

**South Somerset District Council: Strategic Growth Options for Yeovil  
 Assessing the Options – Suggested Approach**

1. The SA has used the agreed SA Framework of objectives & decision-aiding questions, recognising 5 categories of significance based on available thresholds & standards (please refer to key in SA Report) and available evidence; gaps and uncertainties are acknowledged (and acceptable).
2. The comparative SA has not identified a clear preferred option (and this is not unusual – these are strategic assessments by definition. The SA could differentiate further, for example, by using thresholds of distances or provision of services/facilities – but these would have to be set by the Council.
3. The requirement from the EU SEA Directive is that the reasons for selecting/rejecting options should be made clear in the (Environmental) Report. The SA is a decision-aiding tool, not in itself a decision-maker.
4. We set out below a list of suggested criteria that could be used to help identify and justify the preferred direction of growth for Yeovil:

No	Criterion	Potential Reasoning & Examples
1	Deliverability and viability (housing & employment)	Certainly of delivery – ability to contribute to short and medium term housing need (takes in to account complexity; partnership arrangements of landowners; stage of advancement existing plans)
1a	Market Capacity	Consideration of market capacity constraints
1b	Infrastructure deliverability	Key infrastructure deliverability (reference to existing commitments & timings for road, cycle and walk ways improvements )
2	Provision of services & facilities	Ability of development to satisfy proven local / strategic need. Proximity to and ability to support sustainability of existing services
3	Further Mitigation potential	Landscape / Heritage/ Agricultural land (opportunities to mitigate some negative impacts; consideration of phasing; offsite possibilities; comparative effectiveness)
4	Added opportunities and benefits	Exceptional ability of development to contribute to proven need; to create key opportunity e.g. sports facility/ school/ access to employment site.
5	Ability to provide long term development (beyond Plan period)	To fulfill aspiration for a large self-sustainable community. Para 154 of the NPPF states that “Local Plans should be aspirational but realistic.”

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While the numerical/quantitative weighting for the further criteria isn't considered appropriate, national planning policy provides guidance on which of them could be afforded greater weight in terms of decision-making. The NPPF states in Para 182 that a local planning authority (LPA) should submit a plan for examination which it considers is sound, namely that it is positively prepared; justified; effective and consistent with national policy. As part of submitting an effective plan the LPA needs to ensure that it is deliverable over the plan period.

Para 173 relates to ensuring viability and deliverability stating that “pursuing sustainable development requires careful attention to viability and costs in plan-making and decision-taking. Plans should be deliverable.” It then goes on to say that “the sites and the scale of development identified in the plan should not be subject to such a scale of obligations and policy burdens that their ability to be developed viably is threatened.”

The deliverability and viability of sites is also emphasised through the delivery of a wide choice of high quality homes. Para 47 of the NPPF states that authorities should identify and update annually a supply of deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing need. “To be considered deliverable, sites should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years and in particular that development of the site is viable.” It goes on to state that “to be considered developable, sites should be in a suitable location for housing development and there should be a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.”

The NPPF stresses the importance of deliverability and viability in producing a sound plan. To acknowledge this and ensure conformity with national planning policy it is recommended that the first criterion is afforded the greatest weight in decision-making. Market capacity and infrastructure deliverability influence deliverability and viability and so should be considered as sub-criteria to the first criterion (deliverability and viability). Para 177 of the NPPF states that it is “important to ensure that there is a reasonable prospect that planned infrastructure is deliverable in a timely fashion.” The NPPF also sets out the importance of taking market signals and conditions into account.

If there is still little to differentiate between the Options after criteria 1 to 4 have been considered then the Council should take into account which of the Options has the greatest potential to meet the aspirations of the Plan. Criterion 5 relates to the aspiration of the Plan for a large self-sustainable community, essentially considering the capacity of the Option to accommodate further development after the life of the Plan. Aspirations for beyond the plan period can be a final consideration for the Council after the other 4 criteria, which primarily relate to the provision of sustainable development during the life cycle of the plan.