations of gadwall, greater white-fronted goose, dunlin Bewick’s swan, common shelduck and common redshank. Threats include urbanisation, changes to hydraulic conditions, modification of cultivation practices, and recreational disturbance.

• **The Quants** SAC is a damp and sheltered site of neutral grassland/fen mosaic. It is designated owing to the presence of marsh fritillary butterflies, for which it is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK. The main threats to the site are air pollution and changes in biotic conditions.

Figure 3.9: European and Internationally designated sites in SWT
Within 10km of the district boundary lie:

- **Exmoor Heaths** SAC is located to the west of Minehead. The SAC is designated for the presence of Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* and European dry heaths, for which it is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK. It also supports vegetated sea cliffs, alkaline fens, old sessile oak woods and blanket bogs. The overall condition of the habitats is not good. Threats to the site include invasive species, changes to hydraulic conditions, grazing, and air pollution.

- **Culm Grasslands** SAC isolated on either side of the A361, 4km south of the district boundary. It is designated for its Northern Atlantic wet heaths, Molinia meadows, and marsh fritillary butterfly. It has also been frequented by otters. Threats include changes to hydraulic conditions, cultivation, modification of cultivation practices, and air pollution.

SWT hosts many Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which are shown at Figure 3.10. Many of the SSSIs underlying the Somerset Levels and Moors SAC are in unfavourable declining condition, primarily due to agricultural runoff, drainage, and other forms of water pollution. There are also over 480 local/County wildlife sites within the district, as well as Ancient Woodlands and wetlands, many of them designated as SSSIs or County Wildlife Sites.

Figure 3.10 Condition of SSSIs in SWT
Protected species

Great crested newt, hazel dormouse, water voles and otters are relatively widespread and common in SWT, and at least 15 bat species have been recorded in the district:

- Greater horseshoe
- Lesser horseshoe
- Common pipistrelle
- Soprano pipistrelle
- Nathusius’s pipistrelle
- Daubenton’s
- Leisler’s
- Natterer’s
- Noctule
- Bechstein’s
- Brown long-eared
- Serotine
- Whiskered
- Grey long-eared
- Barbastelle

Birds are by far the largest group of high priority species in terms of priority and conservation concern. The marsh fritillary butterfly also frequents the Quants SAC.

Very often these species are not associated with a 'special habitat' but are found in areas which are not designated sites and in the wider countryside. Therefore, they are an important and separate issue in which a planning authority has a crucial role. For instance Daubenton’s bats are present along the river Tone and rely on the provision of bankside vegetation and low light levels. Similarly several otter holt can be found within urban areas of the district. The River Tone is a vital wildlife corridor through the Taunton urban area for these and other wildlife species which, if severed, would cause fragmentation of populations; threaten population viability; and reduce genetic exchange. An important colony of the rare barbastelle bat is also under pressure from development proposals for Wellington.

The South West is also of national importance for bees, due to the unique conditions resulting from a combination of climate and great diversity of habitats. The region is home to nationally rare and threatened species, and for some, the South West supports a national stronghold or the last known population in the UK. In SWT, areas within Exmoor and the Somerset Levels are particularly under threat. In relation to potential Local Plan impacts, habitat loss and climate change are two of the most significant factors leading to these declines in pollinator numbers. The Somerset Pollinator Action Plan 2018-28\(^{61}\) seeks to protect and increase the amount and quality of pollinator habitat and manage its greenspace to provide greater benefits for pollinators.

Biodiversity is going down rapidly nationwide as a result of habitat fragmentation, intensive agriculture, climate change, urbanisation and other pressures. The National Planning Policy Framework states that planning policies and decisions should minimise impacts on, and

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\(^{60}\) Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) and county ecologist


\(^{62}\) West Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan (1999)
provide net gains for biodiversity. DEFRA has recently concluded that 10% biodiversity net gain should be sought\(^6^3\).

The Somerset Wildlife Trust\(^6^4\) is actively pursuing habitat improvement including their Living Landscape programmes for linking smaller, isolated wildlife sites to create wider, more robust landscapes to safeguard wildlife for the longer term. Projects in the local area include those on the Somerset Levels and Moors, Taunton and along the coast.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biodiversity: Existing problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reducing biodiversity nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor condition of large parts of Somerset Levels and Moors SPA/Ramsar site and constituent SSSIs, due to agricultural practices and water pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invasive non-native species</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key sustainability issue:**

• The district contains many areas of high ecological value, including sites of international and national importance, as well as protected species. These are under threat from development pressure.
• The cross-boundary effects on Exmoor National Park are likely to be important (e.g. increased housing in the western part of the District may cause increased recreational pressure in Exmoor which could affect its biodiversity).
• Any new development must respect the special qualities that make up the biodiversity features of the District, and not just those that have been afforded designated status.
• New development must deliver at least 10% ‘net biodiversity gain’.
• Tree planting (adopting national targets) is needed for biodiversity and climate change.
• Taunton Garden Town has aspirations for biodiversity improvements, greening of the river corridor, set back of development etc.

### 3.7 Climate Change

**Climate**

Along with the rest of South West England, SWT has a temperate climate which is generally wetter and milder than the rest of the country. The annual mean temperature is about 10°C (50°F). Seasonal temperature variation is less extreme than most of the UK because of the adjacent sea. The summer months are the warmest with mean daily maxima of about 21°C (70°F). In winter mean minimum temperatures of about 1°C (34°F) are common.

**Emissions**

Per capita energy consumption and CO\(_2\) emissions have been falling significantly over the last decade (Table 3.6), but remain slightly above the national average. Much of the fall in CO\(_2\)

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\(^6^4\) Somerset Wildlife Trust [https://www.somersetwildlife.org/what_we_do.html](https://www.somersetwildlife.org/what_we_do.html)
emissions has been from the industry and commercial sector, whose emissions more than halved between 2006 and 2016. This is in part as a result of national decarbonisation of the electricity grid. Transport emissions hardly reduced during this time, and accounted for 53% of the district’s emissions in 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agriculture (kt)</th>
<th>Industry &amp; commercial (kt)</th>
<th>Domestic (kt)</th>
<th>Transport (kt)</th>
<th>Total* (kt)</th>
<th>Per capita (t)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td>7.5 (TD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.0 (WS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1 (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>5.3 (TD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.9 (WS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6 (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% reduction</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29% (TD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 - 2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51% (WS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35% (E)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TD = former Taunton Deane, WS = former West Somerset, E = England

Table 3.6 Carbon dioxide emissions 2006 and 2016

**Renewable energy generation**

In 2016, SWT produced 110.7MW of renewable energy, of which 75% was photovoltaic (solar electricity), 17% was biomass for heat, 6% was heat pumps, and the remaining 2% a combination of solar heat, hydropower, wind, landfill gas and sewage gas. Jointly, the former Taunton Deane and West Somerset districts would have been in the top 10% of local authorities producing renewable energy.

**Flood risk**

Areas vulnerable to sea flooding in SWT include land between Blue Anchor and Minehead, and near Hinkley Point ‘C’ (Figure 3.12). There is also a risk of fluvial flooding across the district, notably in Taunton and Wellington, from the Rivers Tone, Exe, Parrett and tributaries. The Somerset Levels and Moors are subject to extensive flooding at times.

In the former West Somerset area, including Exmoor National Park, about 2700 people and 1600 commercial and residential properties – 8.5% of the total population - are at risk from a 1% annual probability river flood. In the former Taunton Deane area over 2400 properties within the former Taunton Deane classified as being at risk of 1% annual probability river flood.

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flood. This amounts to around 5% of the existing housing stock in the former Taunton Deane borough.

**Figure 3.12  Flood risk in SWT**

**Likely future without the plan**

Existing Local Plan documents promote the mitigation of climate change – including energy efficient housing, and promotion of walking and cycling - but are not particularly challenging. SWT declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and are working towards carbon neutrality by 2030. This is a significantly more challenging target than the UK Government’s target of carbon neutrality by 2050, and Council policies will seek to deliver this.

The 2009 UK Climate Projections suggest that, compared to the period of 1961-1990, the future climate in south-west England is likely to have drier and warmer summers, milder and wetter winters, and more frequent extreme events (Table 3.7). More recent climate change projections from 2018 are available, but only for a limited range of topics which does not include precipitation. Figure 3.13 shows the most likely predictions for mean air temperature in the 12km square that includes Taunton, to 2080. An average increase of about 4°C is projected compared to the 1980-2000 baseline.

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69 Gov.UK (nd) Flood map for planning, https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/
Table 3.7 UKCP09 projections for the South West region relative to the 1960-1990 baseline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2020s</th>
<th>2050s</th>
<th>2080s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual mean precipitation</td>
<td>0 to +1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1 to +2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer (June-Aug) precip</td>
<td>-5 to -8%</td>
<td>-14 to -20%</td>
<td>-16 to -30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter (Dec-Feb) precip</td>
<td>+6 to +7%</td>
<td>+12 to +17%</td>
<td>+17 to +27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual average temperature</td>
<td>+1.4°C to +1.5°C</td>
<td>+2.2°C to +2.8°C</td>
<td>+2.8°C to +4.4°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer mean temperature</td>
<td>+1.5°C to +1.7°C</td>
<td>+2.0°C to +4.0°C</td>
<td>+3.0°C to +5.1°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer mean max. temperature</td>
<td>+2.0°C to +2.1°C</td>
<td>+3.3°C to +4.2°C</td>
<td>+3.9°C to +6.7°C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.13 Likely changes in seasonal mean temperature to 2080, compared with the 1980-2000 baseline for the 12km square including Taunton

These changes will increase the threat of flooding; overheating and water stress; and stronger, more damaging wind speeds. Rising sea levels and increased storm violence as a result of the climate crisis will increase the risk of flooding from the sea, posing an increasing threat to new and existing development close to the parts of the coast which are low-lying and/or which are unstable and vulnerable to rapid erosion.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change releases petroleum exploration and development licenses (PEDLs) to private developers, which allows them to explore for oil or gas, including shale gas. One of the three current PEDLs in Somerset – PEDL 344 - is in SWT: see Figure 3.14. As the mineral planning authority, Somerset County Council is responsible for determining planning applications for the location of any wells and wellpads, imposing conditions to ensure that the impact on the use of the land is acceptable. To date, no planning applications have been submitted for oil or gas at PEDL 344.

The West Somerset flood risk management plan predicted that, by 2100, about 3500 people and 2040 properties would be at risk from a 1% annual probability flood, up from 2700 and

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1600 respectively in 2012. Most of the additional properties at risk would be in Minehead\textsuperscript{73}. In the former Taunton Deane area, a flood alleviation reservoir is being considered between Wellington and Taunton, to reduce the incidence of flooding at Taunton.

![Figure 3.14 Petroleum Exploration and Development License 344\textsuperscript{74}](image)

### Climate Change: Existing problems

- Per person CO\textsubscript{2} emissions in the district are higher than the national average. More than half of the emissions are from transport.
- About 4000 properties in the district are at risk of a 1\% annual probability flood.

### Key sustainability issues:

- Given the amount of development proposed in the district, there is a clear need to mitigate the effects of, and adapt to, climate change.
- Need to increase the energy efficiency of new and existing homes
- Need to increase the delivery of renewable and low carbon technologies
- Need to improve rates of walking, cycling and public transport. This may require constraints on private car use.
- Some sites coming forward through existing allocations lie within areas of flood risk. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is being updated to include climate change.
- Fracking proposals in the License 344 area could significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions.
- Need to adapt to the effects of climate change through locational and design considerations (including Natural Flood Management methods), as the effects of climate change are increasingly felt.


\textsuperscript{74} https://decc-edu.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=29c31fa4b00248418e545d222e57ddaa)
3.8 Heritage

SWT has a diverse and distinctive historic environment, which plays a key role in defining the local character and distinctiveness of the district. Its towns and villages have developed over centuries, resulting in a rich and diverse local character. This is reflected today by the recognition of 53 Conservation Areas, nearly 3,000 Listed Buildings, 235 Scheduled Monuments, and 11 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens (see Figure 3.15), of which 26 are at risk\(^5\). There are no registered battlefields in SWT.

![Figure 3.15 Heritage assets in SWT](image)

The district’s heritage dates back to the Palaeolithic, or Old Stone Age as shown by the finds of flint axes and woolly mammoth bones along the coast. Nationally important archaeological remains can be found throughout the district, including the Bronze Age barrows of Williton, and the iron age hill forts of North Camp and Trendle Ring.

In Medieval times the population grew rapidly, and the current rural composition of fields, roads, hollow ways, farms and settlements was established. The Castles of Dunster and Stogursey, Cleeve Abbey, the parish churches in the scattered villages, and the medieval fishweirs in Minehead Bay show how important the district was in the medieval period. There is little evidence of significant industry in the western art of the district, although there was extensive copper mining on the Quantocks.

Taunton was historically a focus for trade, conflict and rebellion, notably the anti-royalist stance taken by the town during the civil war and Monmouth rebellion. The town’s history is evident in its architecture and monuments, and particularly in the town centre itself, which boasts Taunton Castle amongst other historic features. The town was an important location in the War of the Roses and the Civil War.

Wellington contains a number of important heritage assets which are featured on Historic England’s Risk Register. In 2017 a project officer was employed to work specifically on the heritage assets at risk within the town. This includes the Tonedale Mill, Toneworks, Wellington Monument and the Conservation Area. The Council are working in close liaison with Historic England to safeguard these assets into the future.

The coast has helped shape the identity of much of the area. The Tudor ports of Watchet, the Victorian resort of Minehead and the continuing importance of Butlins all highlight the importance of the sea to the fortunes of the district.

Cider orchards have played an important role in the district’s history and for a long time were a prominent feature of the landscape. Ancient orchards are evident, for example, between Taunton and Wellington at Stoford Manor and near Poundisford and Shoreditch and Haygarth’s Farm to the South of Taunton town.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heritage: Existing problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 26 (out of more than 3000) heritage assets in the district are at risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key sustainability issue:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Significant development is occurring in the district and is already planned for through allocations. Further development in towns (to minimise greenfield development) may adversely impact upon heritage assets if higher densities are sought or is development is considered necessary to enhance sustainability of villages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited growth may occur in villages to enhance their sustainability but care will be needed not to adversely affect their character or setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.9 Landscape

National landscape designations

Nationally designated landscapes account for over half of SWT, in the form of the Quantock Hills and Blackdowns Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Exmoor National Park (Figure 3.16). AONBs are particularly special landscapes, with such outstanding distinctive character and natural beauty that they are protected in the national interest for future generations.

The Blackdown Hills AONB, designated in 1991, covers 370km² and has a varied landscape descending south from a prominent escarpment to an open upland plateau, deeply dissected by valleys, between fringes of rolling ridgeland. The open ridges provide a strong contrast
and backdrop to the adjacent Vale of Taunton; which in turn permit dramatic elevated views over the vale from Blackdown Hills. Beech shelterbelts on high ground and wooded scraps and slopes are a key feature. It is important to retain the visual sensitivity of the slopes and ridgeline/skyline of Raghill and spurs within the Blackdown Fringes Farmed and Settled High Vale.

![Figure 3.16 Landscape designations](image)

The Quantock Hills AONB, designated in 1957, covers 99km². They form a ridge comprising heath, woodland and farmland. The AONB landscape features heather moorland, comprising grass, heather and bilberry. It is largely devoid of settlement and imparts a feeling of space and remoteness.

Exmoor National Park is covered by a separate planning authority, the Exmoor National Park Authority. However, due to its upland nature, development in the surrounding area can affect the views from the park into the wider countryside. Light pollution is a key issue: Exmoor is one of the few areas in the south of England which remains relatively free of mass light pollution sources. However, the skyline is often brightly lit from South Wales, and lighting from nearby settlements such as Minehead is regularly reflected from clouds.\(^{76}\)

Other areas of special landscape in the district include the coastline from Hinkley Point to Countisbury, the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area and Ramsar site, and a range of ancient woodlands and other biodiversity sites.

\(^{76}\) *South West Landscapes*
National Character Areas

SWT exhibits considerable landscape variety. It is the most wooded district in Somerset due mainly to the large areas of woodland in Exmoor National Park. Much of the SWT area is a landscape of hedgerows trees, small copses and occasional orchards. Seven joint National Character Areas (NCA) fall within the District (Figure 3.17):

- 142. Somerset Levels & Moors;
- 143. Mid Somerset Hills;
- 144. Quantock Hills;
- 145. Exmoor;
- 146. Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fridges;
- 147. Blackdowns
- 148. Devon Redlands

Only very small areas of NCA 142 and 148 fall within the north-east and southern ends of the SWT, and they are not discussed further here. The remaining NCAs are shown at Figure 3.17 and described further at Table 3.5. Both of the former districts had landscape appraisals carried out\(^77\). These provide a more detailed breakdown of the landscape, but are broadly consistent with the NCAs.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Area</th>
<th>Key Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 143: Mid Somerset Hills | Series of low hills, islands and ridges dividing the Somerset Moors and Levels  
Flatter landscape to the eastern side of the character area can be contrasted with the hillier west  
Major rivers such as the Parrett and Brue cut through the hills, and are lined to the wetlands of the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area  
There is a strong wooded feel to the landscape from hedgerows and small woods, although only about 4% of the landcover is woodland |
| 144: Quantock Hills | Central high, heathland ridge, with some beech clumps  
Irregular field patterns and farmsteads in sheltered fringes  
Steep wooded valleys and lower slopes, commonly with former deer parks. Beech copses and lines are characteristic  
Red sandstone and shales used in older buildings and giving colour to the soils  
High archaeological interest of Bronze Age monuments such as burial mounds |
| 145: Exmoor | Diverse upland landscape, rising abruptly out of the surrounding lowlands  
Central high, treeless moorlands used for rough grazing, incised by steep wooded valleys and combes with occasional grass and arable fields  
High hills of Exmoor Forest and the Brendon Hills form a backdrop to large portions of western Somerset and mid and north Devon.  
Impressive views from higher hills and ‘beacons’  
Complex coastline of headlands, step cliffs, waterfalls and coves |
| 146: Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fringes | Lowland, mixed farming landscape, with dense hedges, sparse woodland and frequent settlement  
Contrast between floodplain, low clay vale and higher sandstone vale edge  
Scattered settlement of farmsteads and hamlets linked by winding lanes  
Red sandstone buildings and prominent perpendicular churches Cider apple orchards  
Variable hedgerow tree cover, with some areas of abundant hedgerow oaks. Willows on floodplains  
Open and windswept coast with low cliffs |

79 Ibid.
### Local landscape designations

In 2014, Taunton Deane Borough Council identified a range of Special Landscape Features (SLFs) in the District[^1]. Some SLFs, such as Thorn Hill and Burrow Mump, are visible over a very wide area, and are therefore important in the wider landscape, notably as landmarks. Others are of more local importance, being essential to the landscape setting of settlements. Examples include Cotlake Hill and Creechbarrow Hill, Taunton; North Curry Ridge; Crown Hill, West Buckland; and Foxdown Hill, Wellington. Some provide a very important function in screening and containing settlements. Stonegallows Ridge and Rag Hill have this function with regard to Taunton, and Crown Hill plays such a role at West Buckland.

The protection of Green Wedges has long been an important part of the planning policy framework for Taunton and Wellington. Green wedges constitutes positive, environment-led planning for the future, helping to avoid a situation where urban open spaces are dispersed and unconnected, and thus unable to provide the many functions wedges achieve (including separation between settlements). Green wedge assessments have been carried out as part of Taunton Dean’s Updated Green Wedge Assessment 2017. Figures 3.18 and 3.19 shows the green wedge boundaries in Taunton and Wellington.

---

Likely future without the plan

Major changes to SWT’s landscape over the past 100 years include:

- Coniferous plantations: In the 1920s coniferous woodland replaced deciduous woodland and poor agricultural land. The Quantocks and the Brendon Fringe were the areas most affected by afforestation.

- Agricultural intensification and changes: From 1945 onwards there has been a change from pastoral to arable farming. Key impacts of this change were the loss of hedgerows, poor management of hedgerows, increased field size, loss of orchards and ponds, development of large new farm buildings, and changes to arable farming and growing of non-traditional crops.

- Nuclear power station: The building of Hinkley Point Power Station has created a visually dominant landmark within the landscape

- Tourism: An increased demand for tourism and recreation has led to visual changes, particularly to the coastal landscape. These include the creation of camping and mobile home sites, and the building of the Butlins holiday camp in Minehead (which is visible up to four miles away)81.

Although coniferous planting has largely been overtaken by the planting of broadleaf trees, the other forms of change are likely to continue further. Urbanisation is also likely to increase in the absence of the plan, with more houses and associated infrastructure being developed.

Landscape: Existing problems

- The district’s landscape is negatively affected by agricultural intensification, tourism development, and light pollution
- New development has not always been consistent with the character of the area and the local building vernacular, and the character of rural villages is under pressure from development outside settlement boundaries

Key sustainability issue:

- SWT has significant areas of landscape importance which development pressures will need to be sensitive to. It is important to preserve important views to and from the countryside.
- Development in villages may be encouraged to enhance their sustainability but this would need to be balanced against the impact on their character.
- Development in or near the AONBs and Exmoor National Park could have an adverse impact on their landscape character and long-distance views, including from light pollution.
- Local Landscape Features need to be protected from harmful development.
- Green Wedges should be retained and enhanced, helping to provide a network of green infrastructure
- The urban form of Taunton should remain below the ridge lines which are sensitive to development.

81 West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment (1999), referred to in sustainability appraisal of West Somerset Local Plan.
3.10 Soil and minerals

Soil

The Agricultural Land Classification provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland. Grades are related to climate, topography, drainage, soil characteristics and other site factors. The ‘best and most versatile land’ is defined as Grades 1 and 2. Grade 3 is considered moderate for agricultural production, and Grades 4 and 5 are poor.

Most of the agricultural land in SWT is of good to very good quality, as shown in Figure 3.20. Most of the district contains Grade 3 agricultural land but there are areas with Grade 2 and Grade 1 agricultural land. The poorest agricultural land is typically located in the upland areas, though there are also some areas classified as Grade 4 in the Mid Parrett area of the Somerset Levels and Moors.

![Figure 3.20 Agricultural land quality in SWT](image)

Development on previously developed land

Building on brownfield (previously developed) land helps to reduce impacts on greenfield land, and its associated agricultural value. In 2017-18, 34% of Taunton Deane Borough Council’s residential units were built on brownfield (previously developed) sites, and 23% of West Somerset’s. In 2016-17, the respective figures were 40% and 16%.

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**Contaminated land**

The Environment Protection Act 1990 defines ‘contaminated land’ as land that is contaminated to such an extent that it poses an unacceptable risk or threat to human health or the environment. West Somerset Council’s most recent contaminated land strategy is from 2011, and Taunton’s from 2013\(^4\). If a site is identified the responsibility for remediation will fall to the polluter or the owner of the land. Although many sites have been found in SWT that have potential low priority contamination, no sites in SWT have been found where the contamination was significant enough for the site to be classed as contaminated.

**Minerals**

SWT has historically been mined for iron and copper, and there is currently some small-scale working of building stone. However there are no large active minerals sites in the district.

**Likely future without the plan**

Somerset County Council’s Minerals Plan\(^5\) sets out how and broadly where minerals will be worked in Somerset until the year 2030. It includes significant building stone safeguarding areas, plus some smaller crushed rock and sand/gravel safeguarding areas, as shown at Figure 3.21. It also lists in its ‘site profiles’ one small minerals site in West Somerset - 2km SW of Sampford Brett producing 1500 tonnes of sandstone per year – plus the dormant sandstone site east of West Quantoxhead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soil and Minerals: Existing problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Less than half of the district’s new development is being built on previously developed land.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key sustainability issue:**

• Existing Plans allocate a significant amount of greenfield land for new development. If new allocations are required, this could add further pressure on agricultural land.
• Greenfield development may result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land.
• It is important to ensure that Somerset is able to provide an adequate and steady supply of minerals, contributing to national, regional and local requirements without compromising the natural and historic environment of the County.

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3.11 Waste

Waste should be managed in line with the waste hierarchy (prevent, reuse, recycle, recover, dispose) and to view waste as a resource, rather than something that requires disposal. Somerset County Council is the Waste Planning Authority for the county (excluding Exmoor National Park). Local authority collected waste - household waste and other types of municipal waste such as street litter collected by the authority - and recycling services are managed by the Somerset Waste Partnership on behalf of all five local authorities. The four district councils are responsible for kerbside collections and the county council for recycling sites and waste disposal.

Since 2000, Somerset’s rate of reuse, recycling and composting has steadily increased, and the amount of waste sent to landfill has decreased (Figure 3.22). In 2018, the Somerset reuse/recycling rate for local authority collected waste was 55%, sufficient to meet the 50% EU target by 2020. Household waste production in Somerset in 2018 was 242kg/person\(^{86}\). As a comparison, the national household waste recycling rate was 44.8% in 2018, and average household waste was 403kg/person\(^{87}\).


Figure 3.22 Weight landfilled and recycled in Somerset, 2001/02 to 2017/18

No significant existing problems

Key sustainability issue:

- Maintain year on year reduction as waste generated, and increase in waste reused and recycled

3.12 Water Quality and Resources

Water quality

The EU Water Framework Directive requires Member States to achieve ‘good’ status of all water bodies by 2015. This is the status that helps to protect aquatic ecosystems and, with regard to their water needs, terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands. The great majority of the water in SWT drains into the Environment Agency’s “South and West Somerset” river basin district catchment. This is split into several operational catchments. The Tone operational catchment broadly covers the former Taunton Deane area, and the West Somerset Streams operational catchments broadly covers the former West Somerset without Exmoor National Park.

In 2013, 7 water bodies in the Tone area were of good quality and 10 of moderate quality; 4 water bodies in the West Somerset Streams were of good quality and 9 of moderate quality.

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The main reasons for the water bodies not achieving good status were:

- Tone: pollution from agriculture and rural land management (7 reasons); agricultural and water industry, notably pollution from waste water (6); and other (2)
- West Somerset Streams: physical modifications by various sectors (4 reasons); pollution from waste water (1); and other (1)

Large areas of the SWT district have surface water nitrate (Figure 3.23a) and pesticide (Figure 3.23b) issues. The great majority of the district is covered by a Drinking Water Safeguard Zone for surface water, because the area is at risk of failing drinking water protection objectives. An area between Taunton and Wellington is also a Drinking Water Protected Area, as are several smaller areas in the Haddon Hills. These are areas where raw water is abstracted from rivers and reservoirs: raw water needs to be protected to ensure that it is not polluted which could lead to additional purification treatment. A small area in the Blackdown Hills are a Source Protection Zone, where some activities may be limited to safeguard drinking water quality (Figure 3.2). There are no Nitrate Vulnerable Zones in the district.

**Water resources**

Water in the district is supplied by Wessex Water. Availability of water is important both for human health and for ecosystems. SWT hosts a range of internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites that depend on adequate water levels.

Over the past 20 years, the water abstracted by Wessex Water has declined significantly, in part because of per capita water efficiencies, but in great part because the company reduced the leakage from its pipes (Figure 3.25).

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*a) Surface water nitrate issues
b) Surface water pesticide issues

Figure 3.23 Surface water issues in SWT*
Figure 3.24 Water quality protection areas in SWT\textsuperscript{90}

Figure 3.25 Changes in water supply 1995-2018

\textsuperscript{90} https://magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx
Likely future without the plan

The Environment Agency’s long-term water quality projections are for water in both the Tone and West Somerset Streams operational catchments should be mostly ‘good’: 16 out of 17 water bodies in Tone, and 12 out of 13 in West Somerset, with the remaining two water bodies being of ‘moderate’ quality. Climate change is likely to lead to drier summers, which could reduce the availability of water at a time when both population growth and per capita water usage is increasing. Particularly vulnerable are those habitats dependent on groundwater. However the draft Water Resources Management Plan for Wessex Water suggests that there will be enough water supply for the future population of SWT to 2040 and beyond (Figure 3.26). This is in great part because the population of the entire Wessex Water area is not expected to grow rapidly, combined with further household water efficiencies and leakage reductions.

Figure 3.26. Baseline critical period balance between supply and demand

Water Use and Quality: Existing problems

- Water quality in the district’s rivers is not achieving Water Framework Directive ‘good’ standard, mostly due to agricultural practices
- Poor water quality is affecting the quality of the district’s designated biodiversity areas

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**Key sustainability issue:**

- New development could affect water quality and flow
- Changes to water quality and flow could negatively affect rare and protected species found in the district, and designated and non-designated nature conservation sites.
- Major development of infrastructure, housing and industry will result in an increased demand for water, increasing pressure on available supplies.
4   Developing the Sustainability Appraisal Framework (Task A4)

An SA Framework provides a way of assessing the proposed plan’s social, environmental and economic effects, thus helping to ensure the plan’s sustainability. Tasks A1 – A3 provided an understanding of the main sustainability issues for SWT. Based on this, two SA frameworks have been drafted: a ‘policy SA framework’ for the plan policies, and a more detailed and location-specific ‘site SA framework’ for the proposed allocation sites.

The policy SA framework, shown at Table 4.1, consists of SA objectives and more detailed decision-making criteria. The framework has been partly based on the previous SA frameworks for Taunton Deane and West Somerset. The SA objectives incorporate all sustainability topics of Chapter 3, and the SEA topics of Annex I (f) of the SEA Directive.

Table 4.1 Policy SA framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA objective</th>
<th>Will the plan alternative/policy...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Population, health and deprivation**: | • Improve access to open spaces, recreation and sports facilities, and health services?  
• Reduce deprivation and inequality?  
• Reduce crime and the fear of crime? |
| maintaining quality of life, health and well-being for all residents |                                                                                                           |
| **2. Housing**: Provide and maintain a sufficient supply of good quality, mixed housing and ensure sustainable, balanced places are created and maintained | • Provide enough homes for existing and future residents?  
• Meet the need for affordable housing?  
• Provide homes suited to the need of residents, e.g. specialist homes for older residents, lifetime homes etc? |
| **3. Economy and retail**: Develop a dynamic, diverse and knowledge-based economy that excels in innovation with higher-value, lower-impact activities | • Encourage diversification of employment opportunities and higher wage employment opportunities?  
• Encourage the ‘green economy’ of environmentally-friendly jobs?  
• Support the roll-out of high-speed broadband?  
• Improve access to skills and entraining to encourage young people to remain in the district? |
| **4. Transport and air quality**: Minimise the need to travel (particularly by car), facilitate more sustainable forms of transport, and protect residents from poor air quality | • Reduce the need to travel?  
• Increase opportunities to use sustainable modes of transport?  
• Prevent development in areas of current or likely future poor air quality? |
| **5. Biodiversity**: Protect, conserve and enhance the district’s biodiversity, habitats and | • Protect designated wildlife sites, and avoid loss of ‘favourable conservation status’ of protected species? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA objective</th>
<th>Will the plan alternative/policy...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| species.     | • Protect wider biodiversity, including preventing fragmentation of habitats?  
               • Protect ecosystem services, including pollination?  
               • Provide significant biodiversity gain associated with new development? |
| 6. **Climate change**: Address the causes and impacts of, and adapt to, climate change | • Increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions?  
               • Increase the amount of energy generated from renewable resources?  
               • Help to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?  
               • Avoid development in areas of high and medium flood risk?  
               • Improve adaptation to other unavoidable effects of climate change (heat, drought, extreme weather events)? |
| 7. **Heritage**: Protect, enhance and manage sites, features and areas of archaeological, historical and cultural heritage importance (including maritime and coastal heritage), and their settings | • Prevent development from negatively affecting heritage assets and their settings?  
               • Enhance heritage assets and their settings? |
| 8. **Landscape**: Protect and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape quality of the district, maintaining and strengthening its distinctiveness and its special qualities | • Provide the AONB / Exmoor National Park with the highest level of policy protection, reflecting AONB and National Park management plan objectives?  
               • Encourage development which considers the existing character, form and pattern of the landscape, buildings and settlements?  
               • Encourage development which incorporates green infrastructure, woodland and open space into the design? |
| 9. **Soils, minerals and waste**: Minimise the development of greenfield sites, reduce soil contamination, ensure the provision of adequate minerals and promote the waste hierarchy | • Focus development on previously developed land?  
               • Protect high quality agricultural land?  
               • Promote the efficient use of land?  
               • RemEDIATE contaminated sites?  
               • Protect safeguarded minerals sites?  
               • Promote the waste hierarchy? |
| 10. **Water**: Protect and enhance water quality, and minimise water use | • Protect groundwater and surface water quality, e.g. through use of SUDS?  
               • Ensure that development is supported by adequate water supply, foul drainage, sewage treatment facilities and surface water drainage?  
               • Reduce per capita water consumption, e.g. through rainwater recycling, grey water reuse and BREEAM/Code for Sustainable Home standards? |
The possible site SA framework, shown at Table 4.2, considers factors that would affect the sustainability of development at that site. This allows sites to be assessed and compared on the basis of their sustainability. The framework does not consider issues related to housing or employment, since all housing/employment sites will score positively on these objectives. The site criteria may need to be fine-tuned (and possibly deleted) as information on the availability of appropriate data for the district becomes clearer.

Table 4.2 Possible site SA framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA objective</th>
<th>Site criteria:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Population, health and deprivation:** Reduce inequalities and promote quality of life, health and well-being for all residents | • Would development of the site deliver regeneration in an area that is in the lowest 20% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation?  
• How far is the nearest area of open space?  
• Would development of the site lead to loss of open space or recreational areas?  
• How far is the nearest GP surgery? |
| **4. Transport and air quality:** Minimise the need to travel (particularly by car), facilitate more sustainable forms of transport, and protect residents from poor air quality | • How far is the nearest town centre?  
• How far is the nearest train station?  
• How far is the nearest bus stop for buses that run once an hour or more?  
• Is the site in or adjacent to an Air Quality Management Area? |
| **5. Biodiversity:** Protect, conserve and enhance the district’s biodiversity, habitats and species. | • How far is the nearest SAC/SPA?  
• How far is the nearest SSSI?  
• Is there a protected species on site?  
• Is there other significant biodiversity on or near the site? |
| **6. Climate change:** Address the causes and impacts of, and adapt to, climate change | • Is the site wholly or partially within flood zone 3? Flood zone 2? |
| **7. Heritage:** Protect, enhance and manage sites, features and areas of archaeological, historical and cultural heritage importance (including maritime and coastal heritage), and their settings | • How far is the nearest heritage asset, and what is it?  
• Is the site in a Conservation Area?  
• How far is the nearest Area of High Archaeological Importance? |
| **8. Landscape:** Protect and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape quality of the district, maintaining and strengthening its distinctiveness and its special qualities | • How far is the nearest AONB?  
• How far is the nearest National Park?  
• Would development of the site affect a Green Wedge or other open space?  
• Would development of the site affect a sensitive ridgeline (e.g. in Taunton)? |
| **9. Soils, minerals and waste:** Minimise the development of greenfield sites, reduce soil contamination, ensure the provision of adequate minerals | • Is the site greenfield or previously developed?  
• If the site is greenfield, what is the agricultural land value? |
SA objective
and promote the waste hierarchy

Site criteria:
• Is the site in a mineral safeguarding area?

10. **Water:** Protect and enhance water quality, and minimise water use
• How far is the nearest water body?
• Is the site in a Source Protection Zone?

For both the policy and the sites appraisal, the categories of impact significance shown at Table 4.3 are used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>--</td>
<td>Major negative compared to the current situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Minor negative compared to the current situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>Both positive and negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Neutral effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Minor positive compared to the current situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>++</td>
<td>Major positive compared to the current situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Uncertain - Uncertain or unknown effect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Consulting on the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal (Task A5) and next steps

The purpose of the scoping report consultation is to ensure that the scope and level of detail of the environmental as well as social and economic information proposed to be included in Sustainability Appraisal is sufficient. In order to satisfy the requirements of the SEA Directive, we will seek the views of the statutory environmental consultation bodies designated in the SEA Regulations: Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. The consultation findings will be integrated into the final SA report.

The next SA steps to be carried out are Stages B and C: consideration of alternatives, assessment and mitigation of the impacts of the emerging plan, and preparation of an SA report.

The Council will be producing an Issues and Options document for consultation in November 2019, a Regulation 19 Draft Plan in summer 2020 and Submission to the Secretary of State in winter 2020. Examination in Public in spring 2021 with a view to Adopting the new Local Plan in winter 2021.