

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	1st February 2023	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE
		E 3510
TITLE:	Somer Valley Enterprise Zone Local Development Order – Commitments	
WARD:	Paulton	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
<p>List of attachments to this report:</p> <p>Please list all the appendices here, clearly indicating any which are exempt and the reasons for exemption.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1- Biodiversity Net Gain Policy Flow Diagram • Appendix 2- Combined Walking/Cycling Plan for A362. 		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Council is committed to delivering the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone (SVEZ). This is a priority in the adopted Local Plan and the Bath and North East Somerset Economic Strategy under Cabinet paper E3499.
- 1.2 There is a market failure in the provision of employment space in Bath and North East Somerset, including in the Somer Valley where there is clear evidence of a reduction in good quality, local jobs and increase in out-commuting. The Council's new Economic Strategy therefore prioritises action to:
- a) Create **Resilient Businesses** by building a diverse, creative, and sustainable base.
 - b) Support **Stronger Places**, building resilience and sharing prosperity more fairly.
 - c) In addition, the Economic Strategy expresses our commitment to supporting a **greener economy**.
- 1.3 SVEZ will create an exemplar, net zero green business park for new business and employment and will contribute to the development of a diverse, creative and sustainable local business base. The Enterprise Zone will provide a sustainable green business park location to grow our green economy (examples being renewables, battery technology, hydrogen, carbon reduction, green tech, carbon sequestration, green finance), providing businesses an environment to maximise their contribution to tackling the climate emergency.

- 1.4 The green economy encompasses more than the renewable energy and environmental services sectors. The natural resources sector is growing and will continue to do so to deliver biodiversity net gain and nature-based solutions to address climate change and local needs. The Council is committed to work with businesses to green all sectors, enabling local organisations to act on new market opportunities to position us as leaders in green inclusive growth. The SVEZ is a critical intervention to ensure that these businesses are able to base themselves and grow in the Somer Valley.
- 1.5 A proactive approach is required to achieve these aims and stem the decline in local employment available around Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Paulton and Farrington Gurney, reducing the traffic and emissions caused by out-commuting. The Council has set out to deliver appropriate economic development through the creation of this Enterprise Zone.
- 1.6 The Council's ambition for the SVEZ is to provide high quality jobs and to do so in a way that enhances the environment, provides the infrastructure to enable people to choose walking and cycling and bus transport, and protects the local high street. One of the reasons that the Council is leading the project is to ensure that these aims are fully met.
- 1.7 The Council proposes to control the development and ensure it meets the aims set out here through a 'double lock'. Firstly, through the adoption of the Local Development Order (Cabinet paper E3486) which provides the planning permission that describes how sustainable development can come forward. Secondly, by securing the land and thereby controlling how to bring development forward, including ensuring the supporting infrastructure is put in place. This is set out in Cabinet paper E3487.
- 1.8 This paper sets out the commitments the Council has for the SVEZ. Some of these will be delivered by adopting the LDO. Others will require further Council interventions to ensure that the site delivers growth that is sustainable and enhances the lives of residents in the Somer Valley. The plans set out here and in the LDO will seek to deliver an exemplary commercial and green development, creating circa 1,300 jobs while minimising the negative impact on residents and the environment.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Adopt the 8 aims defined within this paper that set the Council's commitments for the SVEZ.
- 2.2 Review progress on the Enterprise Zone regularly and agree any further interventions required to ensure that these ambitions are being met.

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 The SVEZ comprises 33 acres of land located at Old Mills to the west of Midsomer Norton. The greenfield allocation at this location was agreed in 2007 (Local Plan) and again in 2023 (Local Plan Partial Update) because of the lack of suitable brownfield sites in the area. The legacy of historic industrial sites in the

Somer Valley, in local centres and close proximity to existing housing, did not make these sites suitable for the scale of mixed commercial development required to meet employment needs or business growth in the Somer Valley, historically or now. These town centre brownfield sites have all been allocated.

3.2 The land is designated as an Enterprise Zone which means that all the business rates growth generated by new development will be fully retained by the Council for a period of 25 years.

3.3 The SVEZ has been allocated as an employment site since 2007, yet the market has failed to bring forward development due to significant barriers to the private sector led intervention. The Council has taken responsibility of promoting the site allocation via the LDO.

3.4 The LDO allows the development of commercial buildings on the site within the parameters set out in the LDO and Design Codes, including limits on total floor area, heights of buildings and materials used in construction.

3.5 The Council has set 8 ambitious aims, these fall into two categories: direct ambitions for the SVEZ and mitigations to reduce the impact on residents.

3.6 **Council commitments on the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone**

3.6.1 **Create good quality jobs for residents that will reduce out commuting.**

a) The SVEZ is designed to provide up to 1,300 jobs in 35,800 sqm of mixed commercial floorspace. This is a significant increase in local jobs that seeks to reduce the number of out commuting trips and seek to transition these movements to walking/cycling and sustainable transport modes.

b) The SVEZ will support a resilient business ecosystem that will provide upskilling and development opportunities for local residents. The Council is committed to developing employment pathways through the lifecycle of the SVEZ:

- Working with local schools, Bath College (Somer Valley Campus) and employers to promote career paths and an understanding of business and industry in the Somer Valley
- Working with local businesses and those occupying space at SVEZ to promote employment pathways and apprenticeships during construction and occupational phases.

c) The SVEZ will also seek to encourage the development of new businesses and local start ups and offer a space for these businesses to develop. In particular, the Council's Economic Strategy provides a commitment to green the local economy by supporting growth in green and sustainable businesses and helping existing businesses to transition. Control over the businesses that locate on the SVEZ is provided by ownership of the land, this is the subject of Cabinet paper E3487.

3.6.2 **Provide a sustainable location for green businesses to maximise their contribution to tackling the climate and nature emergency**

- a) The Corporate Strategy sets a commitment to improve the abundance and diversity of species by creating and improving habitats. The SVEZ will deliver circa 10 acres of green infrastructure on site, including over 10,000 trees. Off-setting of BNG could deliver circa 16 acres of habitat locally.
- b) Drainage management will offer a more natural approach to manage surface water through sustainable drainage ponds that create new habitats leading to an increase in biodiversity at SVEZ.
- c) Phase 1 & 2 of the infrastructure works, which includes the perimeter buffer zone and structural planting and landscaping, will deliver 46% BNG. The SVEZ will be net BNG positive during early plot delivery, albeit each plot is also required to deliver to the policy. See Appendix 1 – BNG future position.
- d) Development on site will achieve net zero carbon through sustainable construction measures including, but not limited to:
 - i. Minimising energy use through the use of energy efficient fabric and services.
 - ii. Maximising opportunities for renewable energy to mitigate all regulated operational emissions.
 - iii. The SVEZ will help to reduce vehicle-related CO2 emissions through the provision of 20% EV charging on site.
- e) The LDO will be reviewed every 5 years and if either legal or policy requirements change then they can be incorporated into the LDO requirements.

3.6.3 **Improve Active Travel**

- The Council's Corporate Strategy sets a commitment to provide more travel choices to all residents. Our commitment is to ensure that a safe cycle path is available between Farrington Gurney and Midsomer Norton before businesses move into the SVEZ, along with promised road improvements and a firm plan in place to extend the cycle track north to Bristol.
- The SVEZ LDO will deliver a segregated walking and cycling track from Old Mills Lane along the A362 to integrate with the Norton Radstock Greenway.
- The Council has been working closely with the Combined Authority's Somer Valley Links Project which, once approved, will provide a shared active travel walking and cycling link from Old Mills Lane to Farrington Gurney. Somer Valley Links has a provisional on site works commencement date of Q3 2025. See Appendix 2 for combined walking/cycling plan for the A362.

- The impact of combined walking/cycling plan shown within Appendix 2 demonstrates the opportunity to focus on increasing pedestrian and cycle movements within the Somer Valley. The Council will seek to increase the transition to walking/cycling and sustainable transport through bus trips.

3.6.4 Ensure public transport is available from the first occupation.

- The Council aims to maintain and extend local and rural regular bus service provision beyond 2027 along the A362 so that employees based at the SVEZ can travel to work by bus. We will work with the Combined Authority and First Bus to seek to extend provision in time for the opening of the SVEZ.
- A Bus Service Assessment has been prepared that reviews the current and future need for buses along the A362. At present, bus services meet the target set by the WECA Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which is due for review in 2027.

3.7 REDUCTING THE IMPACT ON RESIDENTS

3.7.1. Mitigate the risk of worsening air quality

- The Council's Corporate Strategy (2023-7) sets a commitment to lead the UK in Climate Action, including by continually improving air quality. The Council therefore aspires to local limits such as annual concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of 36g/m³ to ensure momentum on air quality is maintained.
- Air quality modelling has been undertaken as part of the Council's LDO submission. The model assessed the air quality of the surrounding area with and without SVEZ.
- All modelled test sites demonstrate a negligible impact in both NO₂ concentrations and PM₁₀ concentrations with the readings forecasting a <36µg/m³ with or without the SVEZ in all locations.
- The SVEZ green business park will adopt a phased delivery over a number of years. The Council is committed to minimising the impact on air quality of the phasing and will identify steps and procedures that will be implemented to minimise the creation and impact on air quality and dust at the site and neighbouring AQMAs through an approved Construction Environmental Management Plan prior to commencement of development. All development will thereafter be carried out in accordance with the Plan, to meet the planning condition. Air quality monitoring will be undertaken regularly to ensure continuing compliance with local air quality management objectives.

3.7.2 Protect Midsomer Norton High Street

- The Council is working towards an economy that is fair, green, creative, and connected. It is important that our economy is inclusive, and prosperity is shared and, as such, the Council is committed to protecting our local high streets.

- The SVEZ will be a mixed commercial park with a range of use typologies. No standalone retail use is proposed through the LDO, only an ancillary food & beverage use on one plot that must complement the nearby town centres. The precise use on this plot can be determined through ownership of the land. This is the subject of Cabinet paper E3487.

3.7.3. Minimise the flow of HGVs on our highways.

- A Deliveries and Collection Strategy for each development plot will be secured through each plot specific Compliance Application. This will include detail of coordination, timings, and arrivals of HGVs. These strategies will control the movement of HGVs during the operational phase of the SVEZ.
- Conditions 21 and 22 of the LDO will deliver site-wide and plot specific Construction Management Plans for construction phases to be submitted prior to development.
- Extensive traffic modelling has taken place which predicts a maximum 4% increase in HGVs on the A37 and 8% on the A362.

3.7.4 No drive through food outlets that will add litter to our roads.

- The Council recognises the ambition to reduce the impact of litter on local roads and does not intend to allow a drive-through food and beverage unit on Plot 4 to generate excess litter.
- The way in which Plot 4 is used as a food and beverage unit can be controlled through ownership of the land. This is the subject of Cabinet paper E3487.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 Progression of the future ambitions is reliant on control of the land. Further information can be found within the Statutory Mechanisms paper E3487.
- 5.2 Implementing some or all future ambitions may impact land value, this will need to be considered through individual plot related business cases.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 Risk assessments relating to the issues and recommendations will be undertaken at the time these ambitions come forward in operational delivery or policy terms, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.
- 6.2 In general, the ambitions do not pose significant risk. If the wording of the ambitions changes that could affect the analysis of risk.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the SVEZ project. Following a review with the Equalities Team, no adverse impacts have been identified.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 8.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency in March 2019, committing it to providing the leadership necessary to enable Bath and North East Somerset to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 8.2 The SVEZ represents an opportunity to address several related issues which will help to address the climate emergency. It will help reduce out-commuting in the Somer Valley through the provision of new jobs and it will also provide a range of active and sustainable travel improvements including a new cycle link to the Norton Radstock Greenway and new bus stop.
- 8.3 The development will achieve a 100% regulated operational carbon emissions reduction from Building Regulations Part L 2021 (or future equivalent legislation). The SVEZ will help to reduce vehicle-related CO2 emissions through the provision of EV charging on site, in line with the Council's local transport policies.
- 8.4 The LDO is compliant with B&NES Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policy. The development will deliver 10% BNG via on- and off-site provision. Offsite BNG will be focussed locally.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 Not applicable

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 An informal engagement was held from 19th May 2022 to 30th June 2022 for stakeholders, Parish Councils, Town Councils, and the public to comment on the illustrative masterplan, proposed highway works and design aspects of the site. During the informal public engagement, a public webinar was held alongside presentations at Westfield Parish Council, Radstock Town Council, Paulton Parish Council and a resident's meeting held in Paulton. Consultation material was held on the B&NES website but also installed in Paulton, Midsomer Norton and Radstock libraries. A hard copy of the engagement questionnaire was also made available at the libraries.
- 10.2 The LDO statutory consultation began on 16th January 2023 and completed on 13th February 2023. Statutory consultees and the public were able to comment on all relevant LDO documents via the planning portal.
- 10.3 A revised statutory consultation was carried out from 22nd September 2023 to 26th October 2023. Prior to the revised consultation going live, the project team attended a Somer Valley Links consultation drop in event at Farrington Gurney on the 24th July 2023. In addition, the team presented at Farrington Gurney Parish Council meeting on 18th September 2023 and to the Somer Valley Forum on 20th September 2023.

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Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	