INFRASTRUCTURE, COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

As explained previously in this submission, a considerable amount of housing development has already taken place around the northern outskirts of Yeovil, and some of these developments have not benefitted from adequate infrastructure and community facilities – for example over 1,000 houses were constructed in the Great Lyde estate to the west of Lyde Road, and in the Redwood Road / Romsey Road area to the east of Lyde Road (both in the neighbouring Lyde Ward of Yeovil Without Parish) with virtually no facilities.

Furthermore, despite the generally high level of employment within Yeovil, the eastern wards of Yeovil are considered to be amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England. References to this deprivation can be found, inter alia, in the English Indices of Deprivation – Somerset Summary, the Parish Profile (January 2012) of St Michaels and All Angels Church – Yeovil, and the website of the Reckleford Community School and Children’s Centre – Yeovil.

This situation will be severely exacerbated when the three new Key Sites at Lyde Road, Brimsmore and Lufton (consisting of over 2,400 homes) are constructed and occupied. The planning permissions and Section 106 Agreements for these three Key Sites envisaged the provision of various new facilities which could have catered, not only for the residents of the Key Sites, but also for those of the neighbouring suburbs of Yeovil.

However, with the Lyde Road Key Site less than 50% complete, the developer of that site has already obtained permission to relax some of the Section 106 Agreements, including that for the maintenance of play spaces and equipment. Furthermore, we understand that the developer of the Lufton Key Site is also in negotiations to achieve similar relaxations of the Section 106 Agreements for that development.

There does not therefore seem to be any guarantee that the facilities which are promised for new housing developments will actually be provided or financed to the required level. Such developments cannot therefore be considered to be sustainable.

Developers also have a responsibility for the sustainability of new developments. A development cannot be considered to be sustainable if the developer is allowed to make promises to achieve outline planning permission or to get agreement to Section 106 Agreements, only for them to be allowed, or even encouraged by the Government, to later renege on those promises and agreements or slow down the provision of infrastructure and facilities, whenever they are able to argue that the profitability of a particular development is jeopardised by temporarily adverse economic conditions. Developers are aware that the housing market experiences good times and bad, and they should be required to ensure that the sustainability of all aspects of the whole development, not only their profitability, is achievable at all times.

If the feasibility of developments is threatened because those developments are no longer financially viable, then they should not be considered to be sustainable. It is the residents of such developments who have to suffer in the long term when inadequate facilities are provided.

It is the opinion of the Northern Parishes that no further housing should be sanctioned to the north of Yeovil unless there is a guarantee that all the necessary infrastructure, communal facilities and services will also be provided and can be afforded, to serve the deprived areas of Yeovil, the three
Key Sites and any proposed new development. Furthermore, it is the opinion of the northern parishes that such a sustainable development can only be achieved if all 1565 houses are built in one location – i.e. to the south of Yeovil.

Previous experience would also indicate that, whilst new housing developments can take several years to be completed, the necessary community facilities are not provided until the completion of the housing, either because of late trigger points in Section 106 Agreements, or because of delayed handover of facilities by the developer and non-adoption of roads by the County Council. These matters need to be taken into account for any new development.

It should be noted, as recorded in Clause 5 of the Inspector’s Preliminary Findings, that “it is the Council’s intention that any sustainable urban extension (SUE) would be exceptionally self-contained and that there would be little use of the car. Homes, employment (one job per household is the Council’s objective), education provision, leisure opportunities, and other community facilities and services (including retail) would be available within the extension”. Furthermore, a buffer zone was promised to separate East Coker from the development and a Garden City concept with 40% of green space within the development was envisaged (see Clause 30 of the Inspector’s Preliminary Findings). It is to be hoped that, if part of the YUE is regrettably to be constructed at Primrose Lane, that the Council’s intentions with regard to sustainable urban extensions will continue to apply in full to the Primrose Lane development.

A review of the current provision of infrastructure, community facilities and services, and future requirements is as follows:-

EDUCATION

It is understood that Somerset County Council now intend to construct a new primary school on the site which is being provided by the developer of the Lyde Road Key Site (Wyndham Park) under a Section 106 Agreement for that development. It is assumed that, if the proposed Primrose Lane Development should proceed, then the new school will be designed in such a way that it can relatively easily be extended to cater for both developments. If on the other hand, the YUE were to be built to the south of Yeovil, then the future of the nearby schools at Barwick and East Coker would be guaranteed and additional capacity could, if necessary, be provided within a new primary school on the site.

However, the provision of secondary education places is seen as being more of a problem. The three secondary schools (Bucklers Mead, Westfield and Preston Academies – all on the north side of Yeovil) are already overstretched and there are approximately 2,000 homes still to be constructed and occupied at the three Key Sites. As mentioned earlier, the total number of dwellings to be provided in Yeovil in the Plan Period is 7441 – of which 5876 would be within the urban framework of the town and 1565 at the sustainable urban extension(s). Furthermore in the Infrastructure Notes, it is stated “For 7441 dwellings over the Plan Period there is a requirement for …..1445 Primary Places and 1062 Secondary Places. A further 7,441 new homes (wherever they may be built) can therefore only increase the pressure on the three existing secondary schools, which will all need significant investment just to cope with existing development.
Somerset County Council should therefore provide undertakings that plans will be drawn up, in good
time and in consultation with the local parishes and residents, to ensure that the required number of
secondary school places are available when they are needed. It would seem to be sensible to locate
the YUE to the south of Yeovil incorporating a new secondary school, for a minimum of 1,000
students, to serve the south of Yeovil.

Finally Yeovil College is situated on a congested site with little scope for expansion. Assurances are
required that sufficient tertiary education places will be available to cater for the student
populations from Wyndham Park, Brimsmore, Lufton and from the proposed new Yeovil Urban
Extension(s), and to take account of the new requirement for compulsory education, training or
apprenticeships up to the age of 18.

ROAD NETWORK

It is the opinion of the Northern Parishes that the road network to the north of Yeovil (and indeed
throughout Yeovil) is already overloaded and unsafe. We understand that in town planning courses
in Canada and other countries, Yeovil is quoted as being a bad example of road network and traffic
planning management.

With the forthcoming completion of the Lyde Road Key Site and the impending commencement of
Brimsmore and Lufton Key Sites, the situation will soon become completely gridlocked, and the
construction of another development of 765 homes at Primrose Lane can only exacerbate that
situation. It is noted however that the evidence provided by SSDC/Enfusion does not include any
information regarding current or predicted traffic volumes across the north of Yeovil, and it is
difficult to believe that planning consultants could have arrived at a recommendation without that
necessary data.

Originally, outline planning permission for the Brimsmore development was approved on the basis
that a dual carriageway by-pass would be provided to divert the very heavy volume of traffic from
Thorne Lane around the new development. Subsequently the developer and the Highways
Authority have decided that such a highway could no longer be afforded. The Highways Authority
now seem to accept that the problem can be resolved by pumping ever more traffic through the
narrow main thoroughfare of the new Brimsmore Development – to the detriment of the safety and
well-being of the children and residents of that new development. More houses at Primrose Lane
will only increase this volume of traffic.

If the development at Primrose Lane is sanctioned, then presumably a new roundabout or traffic
light junction will have to be provided at the entrance to the site on Mudford Road, and further
improvements (over and above those which are now being contemplated) will be required at the
Lyde Road / Mudford Road, Lyde Road / Sherborne Road and Mudford Road / Coombe Street Lane
junctions.

This minor, but expensive, tinkering with nearby road junctions around the town seems to be the
only response of the Highways Authority to the traffic problems of Yeovil. It is the opinion of the
Northern Parishes that this policy will be insufficient to deal with the resultant traffic congestion,
and dual carriageway improvements on the scale which have been undertaken in Taunton are
required.
At present, road access to major trunk roads (A37 north and south, A3088 Cartgate Link and A303 east and west) is only available from the Primrose Lane site through congested parts of Yeovil, or through neighbouring villages, including Mudford, which are already unable to cope with the heavy traffic. Likewise, road access to the hospital, college, retail outlets, employment locations etc. is often already difficult and time consuming.

If an adequate road network cannot be afforded then new housing developments should not be contemplated.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Whilst it is acknowledged that the number of car journeys must be reduced to ease traffic congestion, pollution, global warming etc., this can only be achieved by the provision of affordable commercially viable or subsidised bus services or other form of public transport through properly pre-planned developments such as those which were previously being proposed for the YUE to the south of Yeovil.

Bus fares in Yeovil are currently expensive compared with other urban areas of the country (approximately £3.60 per single journey from Lyde Road to town centre). Also, by way of example, it is understood that the cost of school transport from Mudford Village to the school at Queen Camel is £600 per child per year.

One of the Section 106 Agreements for the Lyde Road Key Site (Wyndham Park) required the provision by the developer of £480,000 for bus services and £175,000 for travel initiatives. Somerset County Council has already received a total amount of £375,000 from the developer in respect of this Agreement, but the County Council appears to have banked this amount but no bus services or travel initiatives have yet been provided for the residents of Wyndham Park. On the contrary the County Council is now consulting on the possibility that funding will be withdrawn for the No. 11 route – the only bus service in Yeovil which is subsidised by Somerset County Council.

There would therefore appear to be very little chance that a bus service can be guaranteed for either Wyndham Park or for any proposed new neighbouring development at Primrose Lane. If, as suggested by the Planning Inspector, existing bus services can easily be extended into new developments, then why has this not been achieved at Wyndham Park? The lack of bus services at Wyndham Park results in the level of car ownership being so great that the parking of so many cars causes congestion on the roads of the estate. A similar situation cannot be allowed to occur on any new development.

On the other hand, if the YUE, with 1,565 dwellings, were to be constructed to the south of Yeovil, it would seem that a bus service serving that community and surrounding areas could be commercially viable, and even a dedicated bus lane or a tram service linking the southern sustainable urban extension to Yeovil town centre has been suggested.

With regard to rail transport, many towns and cities have taken advantage of out-of-town or parkway type railway stations to develop new commercial and housing areas. Yeovil Junction Station has a regular hourly service to London Waterloo and to Exeter. This service could relatively easily be enhanced, with faster journey times, if the second track (which was abandoned in the 1960s) were to be reinstated. It would therefore seem to be logical that the Keyford/Coker site
should be developed to take advantage of the valuable transport facility provided by the railway station – only a short walk, cycle ride, or bus ride away from that new development.

Walking and cycling routes are heralded as being necessary requirements for new developments, and assurances have been given that, wherever the Yeovil Urban Extension(s) may be located, encouragement will be given to walkers and cyclists. This may well be true within the confines of the new developments, but distances from Primrose Lane to college, hospital, town centre, out-of-town shops, railway stations, employment zones at Westlands, Yeovilton and the Trading Estates, are long and undulating and there does not seem to be any proposals for the provision of new footpaths and cycling routes through the outer and inner suburbs of Yeovil.

If adequate public transport facilities cannot be provided then new housing developments should not be envisaged.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

The Lyde Ward of Yeovil Without Parish consists of over 1,000 houses and has no Health Centre or pharmacy. Wyndham Park, with 848 houses planned, is currently under construction but it is not foreseen that land will be provided for a Health Centre and Pharmacy. If the new development at Primrose Lane is to get the go-ahead, then it is vitally important that a Health Centre and Pharmacy should be provided to service these three areas with a total population of approximately 6,000 persons.

Likewise, Yeovil District Hospital already occupies a congested site with little prospect for future expansion, and should have been relocated to a new site long ago. Already some health services are being transferred to Taunton and parking for staff and visitors is a nightmare. Will the hospital be able to cope with an influx of new residents from a total of 7,441 extra dwellings throughout the town, including from the Lyde Road, Brimsmore, and Lufton Key Sites and from the Yeovil Urban Extension(s)?

If acceptable health services cannot be guaranteed then further new housing should not be considered.

FLOODING

Flooding has become an annual fact of life for the residents of Mudford. The worst floods for over 40 years hit the village over the Christmas and New Year period of 2013/2014 (please refer to the Western Gazette newspapers of 19th and 26th December 2013).

The present situation is therefore already very severe – being made worse by recent extreme weather conditions and by the new neighbouring development at Wyndham Park. Building another 765 houses and associated paved areas over previously permeable land can only have an adverse effect upon an already dire situation.

Assurances are given that flooding can be alleviated by the use of attenuation ponds and detailed planning within the site to delay the outfall of surplus surface water into the nearby River Yeo, but it should be born in mind that in recent winters the River Yeo has been running at full bore for many
weeks. Furthermore, if measures to alleviate flooding can be so easily taken, then it is difficult to understand why those measures are not being taken now to ease the present situation.

If the flooding problem at Mudford cannot be resolved, then this new housing development should not be permitted.

Please also refer to the objections of Mr Roger Meecham and others for their comments on the flooding situation.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

It is understood that a total of 5 hectares of employment land, 40% open spaces, a community hall, and play spaces and equipment, are to be provided within the Yeovil Urban Extension(s), but it is important that land should also be made available for other community facilities to be established e.g. Church, shops, post office, pub, police post, sports facilities, etc.