

Somer Valley Enterprise Zone: Statement of Clarification

Pre- Cabinet Questions

The Somer Valley Enterprise Zone (SVEZ) Local Development Order (LDO) was presented to, and approved by, Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Cabinet on 1st February 2024. In the lead-up to Cabinet, the project team and Councillors received a number of questions regarding the project. We have put together the following responses to answer the most frequently asked questions and address any misinformation around the scheme.

Why haven't the Council engaged with residents on the scheme?

A [public engagement was held in May/June 2022](#) for 6 weeks. This included a [public webinar](#), a residents' meeting and presentations at Paulton Parish Council, Radstock Town Council, and Westfield Parish Council. Project boards and questionnaires were provided in Radstock, Paulton and Midsomer Norton libraries, as well as all information and a response form being available online.

The [statutory consultation for the LDO was held in January/February 2023](#) on the B&NES Planning Portal. The public had the opportunity to review documents and feedback on the proposals. Residents were given a further opportunity during the [revised statutory consultation in September/October 2023](#).

The project team have provided regular updates to the Somer Valley Forum meetings, as well as attending Parish Council/residents meetings to provide project updates.

Why is the SVEZ destroying Priority Grassland Habitats (BRERC)?

Through the recent LDO process, we have undertaken survey work which confirms that the fields are modified grassland in poor condition and that the habitats are not priority grassland or irreplaceable.

We publish BRERC 'potential' and 'confirmed' priority habitat records to ensure full consideration is given to habitats impacted by development. BRERC records relating to the SVEZ site date back to 1995-2000 and highlight fields that at the time had 'potential' to be priority habitats, subject to additional survey work to establish each grassland type and condition. That survey work has been completed, and the BRERC records have been updated on the website.

Is there any demand for office space at SVEZ?

The new [B&NES Economic Strategy](#) was adopted by Cabinet on 1st February 2024. The Economic Evidence base behind the Economic Strategy demonstrates there is significant

demand for office and industrial space in the Somer Valley. The plots on site will not be delivered speculatively, so if there is no demand for office space at the time of development, the plot uses are able to switch to research and development or industrial processes.

Why are there no traffic mitigations being put in place?

The highways mitigations set out below must be completed before any units can be occupied on site. This requirement is set out in the Statement of Reasons, which forms part of the Local Development Order (View by searching in the [Documents section of the LDO planning application](#))

In order to limit the impact of increased traffic along the A362 and the A37, the following measures will be put in place.

- Regularising and reducing the speed limit along the A362
- Signal timing adjustments at A37/A362 junction in Farrington Gurney and Radstock double mini roundabout
- A widened carriageway at Sunnyside 'pinch point', whilst also retaining residents' parking
- New development site access roundabout at SVEZ, including straightening the A362 and removing the 'S' bend at Springfield Buildings
- A revised roundabout design at Thicketmead (Phillis Hill)

Why are there no safe active travel routes to the site?

As part of the SVEZ LDO a segregated walking and cycling route will be put in place from Old Mills Lane along the A362 to join with the Norton Radstock Greenway close to Thicket Mead roundabout.

Separately the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is committed to delivering a walking/cycling path from Farrington Gurney to Old Mills Lane via the [Somer Valley Links project](#).

Together these two shared and segregated walking and cycling routes will provide a comprehensive extension to the Norton Radstock Greenway.

Why is a hotel being put on the site when it will compete with local businesses?

Plot 2 could be developed as a hotel, office, research and development, industrial or warehousing space. The development of this plot will depend on demand. If a hotel is built on this plot, it will cater for new local businesses and their suppliers/clients that will also present an opportunity for existing local providers.

Statutory Consultation Questions

During the [Statutory Consultation for the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone Local Development Order](#) (January to February 2023 and September to October 2023), we received a number of comments, objections and questions from the public. The project team have put together this feedback on the main themes, to help you to understand more of the history of the project, the thinking and Council policy behind it, and how we are responding to your concerns.

Themes of the feedback

We have grouped these concerns, and our responses to them, around four central themes:

- The siting, purpose and planning impact of the Enterprise Zone
- Concerns about travel and transport
- Future uses of the site
- The potential impact on the environment

Our response format

For each query, we have provided a brief summary answer. Where appropriate, this is explained with more detailed reference to Council policy, national legislation, or technical documents and studies which are available as part of the Local Development Order planning application.

The Local Development Order planning application

- [View the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone LDO planning application](#)
- [View the list of documents supplied with the planning application](#) (this list also includes comments submitted by post)
- [View comments on the planning application so far](#)

The siting, purpose and planning impact of the Enterprise Zone

Why is the Enterprise Zone development planned for a Greenfield (previously undeveloped) site, and not a Brownfield (ex-industrial) location?

The main strategic aims of the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone (SVEZ) are:

- to provide land for employment use in the Somer Valley
- to provide jobs for local people
- to reduce 'out-commuting', meaning the need to travel to work in more distant centres, such as Bristol, Bath and Wells

Whilst there are a number of Brownfield sites in the Somer Valley, there are no unallocated sites that would be of the appropriate size to provide the level of employment land that SVEZ provides.

The policy detail

The land at the SVEZ site was allocated in 2007 for employment development. The LDO has been in development since 2020, and takes into consideration the current economic climate and local demand. In our recent [Local Plan Partial Update](#), we made some slight changes to the proposed boundary of the site, and proposed uses of this land. The [B&NES spatial strategy for Bath and Midsomer Norton](#) has a focus on the reduction of out-commuting and creation of local jobs, and the LDO at SVEZ is an important part of delivering this policy.

Does the Local Development Order mean that future developers on the SVEZ site will not have to get planning permission?

The LDO is a form of planning permission, ensuring that future developments meet agreed designs and standards.

The policy detail

Any future developments on the SVEZ site will have to comply with the Design Code which is in the LDO. This includes plot-specific checklists that developers will have to follow. Developers will be required to submit Compliance Applications to the Local Planning Authority to demonstrate that the proposed development meets all the conditions set out in the LDO and is in accordance with the Design Code. Whilst developers will not have to submit a formal planning application in the traditional sense, the Compliance Application will ensure that development is suitable, appropriate and in line with the Design Code, including all parameters and conditions set by the LDO.

Why are we focusing on new development, rather than rejuvenating our existing High Street?

There are separate projects already helping to restore and renew Midsomer Norton's town centre. The SVEZ, once delivered, will work in combination with these projects to raise the profile of the town, and attract more businesses, employment, and visitors, adding to economic activity.

The wider context

Midsomer Norton has a [High Street Heritage Action Zone](#) (HS HAZ), which aims to restore and regenerate the medieval market town. The focus of the HS HAZ is to restore the Town Hall and its traditional Market Hall alongside the creation of a high-quality public realm and Market Square, at the Island, to host traditional markets once again.

In addition, the HS HAZ aims to highlight Midsomer Norton's industrial heritage in the following ways:

- Working with local businesses to improve shopfronts and signage throughout the High Street
- Installing new benches in the style of historic street furniture, as defined in the Bath Pattern Book
- Installing new locally distinctive banners

We have used the [HS HAZ designation](#) as a catalyst to secure further funding to help deliver the town centre regeneration - to date securing over £2.5m. Looking further into the future, a masterplanning exercise is to take place in 2024/2025. This will allow local people to have a say in shaping the 'Old Brewery Quarter' around South Road and the lower High Street.

For further information and project updates please visit the [Your Midsomer Norton](#) website, <https://yourmidsomernorton.co.uk> or email the project team directly at MidsomerNortonHSHAZ@BATHNES.GOV.UK

Concerns about traffic and transport

The current road infrastructure around the SVEZ site is already under strain. How will we manage increased traffic and activity when the site is in operation?

Road safety and traffic management has been a major consideration in developing the SVEZ project, and the LDO includes detailed measures to manage this.

The policy detail

We commissioned extensive traffic modelling during the development of the SVEZ project, both before and after the COVID 19 pandemic. The LDO includes the following measures to accommodate additional traffic safely:

- Regularising and reducing the speed limit along the A362
- Adjusting signal timing at A37/A362 junctions in Farrington Gurney and Radstock double mini roundabout, to reduce the likelihood of queueing traffic
- A widened carriageway at Sunnyside pinch point (where two lanes of vehicles cannot currently pass safely), whilst also retaining resident parking
- A new site access roundabout at the entrance to the SVEZ site, including straightening the A362 and removing the current 'S' bend at Springfield Buildings
- A redesigned roundabout at Thicket Mead (Phillis Hill)

Will there be suitable travel options to get to the SVEZ site, and enough suitable parking on site?

The LDO complies with our latest districtwide policies on developments and parking, electric vehicle charging points, and sustainable transport.

The policy detail

The Local Plan Partial Update, adopted in Jan 2023, includes a new [Transport and Development Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\)](#). This sets out how new developments have to provide for all of the modes of transport that users will need to access the site. It includes parking requirements for different building uses, and makes provision for an expansion in the use of hybrid and electric vehicles, including the need to provide charging points. We have incorporated the SPD policy into the LDO masterplan.

Why are there plans for an East Cycle Track (to the Radstock Greenway), but not a West Cycle Track (to Farrington Gurney)?

The SVEZ LDO only mentions a new cycle track to the east because plans for a corresponding track to the west are part of a separate scheme.

The wider context

The [Somerset Valley Links](#) project aims to support sustainable transport links, and includes the provision of a pedestrian/cycle link which would connect Midsomer Norton and the SVEZ site to Farrington Gurney. This project is currently administered by WECA (The West of England Combined Authority), and funded via the [City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements](#) scheme.

Future uses of the site

Is there really a demand for more office or industrial space in this area?

Independent economic research suggests that recent losses of employment sites has had a substantial negative impact on the local economy.

The policy detail

The project team has been regularly working with consultants to assess the local demand for office and industrial space within the Somerset Valley. A result of this research, our recently published Economic Evidence base, has informed the Councils recently adopted Economic Strategy .

This report describes the economic health of our district. It states that there was a lack of land allocated for employment uses in the Somerset Valley between 2011 and 2020, with the following results:

- The loss of 3,100 square metres of office space
- A reduction of 6,400 square metres of industrial space

The report suggests this loss of space for economic activity equates to:

- A loss of 400 full-time employees
- A reduction of £19.7m Gross Value per annum in the Somerset Valley economy

The B&NES Employment Sites and Premises Evidence Base (2023) that has informed the new Economic Strategy (2024-2034) highlights the need for 8,000 sqm of office space, 36,000 sqm of industrial space and 21,000 sqm of warehousing in the Somerset Valley between 2023 and 2043.

Will there be fast food outlets on the SVEZ site?

Plot 4, is allocated as an ancillary food and beverage unit on the illustrative masterplan. The LDO allows for this Plot to be used in any of the following ways:

- food and beverage
- office or flexible workspace
- light industrial

This will be determined at development stage by demand.

Impacts on the local environment

How can a major new development be in line with the council's declaration of a Climate Emergency, and policy commitment to tackling this emergency?

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in March 2019, committing to providing the leadership necessary to enable B&NES to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. The LDO aims to ensure that we can shape this development to address climate issues around the following areas:

- Shaping how much local people will need to travel to work
- Providing sustainable travel improvements
- Bringing forward development with a commitment to leaving the natural environment in a better state than it was before the development began

The policy detail

The SVEZ LDO will help to reduce out-commuting for work, through the provision of new jobs locally. Measures in the LDO will also provide a range of active and sustainable travel improvements, including a new cycle link to the Norton Radstock Greenway and new bus stops. The LDO will achieve a 100% regulated operational carbon emissions reduction from [Building Regulations Part L 2021](#) (or future equivalent legislation), in line with the hierarchy set out in Policy SCR7 of the [Local Plan Partial Update 2023](#) and the [B&NES Sustainable Construction Checklist SPD \(2023\)](#).

The LDO will help to reduce vehicle-related carbon dioxide emissions through the provision of Electric Vehicle charging on site, in line with the Council's local transport policies and Climate Emergency declaration.

To comply with our [Local Plan Partial Update \(2023\)](#) , and [upcoming national legislation](#), the LDO incorporates measures to meet [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) targets. This means ensuring that the biodiversity at the SVEZ site is improved by at least 10% as a result of the development.

How will the SVEZ development manage flood risk on-site and in the local area?

We have commissioned independent research into potential flood risk and have incorporated measures to counter this in the LDO.

The measures in detail

The main risk identified in the research is surface water drainage into Wellow Brook. The following measures in the LDO will manage this risk:

- Using a flow control to manage the discharge of surface water runoff into the Wellow Brook watercourse
- Creating a surface water control system which incorporates Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), such as permeable paving serving the commercial plots, ponds and attenuation tanks to serve roofs and other hardstanding areas

How will the SVEZ development manage air and noise pollution on-site and in the local area?

- The Air Quality Assessment prepared by the Councils consultants concluded that activities on the SVEZ site would have no significant impact on the local air quality.
- The Noise Assessment showed negligible changes to road traffic noise from additional traffic to and from the site. Any additional noise generated on site will be mitigated by strategically placed acoustic fencing.

Will the well-known local landmark, 'the Batch' (Midsomer Norton slag heap), be removed as part of the SVEZ development?

Boxbury Hill ('the Batch') is not within the development boundary of the LDO, and does not form part of the SVEZ site. The development will have no direct impact on this non-designated heritage site, and any new buildings on the SVEZ site will be considerably lower and smaller than the Batch, with minimal impact on long-range views towards it.