



South West Regional Assembly

South West Draft RSS Urban Extension Evidence Base Review

Study Approach and Summary of Findings

February 07





South West Draft RSS Urban Extension Evidence Base Review

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1 Study purpose

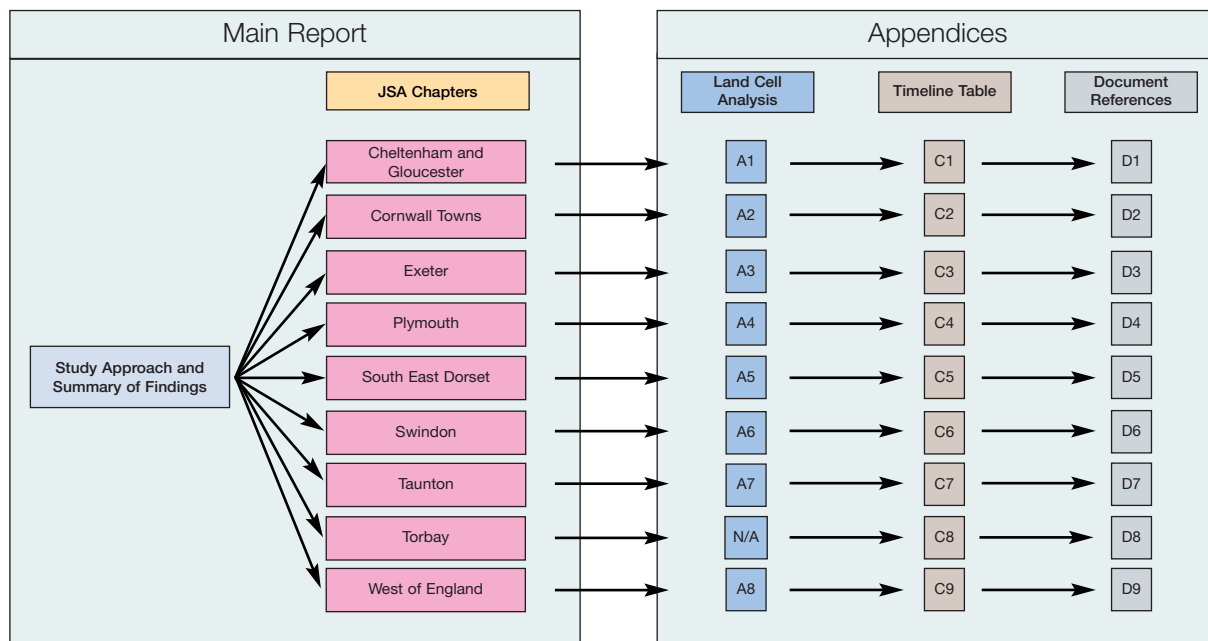
Arup has been appointed by the South West Regional Assembly to provide an assessment of the rationale and underlying technical evidence base for the selection of the urban extension “Area of Search” proposals set out in the Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (Draft RSS)(June, 2006). This is undertaken having regard to the relative sustainability merits of broad directions of growth around those Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs) where urban extensions are proposed. It is not the role of this report to comment on the underlying housing growth projections. Nor does this report seek to verify the strategic approach of focussing development at the SSCTs, as set out in Development Policy A of the Draft RSS.

The brief provided by the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) states it is essential at the regional policy level to reflect through this assessment that the Draft RSS is a strategic planning document and not a Local Development Framework. Consequently, this report assesses whether the evidence base is sufficient to allow for the selection of preferred directions of growth. It does not set out to determine whether exact quantum of development can be delivered on specific sites, although it is clearly of benefit to the robustness of the Area of Search proposals if more detailed capacity and infrastructure studies have been undertaken or are in progress.

Finally, it is important to note that the environmental and infrastructure issues and matters identified in this report are drawn directly from Arup’s review of the technical work undertaken by the sub-regional Joint Study Area (JSA) Section 4(4) Authorities. This means that the level of detail presented in relation to each land area around the Strategically Significant Cities or Towns (SSCTs) is a reflection of the work undertaken by the JSA working groups. The quality of information provided has been adequate to support this approach. Potentially critical factors (factors which can be considered absolute constraints on development), such as biodiversity sites of international or national significance or substantial areas of land at risk from flooding, are identified by all the JSAs.

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2 Report navigation



The diagram above provides a graphical explanation of how to navigate round this report. This Overview Chapter will provide the starting point for most readers, as it contains an introduction to the study, sets out the methodology and context, and provides a succinct summary of the key issues relating to each Joint Study Area (JSA) across the South West region.

Following this are nine more detailed chapters dealing with each of the nine JSAs individually. The JSA chapters set the study areas in context, provide details of the vision, strategy and organisational structure adopted by each working group. This is followed by an assessment of the process used to identify the Areas of Search, and a review of the technical work undertaken by the JSA working groups in relation to a range of factors such as public transport provision, landscape analysis and flood risk assessment. Each chapter concludes with a “Factor Summary Matrix”, which summarises key factors relevant to specific land cells around the periphery of each SSCT.

For a more detailed analysis of the land cells within each Joint Study Area, the reader should direct themselves to Appendix A, where critical/decisive, significant, notable and positive factors are identified for each land cell adjoining the urban area.

An illustration of the evidence gathering process that each JSA went through in terms of preparing their first detailed proposals for submission to the Draft RSS can be found in the Timeline Diagrams in Appendix C. Full references for documents cited in the report can be found in Appendix D.

For any further information, and to access the technical documents that the JSAs have made available online, please refer to the table in Appendix D (D10) which provides details of website addresses and contacts for each of the JSAs.



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3 Assessment method and approach

3.1 Scoping the brief

The brief has been to establish the degree to which the technical evidence prepared by the Joint Study Area (JSA) Section 4(4) Authorities supports the recommendations made to the Regional Planning Body concerning area of search recommendations for the location of urban extensions.

This report will support the Examination in Public of this major component of the Regional Spatial Strategy to establish whether the proposals are “sound” with respect to the tests of soundness set out in Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies. PPS11 contains a range of tests covering issue of process, alignment with other regional strategies and consultation. There are, however, specific tests concerned with the evidence base particularly:

“(vi) whether the RSS is founded on a robust and credible evidence base.”

“(ix) whether the RSS is robust and able to deal with changing circumstances.”

The initial task has been to create an operational definition of “robust” and “credible” to create a basis for assessing the technical evidence assembled by the JSA authorities in justifying the area of search proposals now contained in the RSS.

3.2 Establishing the meaning of “robust” and “credible”

Technical evidence will be considered “robust” if the area of search recommendations reflect national planning policy guidance and best practice, and are consistent with the overall vision and planning strategy adopted by the JSA. Technical evidence not supportive of the overall vision would undermine the recommendation, so the evidence review has involved identifying discrepancies and inconsistencies, including gaps/ partial information coverage. The degree to which a discrepancy or inconsistency is prejudicial to the JSA vision is inevitably a matter of judgement. For example, the failure to appraise accessibility issues related to a spatial growth option ruled out on flood risk grounds would not normally be regarded as sufficient to undermine a strategy.

Technical evidence will be considered “credible” if it is considered appropriate to regional policy and plan making implied by PPS11. As this is a relative value particular to the individual making the judgement it is hard to proof an evidence base against interpretational bias. The approach taken has been to use existing South West and National sustainability appraisal and planning policy guidance to develop a decision making framework which identifies the types of information that would normally be sought to make a “credible” decision about the preferred location of a “sustainable” urban extension. Ultimately, the assessment process becomes one of gauging whether the JSA working group drew on a sufficient breadth of existing information and newly commissioned technical studies (of sufficient depth) to make a final determination.

Credibility has a further dimension linked to “changing circumstances” in so far as relevant alternatives are considered (a matter explicitly referred to in the tests of soundness ix and x for Regional Spatial Strategies). The operational task becomes one of assessing whether relevant alternatives were explored in relation to the prevailing JSA strategy. The technical evidence base should be capable of meeting any future revision of the vision/ planning strategy (i.e. flexibility). An assessment of whether the technical evidence contains sufficient depth and structure to consider revised scenarios has been undertaken. A key test would be the possibility for expanding the geographic search possibilities should the overall vision or planning strategy change in the future e.g. in response to changing the spatial household forecasts.



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3.3 Establishing a framework of “factors”

A major objective for the South West is to ensure that the pattern and distribution of new development conforms to sustainable development principles as represented in the policies outlined in the strategy chapter and extant non statutory frameworks. These principles align with national planning policy having recently been reinforced by the publication of the consultation on the Supplement to Planning Policy Statement No.1 concerning climate change.

In this respect, the SSCTs are considered to offer the greatest potential to accommodate growth in the most sustainable form, primarily due to their inherent critical mass. They have the greatest concentration of public transport infrastructure, retail opportunities, as well as leisure, education and social services provision. As such, they represent the best opportunity to reduce the need to travel, yet still provide an appropriate range of housing and employment provision necessary to maintain a buoyant economy. To ensure that a sequential development strategy focused on the SSCTs is sustainable, there are two important components that should be addressed:

- Firstly, an assessment to identify the contribution that can be made by accommodating additional development within the existing urban area on previously developed land (brownfield sites) is essential.
- Secondly, for those SSCTs where additional development cannot be accommodated within the urban area, there is a requirement to identify additional greenfield land necessary to accommodate development for the long-term growth through an urban extension. Urban extensions should be in sustainable locations with good access to the urban area by transport, cycle and foot. This second part of the strategy is the focus of this report.

Following on from this, Arup has undertaken a review of the prevailing regional policies concerned with sustainable development to draw out those elements most relevant to assessing sustainable areas of search. The results of this review are contained in Appendix E to the report. We have taken the view that “sustainable locations” are then complimented by sustainable buildings policies, some of which are to be found in other parts of the RSS (e.g. sustainable construction) but also in emergent Local Development Frameworks now underway in the South West. However, policies concerned with sustainable buildings lie beyond the parameters of a regional spatial strategy and would require presumptions to be made concerning density, style of building and so forth which properly belong with Local Planning Authorities.

Following the policy review, a range of “factors” were identified that were considered essential to the consideration of a sustainable location. Later, these factors were grouped into the 4 categories detailed below. These became the basis for our review of the credibility of the evidence base for each JSA, and our appraisal of the proposed areas of search for urban extensions:

3.3.1 Environmental Factors

A key aspect of sustainable development is to avoid consuming fresh land resources and harming sensitive environmental assets. Environmental factors also assumes an avoidance of absolute constraints such as areas at risk from flooding, in accordance with PPS25. This definition includes:

- Flood Risk
- Green Belt - applicable to Cheltenham & Gloucester, South East Dorset and West of England
- Green Field Land Take – refers to opportunities to reuse brownfield land on the urban periphery; agricultural value of land
- Biodiversity – Relevant designations include: Ramsar, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI)
- Landscape – refers to natural landscapes influenced by human activities to differing degrees. Relevant designations include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and local landscape designations



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- Built Environment – refers to any features (e.g. motorways, railway lines) that may hinder integration of an urban extension with the existing built up area, in addition to built environment and archaeological designations. Relevant designations include conservation areas, scheduled ancient monuments and listed buildings

An assessment of locations should normally be based on the consideration of matters including location; relative merit; opportunities for mitigating the effect of development. These issues should have been considered in relation to the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment (EU Habitats Directive).

3.3.2 Network Capacity

Network capacity concerns the ability of the road/ rail network to absorb projected growth at locations being considered as possible areas of search. The issue is not the same as accessibility, as excess capacity might exist in the wrong locations to promote accessibility to services and employment opportunities. The factors considered under this heading include:

- Road Network
- Public Transport

Network capacity will normally be judged on the basis of some form of transport modelling process or professional assessment.

3.3.3 Accessibility

Reducing the need for travel is a major strand within policies for sustainable locations. One aspect of this will be the degree to which services and employment are provided for in the master planning of new settlements. Whilst master planning lies beyond the scope of this work, it is a key concern to consider locations that maintain reasonable access to existing services and job opportunities. The factors considered include:

- Access to Employment
- Access to Retail and Private Services
- Access to Public Services

Assessments will normally require some form of integrated transport and land use modelling exercise; and analysis of the catchment area/capacity of existing services.

3.3.4 Other Infrastructure

A range of other types of infrastructure will be required to facilitate a potential development. Within reason, it is usually possible to provide an infrastructure solution to meet any problem; the issue is usually one of cost and timescale. Large scale solutions tend to require significant lead times and significant uncertainties can exist over funding responsibility (e.g. where a single piece of infrastructure supports more than one location/ developer). Categories of infrastructure considered should include:

- Waste facilities
- Water facilities
- Green Infrastructure

With respect to the first two, a basic recognition of the need for service infrastructure of this type would normally be expected with some analysis of volumes and relationship to existing waste processing and treatment plants include recycling. Green infrastructure has also been included in this category, for whilst implementation would be pursued at the



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masterplanning stage, early consideration of how open space and recreational routes would integrate with surrounding green belt or other protected areas is of benefit.

3.3.5 Consideration of “factor” weightings

Each JSA has been charged with making its own set of recommendations concerning preferred areas of search according to its overall vision and planning strategy. In doing so it will have been necessary for the Section 4(4) Authorities (County Councils, Unitary Authorities and National Parks) to consider a range of “factors” that would determine whether an urban extension in a broad area of search (in accordance with PPS11) could be considered an appropriate and sustainable direction of growth. Some factors, such as areas at risk from flooding, would need to be taken into account irrespective of the particular vision/ planning strategy adopted. Other factors, for instance landscape, may be considered more discretionary, and the relative weighting/level of importance afforded to that factor will vary according to the circumstances at each JSA.

An assessment of factors in isolation will not always in themselves provide answers on the best area of search, and the process of reconciling competing pressures is effectively undertaken by reference to an over riding set of strategic drivers. The JSA vision and planning strategies are effectively fulfilling that role, and will have led each Section 4(4) Authority to apply its own “filter” or set of weights to the data it has collected, leading to a decision that has led either to the acceptance or rejection of a potential area of search (although this would not always be explicitly recognised in the processes used by the JSA).

As such, a vision dominated by concerns with maintaining environmental quality may result in a disproportionate weighting of factors when compared to a vision led by concerns over physical urban form or economic regeneration. For instance, a willingness to forego development in an area readily served by the existing transport network in favour of a location distant from a network, but that is more beneficial in terms of another factor such as biodiversity conservation, must mean that a JSA accepts a higher cost of delivering their growth targets with respect to infrastructure provision. While undertaking this review of the evidence base, we have attempted to acknowledge these underlying processes in our analysis.

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3.4 Appraising the credibility of the evidence base

Based on the consideration of factors comprising a sustainable location and the discussion of robustness and credibility, the following Assessment Criteria form the basis of our interrogation of the technical evidence used by the JSAs in reaching their conclusions:

Assessment Criteria	Potential Score	Score Description
Test 1: Spatial Alternatives Has each JSA undertaken a comprehensive review of the urban hinterland to an instructive level of detail?	0	No evidence of spatial assessment having been undertaken.
	1	Assessment limited to only one or two land cells.
	2	A large number of land cells/spatial scenarios have been assessed.
	3	All land cells have been assessed.
Test 2: Factor Consideration/ Depth Have these matters been considered and in what depth? Natural Environment Network Capacity Accessibility Other Infrastructure	0	No evidence presented suggesting this factor has been considered; or supplied outside timescale.
	1	Factor has been recognised but no evidence of how it has influenced recommendations/ explicit recognition of the need for further work.
	2	Factor has been applied partially either in terms of the constituent elements or geographic coverage
	3	Factor has been applied comprehensively.
Test 3: Flexibility Could the evidence base support the consideration of alternative areas of search proposals should circumstances change or higher growth levels need to be accommodated?	0	No evidence base
	1	Spatial coverage of assessment and/or testing of growth levels very limited.
	2	Range of spatial scenarios considered, but implications of higher growth levels are not tested in sufficient detail to inform discussion of alternative solutions.
	3	Comprehensive spatial assessment and testing of growth levels, with the flexibility to inform discussion of alternative solutions.
Test 4: Overall Assessment How well does the technical evidence base support recommendations?	0	Insufficient evidence or structurally unsound evidence base (incomplete)
	1	Significant gaps in the evidence base and/or discrepancies between the Vision and the technical analysis. Revisions may be needed of the Planning Strategy/ Vision
	2	Minor gaps in the evidence base and/or slight discrepancies between the Vision/ Planning Strategy and the technical analysis; soluble through additional technical work.
	3	Comprehensive evidence base and no significant discrepancies with Planning Strategy/ Vision



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3.5 Appraising the Area of Search proposals

As suggested above, the credibility of the evidence base has a dimension linked to “changing circumstances” in so far as relevant alternatives are considered. In order to assess the appropriateness of the area of search proposals, it is necessary to have an understanding of the key factors affecting alternative locations, and the extent to which these were considered by the Section 4(4) Authorities.

Our spatial assessment of the evidence base therefore set out to review the technical information compiled by the Section 4(4) Authorities in relation to the whole urban periphery of each Strategically Significant City or Town (SSCT). For the purpose of this exercise, officers from the secretariat produced a series of maps that divided the urban hinterland into a series of land cells that were given alphabetical references. These evidence analysis cells were identified to provide us with a mechanism to relate a variety of factors, i.e. biodiversity, flooding etc to a spatial area. They do not represent any form of development proposal and do not identify areas that could be developed. The cells only represent a mechanism by which evidence can be assessed. Copies of the maps are reproduced in the individual JSA chapters.

While reviewing the evidence base in relation to matters such as biodiversity, flood risk etc., key factors were identified for each land cell and awarded a significance classification. The significance classifications are intended to give an impression of both the importance/severity of a factor and the proportion of the land cell that it affects (they are colour-coded throughout the report):

Significance Classification

- **Decisive/critical** - factor would be likely to prevent development or severely restrict the scale or scope for development in a land cell
- **Significant** - factor would be likely to prevent strategic development in large parts of the land cell and/or may require extensive mitigation or infrastructure measures to overcome
- **Notable** - factor would be likely to prevent or restrict strategic development in relatively small parts of the land cell; may require mitigation, infrastructure and/or sensitive masterplanning to overcome
- **Neutral** - factor is not of special importance/relevance to this land cell
- **Positive** - there is potential for a factor to be improved/enhanced in the land cell, in a way that may also have wider benefits
- **No information/insufficient information on which to base judgement.**

An interpretation of what each significance classification means in relation to the different factors has been provided at Appendix B. For each SSCT, the key factors identified for individual land cells are summarised graphically in the Factor Summary Matrix provided in the JSA Chapters. A more detailed analysis of the land cells within each Joint Study Area has been provided at Appendix A.

Once the key factors for each land cell were determined, the land cells were then grouped into one of the three development bands described below, as shown within the Factor Summary Matrix. The banding was based on judgement of the JSA evidence, having regard to the significance and scale of the key factors identified, rather than a precise measurement of the land area suitable for development. In this sense, the banding of cells was used as an aid to analysing the information in the factor summary matrix, informing the process whilst reflecting PPS11, and should not be interpreted as a definitive opinion.



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- Strategic development potential - The potential for development, assessed through the JSA technical work, is considered to be of sufficient scale/significance that it warrants identifying in the RSS if selected as an area of search. As a rule of thumb the site would have the potential to accommodate 1,000 dwellings with key requirements to deliver the site(s) identified in the RSS.
- Non-strategic development potential - The potential for development, assessed through the JSA technical work, is not considered to be of sufficient scale/significance to warrant identification in the RSS. As a rule of thumb the site would be under 1,000 dwellings with key requirements to deliver the site(s) not needing identification in the RSS. In essence, non-strategic development should come forward through the LDF process.
- Limited Development - There will be many sites across the region where some development, maybe 1 to 50 dwellings could come forward through individual planning applications. The JSA technical work could never be used to dismiss such potential proposals as its purpose was never to assess such detail. However, it would be inappropriate for this study to categorically state that no development would be appropriate.

3.6 Mapping the evidence base

The sheer scale of the task required the following methods to be employed in capturing information:

- JSA supplied copy reports, maps, data
- SWRA File Records - to identify relevant reports
- Web Search - to access relevant documents

This information has been consolidated into Time Line Diagrams for each JSA (provided at Appendix D). These illustrate documents in terms of when they fed into the RSS process. The diagram also shows those documents that have emerged subsequently to the review cut-off point of 31st December 2006, and were not formally part of the review process but are, nevertheless, regarded as influential to the outcome.

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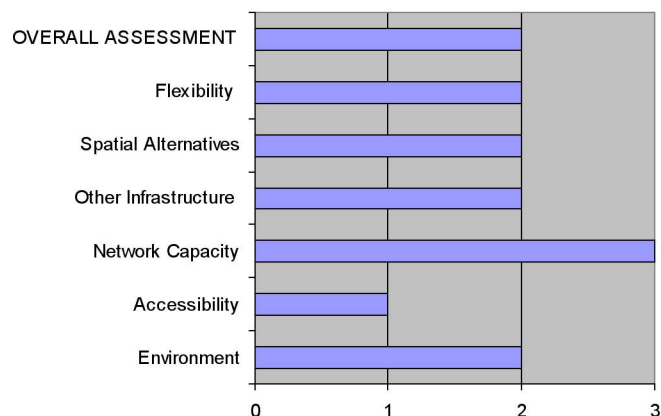
4 Joint Study Area – Summary of Findings

This section of the report provides a brief summary of our findings for each of the Joint Study Areas (JSAs). The scores awarded in relation to the assessment criteria set out in section 3.4 above are shown in the diagrams

4.1 Cheltenham and Gloucester JSA

Cheltenham and Gloucester’s overall vision has been driven by a concern to maintain the distinctiveness of the two urban areas by supporting the existing green belt policy. A secondary factor has been the desire to assist the regeneration of Gloucester and exploit urban regeneration opportunities such as the docklands through the Urban Heritage Regeneration Company. The Draft RSS makes provision for the establishment of an urban extension for about 2,000 dwellings to the north of Gloucester (policy SR12) and the provision of an urban extension for about 4,000 dwellings to the north/northwest of Cheltenham (policy SR13).

Cheltenham and Gloucester JSA



The results of our first test suggest that whilst the breadth of topics considered essential to making a judgement on the merits of the urban extension proposals are present in the evidence base, we consider that there are variations in the depth of analysis. The JSA Steering Group focussed in on a refined range of three growth areas around the periphery of Cheltenham and Gloucester at an early stage, although their reasoning for taking this approach is apparent from the evidence base.

On balance, the Area of Search proposals can be seen to support The Vision for the Cheltenham and Gloucester JSA, which seeks to prevent

coalescence of the two settlements through the safeguarding of the Green Belt designation. The rationale for selecting broad directions of growth to the north of the urban areas has been supported by transport modelling outcomes, and the consideration of other key factors including landscape and flood risk.

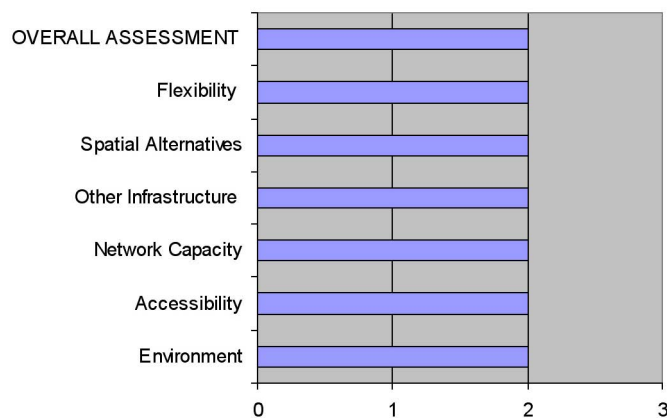
On-going work of relevance to the Area of Search proposals include a review of the Green Belt and biodiversity studies by Cheltenham Borough Council and more detailed transport modelling being undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council.

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4.2 Cornwall Towns JSA

The planning strategy for Cornwall has been led by the desire to consolidate the role of key settlements in their urban hierarchy. An urban extension for about 4,000 dwellings to the south/south west of Truro is provided for by the Draft RSS (policy SR41).

Cornwall Towns JSA



Based on the Cornwall Towns Study, the planning strategy focused on Truro, Cambourne-Pool-Redruth and Falmouth-Penryn as the main focus for accommodating development; with Truro capable of absorbing a potential urban extension due to its role and function. After discounting areas with environmental sensitivities and poor accessibility, the Area of Search was refined down to two possible land cells. This was followed up by a decision to master plan an urban extension within one of the potential areas of search. This master plan for the Highertown Corridor is now evolving through the Local Development Framework process.

With respect to our spatial alternatives assessment criteria, the analysis has covered the areas we would consider necessary to competently assess the location of urban extensions, however the narrowing down of the focus has meant that the depth of information is lacking except where master planning has been completed. This was evident in the consideration of different factors, and it is possible that alternatives might have been prematurely screened out. Furthermore, due to alternative growth levels not having been assessed, the strategy may be less flexible in the event of a change in circumstances.

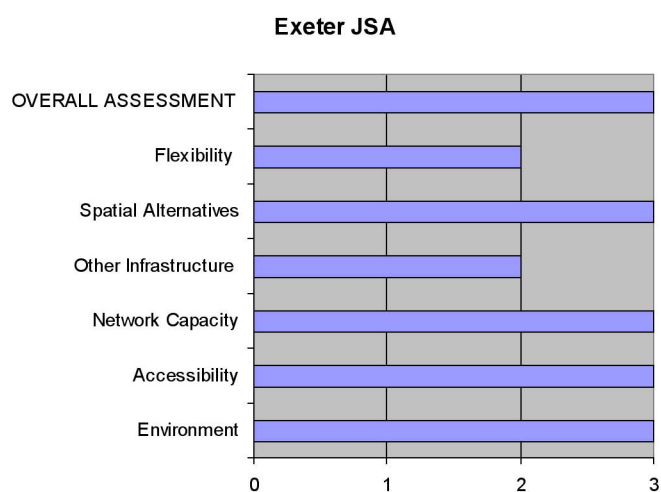
Overall, however, the Cornwall Towns' proposals accord well with the agreed vision for the area and are largely supported by the evidence base. The JSA has begun to address implementation through the Truro and Threemilestone Area Action Plan (currently at Preferred Options stage), and work is ongoing to draw up detailed strategies. Arup is aware that specific projects include a Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) Strategy, a Truro Flood Alleviation Scheme, and detailed proposals for community facilities.

With regards to Saltash and Torpoint, it is considered by the Cornwall Towns JSA that this area is considered within the Plymouth JSA work. It should be noted that in terms of the vision identified in the Cornwall Towns work, development at Saltash and Torpoint would not be prioritised by the Cornwall Towns JSA due to the focus on Cornish towns with a more strategic role and function. The current Area of Search recommendation is supportive of the planning strategy to consolidate the role of key settlements in Cornwall.

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4.3 Exeter JSA

The Exeter vision is essentially driven by a wish to support economic growth. The planning strategy adopted to realise the vision has essentially been inherited from the Devon County Structure Plan with its focus on bringing forward Cranbrook New Community. The Draft RSS supports this, stating that the regeneration of the City's urban area will be complemented by the provision of the Cranbrook New Community (about 6,500 dwellings) to the east of Exeter. In order to cater for development requirements after 2021, the establishment of a further urban extension for at least 1,500 dwellings and 20 hectares of employment land on the eastern and southern perimeter is provided for in the Draft RSS (policy SR16).



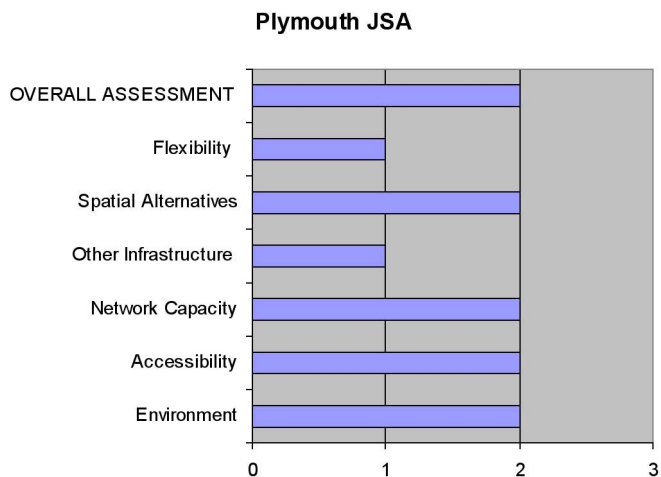
In terms of our tests we found that all the topics considered necessary to determine appropriate Areas of Search for an urban extension had been explored. Similarly with one other JSA, we found that the robustness of the evidence base used for the JSA process was largely dependent upon the merits of analysis undertaken to support the Devon Structure Plan upon which the current planning strategy relies. Whilst this evidence is between three and eight years old we concluded that whilst many of the quantitative indicators and baselines will have changed, there are no grounds for questioning the spatial direction set by the Structure Plan proposals.

Our findings would suggest that the technical evidence base does support the JSA's vision and Area of Search recommendations, and that ongoing work is taking place to develop the proposals further. Arup is aware that transport proposals are being refined through ongoing work.

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4.4 Plymouth JSA

The “Mackay” vision seeks to position the city as a growth point rivalling Bristol by securing a sufficient quantum of development to scale up its position in the urban hierarchy including a capacity to support an additional 100,000 population. The planning strategy adopted to realise the vision has essentially been inherited from the Devon County



Structure Plan with its focus on bringing forward Sherford as part of an economic regeneration strategy linked to enhanced accessibility. In this sense, the strategy has sought to utilise the proposed urban extension, located to the east of Plymouth, as a means of supporting growth corridors linking up key growth areas. The Draft RSS provides for the establishment of the Sherford New Community at a capacity of about 5,500 dwellings (Policy SR35).

In terms of our first test we found that all the topics considered necessary to determine appropriate areas of search for an urban extension had been considered. However, there was a distinct lack of depth in certain areas which could be corrected

through sub regional technical work (waste and water infrastructure capacity etc.). Similarly with one other JSA, we found that the robustness of the evidence base used for the JSA process was largely dependent upon the merits of analysis undertaken to support the Devon Structure Plan upon which the current planning strategy relies. Whilst this evidence is around three to eight years old we concluded that whilst many of the quantitative indicators and baselines will of changed, there are no grounds for questioning the spatial direction set by the County structure plan proposals.

Our key concern relates to the consideration of alternatives on the Western side of Plymouth in the area covered by the County of Cornwall; it is noted that more detailed studies are only available for the land cells within Devon. Cells to the west were analysed as part of the Plymouth Sustainable Growth Study (Pa043), which were outlined by the consultant carrying out the work, as providing an initial review rather than a detailed level of analysis. On balance, we note that there would be significant infrastructure costs to making a western location work in terms of network capacity and accessibility due to its existing toll links in the form of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry.

Overall, it is apparent that the technical base and selection of Areas of Search does support the Vision for Plymouth, South East Cornwall and South West Devon. In particular, the new Sherford community sited to the east of Plymouth and within the South Hams district has the potential to assist the delivery of improved transport network capacity along the Northern, Eastern and Western Corridor. As well as providing public and private services which need to be provided to support the increase in population proposed in the Mackay Vision.

In terms of on-going work, Plymouth City Council has drawn up a draft waste strategy which puts forward suggestions on how to tackle waste for the next 25 years. The draft waste strategy outlines options for collecting and disposing of Plymouth’s waste in the future and takes into account the need to look at a regional and sub-regional point of view.

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4.5 South East Dorset JSA

Our analysis of the JSA planning strategy suggests that maintaining environmental quality was an over riding consideration in identifying possible locations for urban extensions. The existing urban area is surrounded by a number of sensitive environmental assets, the majority of which are protected by European legislation through the Habitat Regulations. This substantive factor has logically assumed a very high weighting and driven the study in a manner over which the authorities have little control.

It is important to note that, in order to address the key planning issues and deliver the Vision, the South East Dorset JSA Working Group intend to deliver a high proportion of projected housing growth within the existing urban area. As a result, the sizes of the proposed urban extensions are very modest in comparison to many other JSAs. The Draft RSS states that

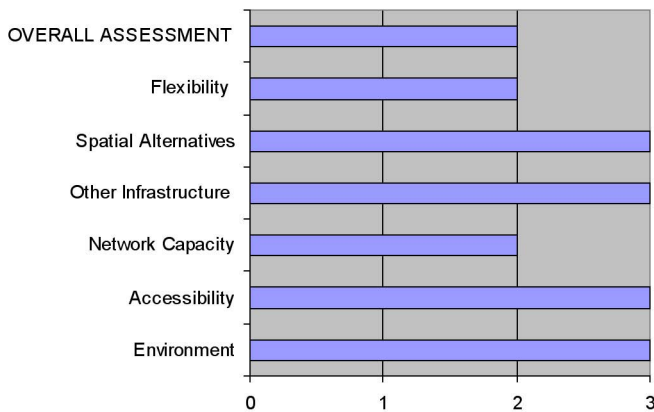
2,400 dwellings would be delivered across three urban extensions north of Bournemouth and Poole, with a further 600 dwellings north of Christchurch (Policy SR29). In this respect, the Draft RSS takes the view that it is the collective strategic significance of the proposed urban extensions, particularly having regard to the unique environmental circumstances, that have influenced the decision to identify the Areas of Search.

In order to identify the potential development locations, the biodiversity designations referred to were considered in combination with a range of further environmental, accessibility and infrastructure factors through a rigorous and spatially

comprehensive mapping exercise. This was supplemented by a thorough Green Belt Analysis. These elements of work further demonstrate the complexity of issues facing the JSA Working Group, and the difficulty of identifying parcels of land with major growth potential.

Overall, the Area of Search proposals can be seen to support the Vision for the South East Dorset JSA. This is apparent in the modest scale of the urban extension proposals and the careful mapping exercise undertaken to inform the choice of potential development sites. One area where further work would be beneficial is that of transport, and the development of strategies for serving the urban extension sites via non-car based modes. It is our understanding that the JSA Working Group has recently secured funding to undertake strategic modelling work.

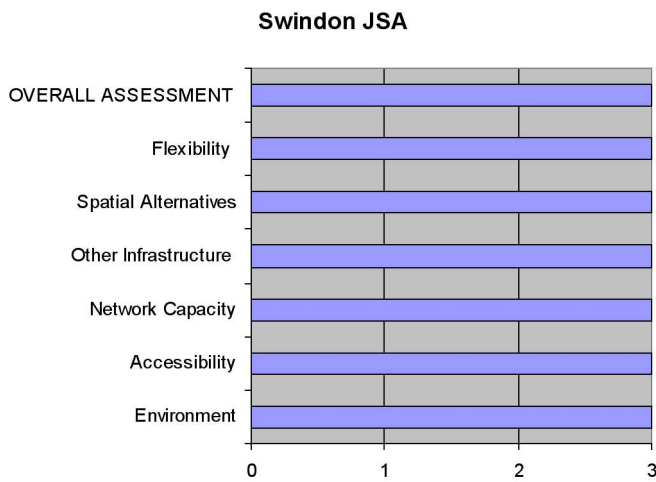
SE Dorset JSA



South West Draft RSS Urban Extension Evidence Base Review

4.6 Swindon JSA

Swindon’s vision, both in terms of practice and published statements, has been to balance economic growth with environmental quality. This approach has been reflected in the planning strategy taken in drawing up its area of search recommendations to the RSS. The Draft RSS makes provision for an urban extension of about 12,000 dwellings to the east of Swindon (Policy SR8).



Our review suggests that a comprehensive process had been used to analyse alternative spatial locations, with assessments being made to a relatively detailed level on a range of factors across each land cell in Swindon’s urban hinterland. In this respect, we found that the breadth of topics considered essential to making a judgement on the merits of an urban extension proposal are present in the evidence base used to select Areas of Search. This analysis included an in-depth coverage of accessibility and network factors. As a result, the evidence base is considered comprehensive enough to allow for the identification of further Areas of Search if required.

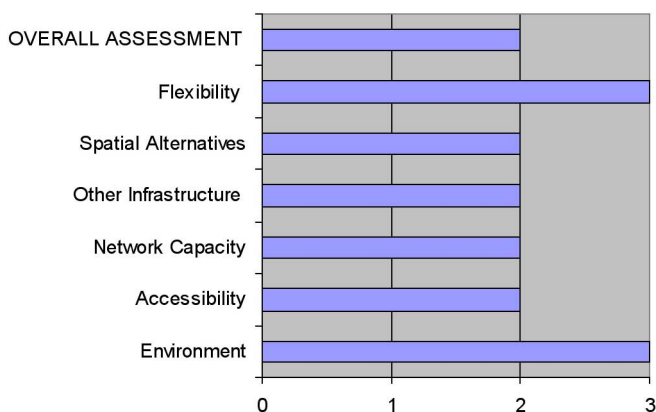
Overall, our findings would suggest that the technical evidence base does support the JSA’s vision and Area of Search recommendations, and that ongoing work is taking place to develop the proposals further. This is particularly true in terms of transport proposals for the proposed Area of Search, but also includes further consideration of educational, health and cultural facilities, utilities infrastructure, affordable housing, flood risk and open space. In terms of water supply, growth at Swindon would benefit from but is not reliant upon the provision of the Upper Thames reservoir.

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4.7 Taunton JSA

Taunton is a market town that aims to build on its central location astride strategic road and rail routes to become a hub for the region. The planning strategy has a strong emphasis on maintaining the environmental quality of the town, whilst ensuring that its economic potential is realised. The priority is to enhance the role of Taunton by regenerating and expanding the town centre to put the waterfront at the heart and providing strategic employment, retailing, sporting and cultural facilities to serve the centre of the region. The provision of sustainable mixed use urban extensions in public transport corridors is aimed at realising the full economic potential of the area. Policy SR21 of the Draft RSS makes provision for the establishment of a strategic urban extension of about 3,000 dwellings to the north of Taunton.

Taunton JSA



In relation to the consideration of spatial alternatives, it was found that the JSA had undertaken work relevant to all the areas considered necessary in determining the identification of sustainable locations for urban extensions. At the early stages the depth of the work varied, with a greater analysis of environmental factors relative to accessibility and transport. However, once those locations that were deemed unsuitable for strategic urban extensions had been removed, more detailed analysis was carried out, including additional factors such as market delivery, benefits for deprived wards, and gas, electricity and telecommunications infrastructure. It is also understood that those locations that were discounted for strategic urban

extensions may still be investigated as possible locations for smaller extensions, which adds flexibility to the overall strategy.

Overall, the results are considered consistent with the vision and planning strategy developed by the JSA, and the recommendations made are supported by the evidence base. It is also evident that work is ongoing to fill gaps in the evidence base and to provide more detailed information on infrastructure requirements and costs. Specifically, the Taunton Transport Strategy Review 2 will address transport and accessibility issues and further work on flood risk management and bats is also understood to be forthcoming.

4.8 Torbay JSA

The Torbay JSA is different from the other JSAs in that a key conclusion of the technical work received as the 4(4) advice was that no strategic urban extensions were considered necessary. Only subsequently has it emerged that growth may need to be accommodated outside the existing urban area. Therefore, Torbay has not been 'scored' in the same way as the other JSAs but this report comments on the process followed and the breath of information included within the study.

The strategy of focusing development within the Principal Urban Area accords with Torbay's vision for regeneration, with improved opportunities and accessibility, whilst maintaining protection of the natural environment.

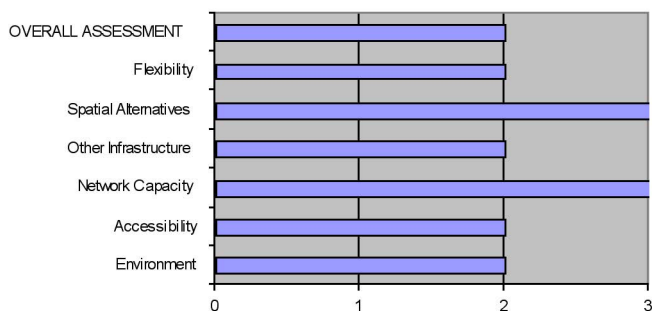
In terms of implementation and ongoing work, Arup is aware that as part of Torbay's New Growth Points bid work has been undertaken to assess the capacity to deliver the New Growth Points Agenda. A summary of revenue and capital projects that are needed to ensure that Torbay has the necessary infrastructure to develop as a sustainable community is provided, which includes transport measures, employment infrastructure, community facilities, public services and green infrastructure.

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4.9 West of England JSA

The West of England represents the largest and most complex of the Joint Study Areas comprising of three principal urban areas in relatively close proximity to one another. The unifying single vision for the JSA has been to support the growth aspirations of the greater Bristol area to aid economic regeneration. The planning strategy adopted to realise the vision is, however, more sensibly explained by looking at the three main urban areas comprising the JSA: Bristol, Weston super Mare and Bath each of which have distinct planning strategies. The areas of search proposals for Bristol are driven by a desire to support the regeneration of South Bristol and to implement a long term transport strategy. Weston super Mare's strategy has been to promote an area of search that supports ambitions for economic growth, to balance housing and employment opportunities. In both cases, housing growth is seen as a contributory means of funding the transport infrastructure necessary to achieve regeneration aspirations. Bath's planning strategy has been to select areas of search which minimise impact on environmental quality, especially the World Heritage Site status of the City and surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

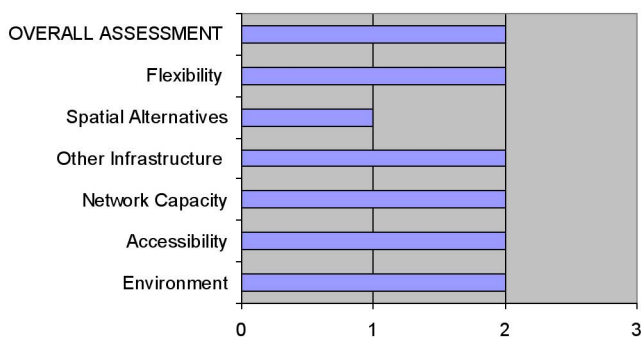
West of England JSA (Bristol)



The Draft RSS makes provision for urban extensions at all three SSCTs. In the case of Bristol, provision is made for urban extensions to the south west (about 10,500 dwellings), south east (about 6,000 dwellings) and north and north east (about 8,000 dwellings)(policy SR4). An urban extension of about 1,500 dwellings is provided for to the south/south west of Bath (Policy SR5). At Weston-super-Mare, provision is made for an urban extension accommodating up to 9,000 dwellings to the east of town (Policy SR6).

Our review found that the breadth of topics considered essential to making a judgement on the merits of an urban extension proposal are present in the evidence base and were used to select areas of search. The GBSTS has provided a comprehensive assessment of public transport and road network capacity in relation to different growth scenarios, and the formulation of a transport strategy that proposes specific elements of infrastructure appears to have fed into the selection of Areas of Search. We do, however, recognise that further work is required to refine accessibility options.

West of England (Bath)

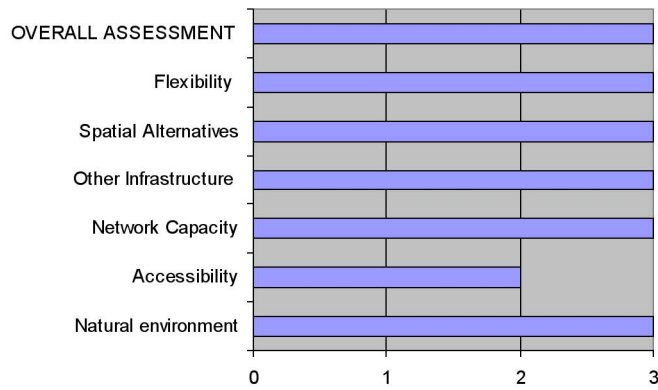


Variations in the depth of factor coverage between the three sub areas and possible inconsistencies were evident. The mapping and analysis of information for Bristol was sufficiently detailed to allow for the identification of potential 'critical' or 'significant' factors such as international/national biodiversity designations and areas of flood risk. More detailed studies that identify and provide basic analysis of local/minor biodiversity, built heritage and landscape designations would allow for a clearer understanding of development capacity. Work of this detail was only apparent for the land cells to the south east.

Detailed assessment in relation to the periphery of Bath is currently restricted to Land Cell F (Area of Search E), the only area that does not fall within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This explains the low score in relation to the

South West Draft RSS Urban Extension Evidence Base Review

West of England JSA (Weston)



spatial alternatives assessment criteria. However, we understand that a more detailed Strategic Sustainability Assessment of the remaining land cells is currently in progress. Alternative development locations around Weston-super-Mare were explored in detail through studies undertaken in connection with the forthcoming Weston Area Action Plan.

In terms of flexibility, the evidence base is sufficiently detailed for alternative development locations to be identified, particularly in the case of Bristol, where flood risk and landscape sensitivities are not so prevalent. Further work in relation to biodiversity, built environment and landscape factors would allow for a

more informed judgement as to the development capacity of different areas. The completion of the on-going SSA work at Bath will provide a basis for the identification of alternative options, should that become necessary.

On balance, we believe that the technical evidence base does support the JSA's vision and area of search recommendations.