

Introduction

5.01 The Local Plan has an important role to play in promoting economic development and employment opportunities. If the need to travel is to be minimised, ensuring there is a continuing and growing range of job opportunities is vital for present and future residents. The prospects for economic growth have been central to the determination of the Structure Plan's housing provision for the District so as to discourage commuting.

5.02 It is important that the Plan is responsive to the changing requirements of the local economy, the structure of which varies considerably through the District. The 1980's and 1990's have seen a strong emphasis on market-led economic development, in association with considerable re-structuring of employment patterns and industrial technology. Government guidance places increased emphasis on the need for Development Plans to take account of the locational demands of business and wider environmental objectives. It also emphasises the role of Local Authorities to foster the development of small, medium-sized firms.

5.03 Throughout the 1980's and 1990's there was considerable restructuring of the District's employment profile. Sedgemoor now has a wider employment base. There is a significant concentration of industrial and service related employment particularly in Bridgwater. The Town has moved from being dominated by two or three major employers to a situation where several large companies are represented including a number of manufacturing firms in food, packaging and other industries. There are major new employment developments currently taking place at Express Park to the north of the Town and Huntworth Business Park to the south.

5.04 During the 1990's, Isleport Business Park was developed creating job opportunities in the Burnham / Highbridge area. Over 800 jobs have been created on the Business Park. Burnham-on-Sea continues to generate tourism related employment with considerable investment by the main leisure operators to extend the season. This is helping to increase full time employment prospects.

5.05 Cheddar is strongly characterised by the world famous Gorge and Caves, and thus relies heavily on tourism related employment. The recent expansion of the Cheddar Business Park is providing opportunities for a range of small firms to establish and expand.

5.06 A considerable number of Sedgemoor residents work outside the District. This commuting is principally to Taunton, North Somerset and the Bristol area. Whilst the Council will work towards greater opportunity for people to work locally, significant amounts of out commuting are likely to continue during the Plan period.

5.07 Many of the policy areas considered in other chapters of the Local Plan are employment generating. This chapter confines itself to issues relating to the supply of land and buildings for industrial, warehousing, office and other business use. Employment in these activities will only account for a proportion of future job opportunities and other sectors of the economy (such as tourism, shopping, construction, agriculture, quarrying and other service trades and professions) will continue to be significant sources of employment.

5.08 The District Council undertakes a high profile and active role in economic development initiatives, both on its own and working with partners encouraging the development of employment activity. The Local Plan policies are one part of a wider strategy to encourage economic activity.

Key Objective

To foster and promote the economic well-being of the District, through application of positive and flexible policies designed to support the establishment and expansion of a range of competitive businesses and enterprises which also contribute towards achieving local need, sustainability and quality objectives.

Employment Land Requirements

5.09 The Structure Plan requires about 95 hectares of land be made available in Sedgemoor for industrial, warehouse and business employment 1991-2011. It states that part of this allocation may be provided on sites allocated for mixed-use development. There is currently sufficient employment land already committed in Sedgemoor to meet this requirement. Some modest increase in land provision is advisable, however, in order to provide for further choice flexibility and assurance of land availability throughout the Plan period. (Figure 5.1)

5.10 In considering the identification of further employment land the Local Plan has been guided by the "sequential" strategy for develop-

Employment and Economic Development

Chapter 5

Figure 5.1 Employment Land Availability as at January 2004 (1991 - 2011)			
	Sedgemoor District	Bridgwater	Burnham/Highbridge
Structure Plan Provision	95.0 ha		
Built or u/c 1991 - 2003	35.8 ha	27.3 ha	6.3 ha
Sites with Planning Permission	54.6 ha	34.90 ha	17.7 ha
Allocated	22.0 ha	17.4 ha	2.0 ha
Total	97.4 ha	64.6 ha	26.0 ha

Notes

- 1** Figure excludes refurbishment and redevelopment of existing sites and properties. They are approximations based on large site information. They should therefore be viewed as an indication of the strategic employment land availability in Sedgemoor.
- 2** The Local Plan includes brownfield housing allocations that will use 15.0 ha of existing employment land. The largest single site totals almost 5.0 ha at Wembdon Road.

ment (Policy STR4) and the proposals for housing (as outlined in the Housing Chapter). Consistent with the Structure Plan, the Local Plan aims to achieve a close relationship between areas of economic expansion and the housing allocations.

Employment Land Proposals

Bridgwater

- 5.11** The majority of existing employment land commitments, (63ha) are in Bridgwater. Express Park, the single largest site (totalling approximately 42ha) is now under construction with the majority of the site now either complete or committed. It is anticipated that this site will be developed over the remainder of the Plan period.
- 5.12** The second largest commitment is the previously allocated employment site at Somerset Bridge. This site remains an appropriate employment site, being well related to established employment areas and proposed road improvements.
- 5.13** There are a number of smaller sites, (including land at Huntworth, the Showground, and Bristol Road) with planning permission.
- 5.14** Whilst there is a range of sites available for both immediate and future development there has been a rapid take up of employment land recently. If this trend continues there may be a shortage of employment land before the end of the Plan period. Furthermore, there may need to be exceptional releases of land for employment generating purposes. The conditions in which such exceptional releases might be made cannot easily be predicted and provided for within the Plan. For example, the Council is aware of the specialised and specific land requirements of employers in Bridgwater involved in the manufacturing of food and drink.
- 5.15** If it is demonstrated that there is a shortage of employment land or that there is a need for an exceptional release of land because allocated sites are unsuitable, the Council will seek to identify a further site or sites. In so doing the Council will adopt the sequential approach set out in policy STR4. It will also have regard to the relevant guidance in RPG10 or any successor Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 5.16** Little Sydenham Farm, a large site on the edge of Bridgwater, which has potential for rail freight

access but which requires substantial road improvements, has significant potential as an employment site. This site, or any other site that might be identified, would require an approved planning brief, an agreed Transport Assessment, an approved Green Travel Plan and it would need to be in accordance with the relevant Transport Strategy for Bridgwater.

Somerset Bridge, Bridgwater

- 5.17** This site (12.5ha) is bounded by the River Parrett, the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal, the railway and to the west The Old Basin. Located between the existing Colley Lane and Huntworth Business Park employment areas the site is a logical location for industrial, warehouse and business use. Access to the site will be via the Colley Lane Southern Access Route (Policy TM2). This will be provided in association with residential development at south Bridgwater.
- 5.18** The Bridgwater and Taunton Canal and River Parrett are important recreational routes. The site is surrounded by a "green wedge" as defined in the Local Plan (Policy CNE4). This designation confirms the long-term significance of the edge of development in this area, retaining connections between countryside and the urban area and keeping open an area important to the character of Bridgwater. The development of this site will therefore require an appropriate and sensitive landscaping scheme.
- 5.19** Part of the site was a landfill site, comprising the infilling of former clay pits. In the past, landfill gas has been produced at this site and monitoring suggests biodegradation is still occurring.
- 5.20** A public footpath and private access road to residential properties (which is used as part of the National Cycleway Network) crosses the site from Crossway Swing Bridge to the railway bridge. This cycling and pedestrian link will need to be maintained in the development of the site. (The access to the housing east of the railway will also need to be maintained).

PROPOSAL E1

Land at Somerset Bridge, Bridgwater (as defined on the Proposals Map) be developed for industrial warehouse or business use subject to the criteria as set out at Appendix 5.1.

Employment and Economic Development

Chapter 5

Land at former Wellworthys playing field, Salmon Parade, Bridgwater

- 5.21** This site (1.9 hectares) is located within the Colley Lane Industrial Park. It was formally used for recreation but has been vacant for over ten years. It is well located to existing employment uses and is one of the few remaining sites within the town.

PROPOSAL E12

Land at former Wellworthys playing field, Salmon Parade, Bridgwater (as defined on the Proposals Map) be developed for industrial, warehouse or business use subject to the criteria set out at Appendix 5.1.

Land to the north of Bridgwater Retail Park, east of The Leggar, Bridgwater

- 5.22** This site (2.6 hectares) is located within the Castle Field Industrial Estate to the west of The Leggar. Contributions will be required toward the completion of The Leggar Link (Proposal TM2z).
- 5.23** The site adjoins known landfill sites and therefore before any development commences a Contaminated Land Assessment will be required.

PROPOSAL E13

Land to the north of Bridgwater Retail Park, east of The Leggar, Bridgwater (as defined on the Proposals Map) to be allocated for industrial, warehouse or business use subject to the criteria set out in Appendix 5.1

Land at East Quay, Bridgwater

- 5.24** This site (0.4 hectares) is located on the west side of East Quay within the Castlefields Industrial Estate. It is adjacent to the River Parrett flood defences and any buildings will be required to be set back 8.0m in order to safeguard access.

PROPOSAL E14

Land at East Quay, Bridgwater (as defined on the Proposals Map) to be developed for industrial, warehouse or business use subject to the criteria set out at Appendix 5.1

Burnham-on-Sea/Highbridge

- 5.25** The second largest committed employment site

in the District is the Isleport Business Park, Highbridge, (allocated in the Burnham-on-Sea Area Local Plan). Located on the east of the Town immediately to the north of the older Walrow Industrial Estate, there is currently about 10ha of land available for employment development.

- 5.26** The Local Plan seeks to relate housing growth closely with employment prospects. Significant additional housing is proposed within the Burnham and Highbridge areas (see Chapter 4). Although there is still a significant amount of employment land available on the Isleport Business Park, some further land should therefore be identified. In the longer term, beyond the Plan period, land in the vicinity of the Isleport Industrial Park is subject to further evaluation, likely to be an appropriate location for employment.

Extension of Isleport Business Park

- 5.27** This site (2 hectares) immediately adjoins the Isleport Business Park to the west and is bounded by Isleport Road to the east.
- 5.28** There is a residential property to the south, as well as a number of houses on the eastern side of Isleport Road. It is important that their environment is not adversely affected by any further development. It is appropriate to restrict development to Office, Research & Development and Light Industrial (Use Class B1).
- 5.29** It is also essential that a landscape buffer be established along the boundary with Isleport Road.

PROPOSAL E2

Land at Isleport Business Park, Highbridge (as defined on the Proposals Map) be developed for business use (B1) subject to the criteria set out at Appendix 5.1.

Cheddar

- 5.30** As the District's largest rural settlement Cheddar, (a "Rural Centre") has significant employment opportunities. There is currently about 4.5ha of employment land committed as phase two of The Cheddar Business Park, the majority of which has now been completed.
- 5.31** Given the amount of housing land already committed, at Cheddar the general desire to offer increased opportunity for local employment and

the possibility of further development, should the high housing growth scenario be adopted, it is appropriate to provide a modest additional allocation for employment land.

Land at Steart Farm, Wedmore Road, Cheddar

5.32 This site (2.6 hectares) adjoins the established Cheddar Business Park and was previously identified in the deposit version of the Cheddar Area Local Plan. It was excluded from the adopted Plan due to an over supply of employment land at that time.

5.33 It is well related to existing employment uses. There is also the opportunity to provide pedestrian and cycle links to the existing and proposed network.

PROPOSAL E3

Land at Steart Farm, Wedmore Road, Cheddar (as defined on the Proposals Map) be developed for industrial, warehouse or business use subject to the criteria set out at Appendix 5.1.

Employment Development

5.34 The employment land proposals support the Local Plans strategy for focussed development. In assessing other proposals for new development, extensions and redevelopment for employment the Local Plan will seek to ensure that this strategy is maintained.

5.35 The travel implications of employment development is an important sustainability issue. Employment is a major trip generator in terms of commuting and freight traffic. It is important that new employment development is achieved in a way that is compatible with the Transport and Movement policies of the Plan (Chapter 7). In particular, the Local Plan seeks to encourage public transport, walking and cycling (Policy TM1) and alternatives to road freight, it safeguards sites for rail freight facilities at Bridgwater and protects the District's two active ports at Dunball and Combwich Wharves (Policies TM6 and TM7).

POLICY E4

Industrial, warehousing, office or other business uses will be permitted within the Defined Boundaries of Towns, Rural Centres and Villages provided that:

a) their environmental impact is compatible with adjoining uses;

b) in the case of industrial or warehousing development where significant levels of freight is likely to be generated there is safe access to the National or County Road network and/or rail freight facilities;

c) large employment developments with high employment densities should be located close to public transport nodes; and

d) in Rural Centres and Villages the scale and type of development is compatible with the settlement's size, public transport accessibility and appropriate to their character and physical identity.

Employment in Rural Areas

5.36 The Council is committed to an active economy in rural areas. A wide range of businesses can be accommodated in the countryside with appropriate safeguards to control their impact. It is important that employment opportunities are available in the rural areas if people are to have the opportunity for a job that does not involve long distance commuting by car and rural services are to be supported. It is an important part of achieving sustainable development in rural areas.

Small Scale Employment Adjoining Rural Centres and Villages

5.37 Normally, new and expanded employment opportunities in the rural areas should be accommodated within the defined boundaries of Rural Centres and Villages (Policy E4). There may be justification for the development of small-scale employment uses adjoining the boundaries of a Rural Centre or Village. The Council will need to be convinced that there are no opportunities for accommodating the development within the settlement boundary.

POLICY E5

Outside but adjoining the defined boundaries of Rural Centres and Villages, permission will be given for new small scale business, industrial or warehousing employment provided that:

a) the site is adjoining to the boundaries of a Rural Centre or Village within which there is no suitable site available;

Employment and Economic Development

Chapter 5

- b) **there would be no unacceptable impact on residential amenity and the character of the countryside;**
- c) **uses which would attract a significant number of people will be accessible by public transport; and**
- d) **the scale and type of development is compatible with the settlement's size, public transport accessibility and appropriate to its character and physical identity.**

New and Existing Employment Uses in the Countryside

5.38 Existing employment uses in the countryside will in appropriate instances be permitted to expand within their existing sites, as long as their impact is not made worse. The redevelopment or rationalisation of existing sites may also be acceptable if the consequences for the character of the countryside and the surrounding area would not be significant.

5.39 The extension of employment sites in the countryside beyond existing boundaries will not be permitted unless some exceptional reasons can be demonstrated to set aside the normal presumption. There may in exceptional circumstances be a need for a countryside location, such as the processing of a local agricultural product. However new employment sites in the countryside will not normally be allowed.

POLICY E6

In the countryside beyond settlement boundaries the establishment of new employment sites and the extension of established sites will only be permitted where a countryside location is essential and no suitable alternative is available within or adjoining a local settlement.

POLICY E7

Within existing employment sites within the countryside limited extension of existing buildings or redevelopment will be allowed, provided that:

- a) **it is in scale with the existing use;**
- b) **uses which would attract a significant number of people will be accessible by public transport; and**

- c) **it does not increase the environmental impact of the site.**

The Conversion of Rural Buildings

5.40 An important source of business accommodation is the conversion of rural buildings. They can also meet the needs of tourism, sport and recreation. Policies for the conversion of rural buildings are set out in the Countryside and Natural Environment Chapter (Policy CNE3)

Farm Diversification

5.41 Government advice encourages farm-based diversification. It recognises that farmers increasingly look to diversify beyond the agricultural industry in order to supplement their incomes. It is important that this broadening of the economy in the rural areas does not create unacceptable environmental impacts. (A policy for farm shops is set out in the Shopping and Town Centres Chapter - Policy TC14)

POLICY E8

Proposals to diversify the range of economic activities on a farm will be permitted if all the following criteria are met:

- a) **the proposal is complementary to the agricultural operations on the farm and is operated as part of the farm holding;**
- b) **the proposal should re-use or adapt any existing farm buildings, which are available;**
- c) **if a new building is justified it should be sited in or adjacent to an existing group of buildings, be of compatible design and blend satisfactorily into the landscape in design, siting and materials;**
- d) **there would be no harm to the residential amenity of neighbouring property, landscape, wildlife or highway safety; and**
- e) **uses that would attract a significant number of people will be accessible by public transport.**

Loss of Employment Sites and Buildings

5.42 Land and buildings that are in employment use or with the potential to provide employment as

a result of planning permission or Local Plan allocation, is an important economic resource. The loss of employment land and buildings to another use should be resisted unless there are clear planning advantages to be gained for alternative uses, or its employment use is demonstrably no longer viable.

5.43 The maximisation of brownfield development is fundamental to the locational strategy of the Local Plan, as set out in the “sequential” strategy for development (Policy STR4). A number of housing sites have been developed or are identified on what were employment sites. However, it is part of the strategy that the maximisation of housing on previously developed sites and in the conversion of buildings shall not prejudice employment opportunities. Employment activity is vital if housing growth is not to fuel increased commuting.

5.44 Where it is clear that the continued employment use of a site or buildings are no longer viable an alternative use will be appropriate. Changing requirements of businesses, restructuring of local industry and problems of access and impact on neighbouring land uses has rendered a number of employment sites particularly in Bridgwater and Highbridge inappropriate for future employment use. Some redevelopment sites will be appropriate for employment development, possibly as part of mixed-use schemes.

POLICY E9

Proposals which lead to the loss of existing or committed business, industrial or warehousing land or buildings to other uses will not normally be permitted unless:

- a) an existing activity which is causing environmental problems would thereby be relocated to a more suitable site; or**
- b) other clear advantages would occur which outweigh the economic disadvantages; or**
- c) there is demonstrably no likelihood of a viable employment use or redevelopment; or**
- d) it can be demonstrated that there would be no significant implications for the quantitative or qualitative supply of employment land and buildings.**

Improvement of Employment Areas

5.45 In some of the older industrial areas of the District, particularly in Bridgwater and Highbridge, businesses are operating in a poor environment in terms of layout, amenity areas or landscaping. The Council will require all new employment developments to be carried out to the highest standards appropriate to the site and location. Any redevelopment of substandard employment areas will also be expected to address existing deficiencies.

POLICY E10

The improvement of the environment, setting and attraction of existing employment areas will be sought and the implementation of appropriate improvement schemes in conjunction with employment operators and landowners will be encouraged.

Home Working

5.46 Established planning policies have sought to resist the development of employment uses where this would adversely impact on other uses, especially housing. Working from home offers significant scope to reduce the need to travel. Technological advances are making it possible for an increasing number of people to work entirely or partially from home.

5.47 In predominantly residential areas the aim is to maintain the residential character of the area and the dwellings in it. If it is judged that an existing or a proposed non-residential use does or would not meet that aim, then it is likely that a material change of use is involved and planning permission would be required. The Council will ensure that such developments are properly controlled by means of planning conditions and, in some cases, by legal agreements. Where appropriate the Council will use its enforcement powers.

5.48 Those considering working from home should seek the advice of the Council at an early stage. In essence the test is whether the non-residential use would generate more visitors, traffic, noise or fumes than if the property were used as a single dwelling without ancillary use. If it would not planning permission is unlikely to be required. If planning permission is required, either for a new proposal or as a result of the intensification of an existing use, then policy E11 will apply.

Employment and Economic Development

Chapter 5

POLICY E11

Within predominantly residential areas proposals for the creation of a workplace within a dwelling, or a separate workplace within a residential curtilage, will be permitted provided that the essentially residential character of the building and the area is not significantly affected in terms of:

- a) the number of visitors and the amount of traffic attracted;**
- b) the levels of noise and pollution created;**
- c) the provision of external lighting and advertising; and**
- d) the hours of working.**