

Royal Bath & West Showground - Shepton Mallet

Planning Framework

July 2010



THE ROYAL
BATH & WEST
OF ENGLAND SOCIETY

LONDON  WHARFEDALE
DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

Rapleys 

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CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
 - 1.1 Purpose of the Planning Framework
 - 1.2 The Society
 - 1.3 London & Wharfedale
 - 1.4 The Society's Vision & Future Objectives
 - 1.5 Improvement Proposals
 - 1.6 Masterplan
 - 1.7 The Consultant Team
 - 1.8 Structure of the Report
2. **The Showground**
 - 2.1 The Event
 - 2.2 Other Events and Uses
 - 2.3 Range of Existing Uses
3. **The Site and Surroundings**
 - 3.1 Site Location
 - 3.2 Description of the Showground
 - 3.3 Rights of Way and Way Leaves
 - 3.4 Ownership
 - 3.5 Shepton Mallet
4. **Planning History**
 - 4.1 Introduction
 - 4.2 Buildings and Restrictions
 - 4.3 Existing Lawful Use
5. **Planning Policy Context**
 - 5.1 Introduction
 - 5.2 The Development Plan
 - 5.3 National Policy
 - 5.4 Other Material Considerations
 - 5.5 Policy Discussion
 - 5.6 Conclusion
6. **Economic Appraisal**
 - 6.1 Introduction
 - 6.2 The Economic Context
 - 6.3 Economic Impact of the Showground
 - 6.4 Summary of Economic Impact of Improvement Proposals
7. **Ecology**
 - 7.1 Introduction
 - 7.2 Tree Survey
 - 7.3 Baseline Habitat Assessment
8. **Landscape and Visual Impact**
 - 8.1 Relevant Policy Designations
 - 8.2 Key Views
 - 8.3 Mitigation
9. **Accessibility and Transport**
 - 9.1 Introduction
 - 9.2 Accessibility of the Showground
 - 9.3 Site Accesses
 - 9.4 Internal Circulation and Parking
10. **Flood Risk and Drainage**
 - 10.1 Introduction
 - 10.2 Baseline Conditions
 - 10.3 Flood Risk and Mitigation
 - 10.4 Surface Water Drainage
 - 10.5 Foul Water Drainage
11. **Ground Conditions and Contamination**
 - 11.1 Introduction
 - 11.2 Summary of Findings

CONTENTS

12. **Infrastructure Services**
 - 12.1 Introduction
 - 12.2 Details of Survey
 - 12.3 Impacts and Mitigation
 - 12.4 Site Capacity to Accommodate Additional Services
13. **Archaeology**
 - 13.1 Introduction
 - 13.2 Summary of Desktop Assessment Findings
 - 13.3 Mitigation
14. **Sustainability**
 - 14.1 Renewable Energy Policy
 - 14.2 Renewable energy at the Showground
 - 14.3 Sustainability Measure
15. **The Masterplan**
 - 15.1 Objectives
 - 15.2 Summary of Opportunities and Constraints
 - 15.3 The Concept Proposals
 - 15.4 Design and Built Form
16. **Phasing**
 - 16.1 Phasing Considerations
 - 16.2 Indicative Timescales
17. **References**

Appendices

1. Statement of Consultation prepared by Rapleys dated July 2010
2. List of events at the Showground during 2009
3. Economic Impact Assessment Executive Summary prepared by Roger Tym 2005
4. Tree Survey prepared by J Lang-Brown, dated April 2010
5. Baseline Habitat Assessment, April 2010
6. Accessibility and Car Parking Assessment by Mayer Brown Ltd, dated May 2010
7. Flood Risk Assessment prepared by EWE Associates Ltd, dated May 2010
8. Environmental Desk Top Study prepared by Rodgers Leask Environmental Ltd, dated 13 April 2010
9. Report on Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy prepared by Rodgers Leask Ltd, dated April 2010
10. Report on Infrastructure Services prepared by Rodgers Leask, dated April 2010
11. An Archaeological Desktop Assessment by R.A. Broomhead
12. Solar Photovoltaic Feasibility Brief prepared by Ecofirst, dated 8 April 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

- 1.1.1 The Royal Bath and West Showground, located 3 km south of Shepton Mallet, is an important regional venue for shows and events attracting over 1 million visitors every year. It is owned by the Royal Bath and West Society, a charity with the aim of encouraging agriculture and rural trades such as arts, manufacturing and commerce. The Showground provides a significant contribution to the local and wider economy as a visitor destination and is an important asset to the farming and rural community.
- 1.1.2 However, the costs of running and maintaining the Showground are increasing and the site is in urgent need of investment. In order to maintain and improve the facilities and ensure that the Bath and West Show can continue to operate, the Society need to secure additional value from the site. This Planning Framework is the product of three years of work to identify how the future of the site can be assured through its regeneration and improvement.
- 1.1.3 The Planning Framework for the Showground is prepared by Rapleys LLP and others on behalf of the Royal Bath and West of England Society (the Society) and their Development Partner, London & Wharfedale.
- 1.1.4 It draws together proposals for the Showground's enhancement for consideration as a Planning Brief in accordance with Policy Q8 of the Mendip District Local Plan. The approved Framework will provide confirmation of the Council's support for the principles of improvement and enhancement of the Showground and will form part of the framework against which future planning applications can be assessed, to ensure a comprehensive and consistent approach is applied across the whole site.
- 1.1.5 The document has been prepared in discussion with Mendip District Council Officers and has been subject to public consultation including a public exhibition and meetings with key stakeholders. A Consultation Statement is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.1.6 The Society and London & Wharfedale thank Council Officers for their cooperation and guidance in the preparation of the Framework.

1.2 THE SOCIETY

- 1.2.1 The Royal Bath & West of England Society is a registered charity established in 1777. Funding raised by the Society provides for education in agriculture and related disciplines and support of the rural economy. Society funded initiatives include:
 - Agriculture, veterinary, educational and art scholarships;
 - Technical events and seminars;
 - Practical farming advice and conferences;
 - Countryside education;
 - Diversification advice for farmers;
 - Education for children, and
 - A market place for countryside products.
- 1.2.2 This work is funded from several sources, the proceeds from exhibitions, membership subscriptions, showground tenants and short term lettings. A number of small rural businesses operate from the site, at least two of which are community support organisations who would find it difficult to operate with the overhead of a commercial tenancy. Income from exhibitions has become a fragile source in the last two decades, owing to the huge increase in regulatory burden associated with holding public events, and the occasional disaster caused by extreme weather conditions or the closure of the countryside due to animal disease. The Society is seeking to consolidate reliable income sources to provide stability for the future, and to enable it to invest in its exhibition infrastructure to bring it in line with the requirements of the 21st century. The contribution to the rural and local economies is likely to increase if this can be achieved.

1.3 LONDON & WHARFEDALE

- 1.3.1 Some three years ago the Society formed a masterplanning group with representatives from Mendip District Council (Planning Department) and Somerset County Council (Highways Department and Economic Development) in recognition of the strategic importance of the Society to the local economy. This group identified potential opportunities for enhancement and consolidation of uses, focusing on parts of the showground which are underused. At the end of this process an initial masterplan was promoted to the property market via a long list of development companies who were invited to bid to become the Society's development partner. It was considered wiser to engage

a development partner than to attempt development alone, as the skills and experience required to bring this project to fruition are rare and certainly not immediately available to the Society. A risk sharing arrangement is more a guarantee of success, and as the Showground is the 'family silver' for the Society, it needed to do all it could to ensure a successful outcome.

- 1.3.2 London & Wharfedale is the Society's chosen development partner to assist in improvement of the Showground and to provide their expertise on development and investment. London & Wharfedale was selected by the Society after a rigorous selection process as being the company best suited to meet the aims and ambitions of the Society. The selection criteria was heavily influenced by London & Wharfedale's track record in delivering comparable projects and the Directors' undoubted commitment.
- 1.3.3 London & Wharfedale brings together the combined expertise of three leading experts with a significant and widely acknowledged expertise in major regeneration initiatives and their funding. The track record includes Trentham Gardens, Stoke on Trent, BREEAM Excellent Offices at SA1 Swansea and joint ventures with Manchester City Council, The London Borough of Enfield, Cranfield University, Alstom, Goodyear, Invensys, Marconi and the regeneration of the former MG Rover facility at Longbridge.
- 1.3.4 The company has substantial financial resources and backing from sources including HSBC, HSBSib, Brockton Capital and La Salle Investment Management.

1.4 THE SOCIETY'S VISION AND FUTURE OBJECTIVES

- 1.4.1 The improvement/development plan is designed to provide an income stream to allow the Society to upgrade its facilities, both to continue to deliver knowledge transfer services to its constituency, and to attract more event organisers to the Showground. The uniqueness of the Showground's rural location, coupled with modern facilities, with plans to create renewable energy on site should provide a much enhanced opportunity to boost the Society's ability to deliver its charitable aims and its economic impact on Somerset. Specifically new exhibition halls are planned to allow more business to be done on the Showground, whether it be charitable or commercial.

1. INTRODUCTION



1. INTRODUCTION

1.5 IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

1.5.1 The Planning Framework sets out justification for a programme of improvement at the Showground and aims to develop the quality of the facilities available to support and improve the Showground function. In order to ensure the Show's future, there is a need to increase year-round business and visitor facilities to enable the more productive and efficient utilisation of the Showground.

1.5.2 Having regards to the nature and purpose of the site's current use, and the potential for the Showground to deliver further benefits to the local economy, it is suggested that the proposed improvements at the site could comprise:

- Improvement of existing buildings including replacement, upgrading or removal;
- A new centrally located exhibition/conference centre;
- Additional employment/commercial premises to provide permanent on-site premises for existing and new rural businesses;
- Rural and outdoor-living specialist retail;
- Hotel space providing on-site hospitality facilities for Showground visitors, and
- A new Eco and Renewable Energy Zone including a solar energy generation facility, visitor centre and wetland habitat.

1.5.3 These potential improvement options have been devised to meet the aspirations of the Society and Showground users, whilst also having regard to the environmental and functional restrictions of the site, and relevant planning policy.

1.6 MASTERPLAN

1.6.1 This Planning Framework draws together an assessment of planning policy and site specific research, to identify key issues, opportunities and constraints. This information has been used to inform the preparation of an indicative Masterplan, which is outlined in Chapter 12. As an indication of how the enhancement of the site can be achieved, the indicative Masterplan identifies the potential to deliver the following development:

Use Proposed	Zone Area (ha)	Approximate potential floor space
Regeneration and improvement zone – improvement and enhancement of the core Showground area and potential for new conference building	39.1	10,000 sq m new conference building
Rural economy business zone – commercial premises for rural enterprises	10.2	15,000 sq m single storey or 23,000 sq m with first floor on some units
Visitor destination zone – specialist rural retail	9.0	13,000 sq m rural retail
Photovoltaic energy park zone	12.5	500 sq m research and learning centre
Rural & Countryside leisure zone	11.8	Predominantly open leisure pursuits
Future opportunity zone	8.7	No specific proposals

1.6.2 At this stage the Masterplan can only provide an indication of the amount and mix of development which could come forward. This is because the Society is a charity with limited funds for investment. It can only bring forward the preparation of specific proposals with the support of occupiers or developments of new development. The development will be market-led, with this Framework facilitating the next stage of advancing detailed proposals.

1.6.3 The Showground's regeneration plans have been subject to publicity and limited marketing efforts over the last two years. However, it is difficult to undertake meaningful marketing without clarification of the Planning Authority's support for the proposals. The approval of this Planning Framework will enable the Society and London & Wharfedale to progress their marketing efforts to in order to secure interest to allow detailed proposals to come forward, through planning applications to the Council as soon as possible.

1.7 CONSULTANT TEAM

1.7.1 The Planning Framework was scoped and coordinated by Rapleys LLP who are appointed as town planning consultants. Other consultants have contributed as follows:

- Stephen George & Partners – Masterplanning and design;

- Rodgers Leask – Flooding and drainage, ground conditions and contamination, and infrastructure and services;
- Mayer Brown – Accessibility and Car Parking;
- James Lang- Brown – Tree Survey;
- John Hemsley – Baseline Habitat Assessment; and
- R Broomhead – Archaeological Assessment.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

1.8.1 The next section of the Planning Framework provides information about the Showground's varied functions, including the annual Royal Bath and West Show, the many other temporary events throughout the year and its permanent uses. It also identifies the Society's vision and future objectives for the site, which provides important justification for the site's improvement.

1.8.2 Section 3 provides a description of the Showground and the surrounding area and identifies ownership and access issues.

1.8.3 Section 4 sets out the planning history of the site and clarifies the extent of its existing lawful planning use.

1.8.4 Section 5 sets out the national, regional and local planning policy context and identifies the policy justification for the Showground's improvement.

1.8.5 Section 6 provides a summary of the economic significance of the Showground through a synopsis and update of the Economic Impact Assessment prepared by Roger Tym and Partners.

1.8.6 Section 7 considers the ecological potential of the site and summarises the findings of the recently completed Baseline Habitat Assessment and Tree Survey.

1.8.7 Section 8 provides consideration of landscape value and a visual impact assessment to identify key views and where mitigation could be needed to offset the impact of existing or new development.

1.8.8 Section 9 considers issues of transport accessibility and the site's accesses and parking facilities.

1.8.9 Section 10 considers the issues of flood risk and drainage,

including proposals for a sustainable urban drainage system to maximise environmental benefits.

1.8.10 Section 11 reviews investigations in relation to ground conditions and contamination.

1.8.11 Section 12 reviews the provision of infrastructure and servicing to ensure that future uses can be accommodated.

1.8.12 Section 13 provides a summary of the findings of a desk-based archaeology study to identify any existing or potential features on the site which merit further investigation.

1.8.13 Section 14 considers sustainability issues, including the potential for renewable energy generation on the site, sustainable construction measures.

1.8.14 Section 15 sets out the Masterplan proposals informed by, and based on, the information from the sections above. It summarises the opportunities and constraints of the site and, guided by this, sets out an indicative Masterplan for the Showground's improvement.

1.8.15 Lastly, section 16 considers the phasing of improvement works.

2 THE SHOWGROUND

2.1 THE EVENT

2.1.1 The Royal Bath and West Show has been held at the Showground since 1965, when the Society purchased the site. Prior to this it had been a travelling show, operating from sites as far flung as Nottingham, Wimbledon and Cardiff. At the heart of the Show are competitions for excellence in all aspects of rural life, including farm animals, cheese making, sheep shearing, sugarcraft, beekeeping, equestrianism, cider making, and country pursuits such as flyfishing. In all there are over 8000 entrants and winning a prize at the show results in enhanced value of the products displayed. Prize winning cheeses are to be found in all the major retailers proudly displaying their awards, and the supermarket buyers are all present at the show, looking for new and exciting foods to offer in their stores. Among the various competitive sections there are 1000 or more trade stands selling an eclectic range of products mostly from the countryside, with a special emphasis on local artisan food products. In the region of 160,000 people visit the show each year, with a 70/30 split

2. THE SHOWGROUND

between urban and rural folk. For many visitors the show is a complete exhibition of all that goes on in the countryside. Although it was originally designed to encourage excellence in agriculture, its role as a consumer event helping to bridge the gap between town and country has evolved to be at least as important as its original purpose.

2.2 OTHER EVENTS AND PERMANENT USES

2.2.1 The Society organises a number of technical events for farmers, including a Dairy Show (6000 visitors), Grassland Show (8000 visitors), and an Agricultural Machinery Show (3000 visitors). A winter programme of conferences and seminars, keeping people up to date on a wide range of topics of interest to landowners and farmers, attracts a further 2000 visitors. A specialist horticultural event is also held in September, bringing a further 25,000 visitors over three days. When the Society is not occupying its own facilities they are let to third parties, as the venue is unique in the West Country for being able to host very large gatherings of people (more than 10,000). Customers range from Christian rallies to music events and motor shows. The showground is let or part let every weekend throughout the year (a full list of events from 2009 can be found in Appendix 2). This part of the Society's business comprises 100 event days throughout the year, and employs an inestimable number of people engaged in all aspects of event management and servicing, both in the local area and nationally.

2.2.2 As well as the temporary events there are a number of permanent business premises/offices on the site, which are occupied throughout the year. These premises are used by local companies and organisations who consider there to be real benefits to working within the functioning Showground. Current occupiers are:

- The Royal Bath and West of England Society (offices);
- Woodcraft Homes (designers and builders of timber houses) (offices and display);
- The Stable Equine Veterinary Practice;
- Next Steps Childcare Centre (nursery);
- Mendip Community Transport (offices);
- Farmhouse Cheese Makers (manufacturing);
- Ritestaff (offices);

- DEFRA (offices);
- Fosters Catering (food preparation);
- Somerset Community Foundation (offices); and
- Several small companies have workshops and storage on the western edge of the site.

2.2.3 In addition, there are several companies such as the Western Daily Press, Old Mill Financial Services and Nat West Bank, which maintain permanent offices that are usually only occupied during larger events.

2.2.4 These other events and uses are essential to the financial sustainability of the Showground facilities, making their maintenance and management viable.

2.3 RANGE OF EXISTING USES

2.3.1 The primary use of the Framework site is as an agricultural showground, comprising exhibition halls and buildings, and external display and competition areas. This includes both permanent and temporary structures and uses. The primary use is supported by a range of ancillary and associated uses, with the core Showground being physically and functionally dominant within the Framework area. The primary Showground use is considered to be sui generis, reflecting its composition of a wide range of subsidiary functions, which vary through time and seasonally in terms of their proportional contribution to the overall use.

2.3.2 The main ancillary uses comprise B1 offices occupied by a number of parties including the Society's office, visitor facilities (including food and drink, catering and retail uses), and such facilities as car parking, admission gatehouses, circulation and services. A children's nursery functions as both an ancillary use to the Society's and other offices, as well as an independent nursery use.

2.3.3 The associated uses comprise two main categories:

- The functionally related business uses related to the Showground's role in the rural economy – these are listed in paragraph 2.2.2 above, and
- Use of the Showground buildings and other facilities for other events – as listed in paragraph 2.2.1 and Appendix 1.

3. THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

3 THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

3.1 SITE LOCATION

3.1.1 The Royal Bath and West Showground is located within the predominantly rural District of Mendip in Somerset. It is around 3km to the south of the nearest market town of Shepton Mallet and 1.5 km west of the large village of Evercreech. The site is mainly surrounded by open agricultural land, although it borders the small village of Prestleigh to the north east.

3.1.2 Primary access is via the A371 which runs to the east of the site and connects it to Castle Cary train station approximately 6 km to the south. There is a secondary site access from the A37 to the west.

3.1.3 The site is accessible from Bristol or Bath, which are both around 35 km north of the Showground. Junction 23 of the M5 lies approximately 35km to the west.



3.2 SITE DESCRIPTION

3.2.1 The Showground covers a site area of 91 hectares. It comprises a core Showground area with related buildings, structures and open space. Land outside of the core Showground, to the north west and south, is used for parking and camping during large events, as well as some permanent uses, including a Land Rover off-road course to the north, and a works compound with workshops and hardstanding for outdoor storage to the west.

3.2.2 The topography of the southern two thirds of the site is largely flat. The northern part of the site slopes up towards the northern boundary, rising approximately 50m over a distance of 1600m.

3.2.3 The Showground has been the subject of sporadic development since the 1960s. The existing site plan shows the existing buildings and features of the site and broadly indicates the function of the areas. The majority of the permanent buildings are concentrated within the central 'core' area, where there are a number of large multi-use buildings, as well as a theatre, a grandstand, the show-ring, and the Society's offices. These buildings were mainly developed between the 1960s and 1980s and are of varying quality. Close to the main entrance there is a children's nursery in a single storey prefabricated building and a number of small wooden cabins.

3.2.4 Circulation within the site is by a grid system of roadways. Outside of the central area, the land between the access roads is mostly laid to grass and used for tents and temporary trade stands and other structures during events. To the north of the main ring, permanent buildings are limited to toilet blocks and scattered trade stand buildings. There is a watercourse running through the central and southern part of the site feeding a lake in the south west part of the Showground.

3.3 RIGHTS OF WAY AND WAY LEAVES

3.3.1 There are two public foot paths crossing the site from east to west, which can be accessed from the A371. The route of the existing footpaths is marked on the Constraints Plan in Section 15.

3.3.2 The Constraints Plan also identifies a variety of infrastructure services (pipes and cables) which cross the site and have associated wayleaves. In addition, there are two wayleaves across the south west of the site from Bagborough Lane, which are also identified on the Constraints Plan.

3.4 OWNERSHIP

3.4.1 All of the land within the red line on the ownership plan on page 5 is owned by the Royal Bath and West of England Society and operated as the Showground.

3.5 SHEPTON MALLET

3.5.1 Whilst the Showground is 'out of town', it is functionally related to the nearby market town of Shepton Mallet, which is only a 3 km to the north of the site.

3.5.2 Shepton Mallet is one of the five market towns within the District of Mendip, all of which have an equal standing in the settlement hierarchy. It is a relatively vibrant town with a growing population of approximately 9,700 people. The town offers range of manufacturing and other employment opportunities with a net inflow of workers (Source: A Portrait of Shepton Mallet, MDC, 2008). It provides a good range of shops and services and other 'town centre uses' to meet the needs of residents, workers and visitors. Its catchment includes the surrounding rural area and the town centre attracts visitors and tourists from further afield. Events held at the Showground are an important attraction for the town.

3. THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS



3. THE SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

3.5.4 Shepton Mallet has the smallest town centre of the Mendip market towns. However it has benefited from substantial investment in recent years with the development of the Townsend Shopping Park on its southern edge, including the relocation of Tesco. The Haskins store has also been overhauled and the adjoining Somerfield has been replaced with an Aldi. This has improved the overall retail offer of the town, increasing its attraction as a shopping destination and reducing the local retail expenditure lost to other centres. The heart of the town centre further to the north remains a priority for ongoing regeneration initiatives including physical improvements to the public realm.

3.5.4 By virtue of its rich archaeological history as a roman settlement and its strategic location for access to the Mendip Hills, the town is considered to have substantial tourism potential which is not yet fully realised.

3.5.5 There is a strong relationship between Shepton Mallet and the Showground. The town is the nearest and most convenient centre for event visitors, many of whom would not be in the area but for the Showground and its events. The proposed enhancement of the Showground facilities will significantly increase its year-round visitor attraction and will provide an important opportunity for Shepton Mallet to further capitalise on the potential for raised perception and increased trade.

3.5.6 Enhancement of the Showground will have a positive impact on the vitality and viability of Shepton Mallet, but to ensure that there are not negative impacts, retail provision on the site will be limited to rural and outdoor living specialist retail. The types of products which will be permitted to be sold will be limited by planning condition or legal agreement and will include items such as specialist food products, rural and local crafts, and specialist outdoor pursuits equipment. These types of retailing would not seek to locate in Shepton Mallet. Such retailers will be attracted by the benefits of a specialist retail destination founded on the Showground and its events. The Showground provides an ideal opportunity for this and the complementary year round retail operation will provide valuable income to allow regeneration and improvement of the existing site facilities.

3.5.7 In relation to employment, the proposals include a rural economy business zone which will be designed to create an environment to meet the needs of the rural economy, particularly agriculture and farming, food production, research, agricultural and farming services. This commercial offer would be complementary to existing and future employment development in the Shepton Mallet.

3.5.7 Full detailed consideration of the impact of all proposals on Shepton Mallet will be required as part of planning applications for detailed proposals, informed by occupier interest. The economic impact of the Showground is considered further in section 6.

4. PLANNING HISTORY

4 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The Showground has been the subject of incremental growth and evolution of the showground operation since the late 1960s. This has resulted in the current distribution of buildings and uses, which do not meet the requirements of the Society and the site's other users and visitors. This section identifies the Showground's current lawful planning position, which sets the background for consideration of the Planning Framework.

4.2 BUILDINGS AND RESTRICTIONS

4.2.1 The planning register shows a stream of applications for development of buildings specifically associated with the Showground use from 1967 onwards.

4.2.2 Prior to 1974, all planning permissions for the site were issued on a temporary basis for up to 10 years. In 1978 planning permission was granted to allow the indefinite retention of all of the structures on the site permitted under temporary applications 'so long as the land continues to be used as an agricultural showground by the Royal Bath and West Show Society'. In addition, in 1978, a planning consent was granted to authorise all buildings on the site which had been erected prior to this date without planning consent.

4.2.3 During the 1970s and 1980s, development on the Showground increased and planning permission was granted for most of the large buildings now existing on the site, including the Grandstand and the large pavilions/exhibition halls. For some buildings, the use intended was stipulated in the planning consent, e.g. 'Erection of stock house for stock, exhibitions, general storage and winter storage of caravans', but for other buildings the use was undefined. The occupation of the major buildings outside of the main show period is not restricted by planning condition, whereby the majority of the buildings can be utilised throughout the year.

4.3 EXISTING LAWFUL USE

4.3.1 Whilst the Royal Bath and West Show is the primary function of the site, the Showground is used as a venue for a range of other events throughout the year. Having regards to the lack of an overall planning consent for the use of the Showground, the Society sought to clarify the lawful planning use of the land in 2004. Evidence was provided on the activity on the site for the previous decade. On the grounds that the uses on the Showground had been in operation for more than 10 years, a Certificate of Lawfulness of an Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) was secured for 'use of the land for country, agricultural, homewares and leisure events, such events not covering more than 100 days in every calendar year'.

4.3.2 Within this, there is no limitation on the retail area that can be used during events or on the types of products that can be sold.

4.3.3 The CLEUD applies to the entire site and relates to the temporary events hosted at the Showground. It does not limit the permanent occupation of buildings on the site for ancillary functions such as the offices and the nursery.



5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

- 5.1.1 This section provides the policy context for the Planning Framework and the policy basis for improvement and enhancement of the Showground.
- 5.1.2 The Development Plan comprises the saved policies of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Structure Plan (2000) and the adopted Mendip District Local Plan (December 2002). The Local Development Framework is under preparation and is progressing towards publication of the Core Strategy Preferred Options version. National planning guidance in the form of the Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) is also a material consideration.
- 5.1.3 In considering the planning policies of relevance, it is important to note that the primary use of the site is as a Showground. As identified in section 2, the Showground provides a necessary combination of functions including tourism, employment and retail; related uses, within an overall sui-generis use.

5.2 THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Structure Plan Review (April 2000)

- 5.2.1 The Showground is not specifically mentioned in the Structure Plan.
- 5.2.2 The general principles for development within the county are set out in STR1, which states that development should be of good design and maintain local distinctiveness. It also states development should deliver a pattern of land use which minimises the need to travel, is accessible to houses, jobs and services and encourages the use of walking, cycling and public transport. The policy states that development should conserve ecological assets, make best use of previously developed land and minimise consumption of non-renewable energy.
- 5.2.3 The Development Strategy of the plan set out in Policies STR4 and STR6 seek to locate development within the existing towns and strictly control development in the countryside outside of settlement boundaries. However, the supporting text to STR6 states that development within the Countryside can be allowed 'when the selection of an alternative location related to an

appropriate type of settlement is not possible...where such development is proposed Local Planning Authorities will need to assess whether, the need for it in an open countryside location is essential, it will be of benefit to the local area and, its impact, in terms of cost to the environment and sustainability, is minimise' (paragraph 3.45).

- 5.2.4 Policy STR6 states that development outside of settlements will be considered where it would benefit economic activity, would maintain or enhance the environment and would not foster growth in the need to travel.
- 5.2.5 In terms of employment, the Structure Plan requires the allocation of 60 ha of employment land within Mendip by 2011. Policy 19 states that in rural areas provision should be made for development which creates or enhances local employment, shopping or community facilities. The supporting text states that this should be strictly controlled, but that reuse of previously developed land in the countryside could be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that the use proposed is appropriate, needed in that location and cannot be accommodated in a settlement.
- 5.2.6 In planning for retail, Policy 20 of the Structure Plan states that retail development should be well related to settlements and of an appropriate scale. Where retail development has the potential to alter the current pattern of shopping centres, the vitality and viability of existing town centres will be a prime consideration.
- 5.2.7 Tourism development in the countryside is addressed in Policy 23, which states that outside of the settlements, tourism development should focus on improving existing attractions and accommodation, and mitigating the environmental impact of existing development. Extensions to existing tourism facilities should be allowed where it will provide net environmental improvement by way of improved layout or landscaping.
- 5.2.8 Policy 38 relates to sport and recreation in the Countryside and states that provision of new facilities will be allowed where they are compatible with the amenity, landscape and ecology of the site. New development which would generate substantial transport movements should be accessible by public transport.
- 5.2.9 Policy 41 identifies the A371 and the A37 as Transport Corridors of Strategic Importance, where there is an objective to increase sustainable transport modes.

5.2.10 Policy 64 states that provision should be made, where environmentally acceptable, for the development of renewable energy resources.

The Adopted Mendip District Local Plan (2002)

- 5.2.11 The Local Plan does not identify the Showground on the proposals map, but it includes a number of general policies of relevance.
- 5.2.12 Policy Q8 states that proposals for significant development on sites which are not allocated in the Local Plan, will only be permitted where they comply with a Planning Brief agreed by the Local Authority following public consultation. This Framework is prepared in line with this policy.
- 5.2.13 Policy S1 states that outside of settlements, development will be strictly controlled, but will be permitted where it benefits economic activity, maintains or enhances the environment and does not foster growth in the need to travel.
- 5.2.14 Policy TC1 relates to development of town centre uses such as retail, professional and financial services and commercial leisure. It states that such uses should be primarily directed to the town centres or allocated development sites unless:
- There is identified need for the development proposed;
 - It would not have an adverse impact on the town centre;
 - There is no reasonable prospect of accommodating the development within a more sequentially preferable location;
 - The development would not prejudice development elsewhere, and
 - The site can be made as accessible as a town centre location.
- 5.2.15 Proposals for rural tourism development are addressed in Policy E14, which states that development will be permitted where:
- (i) The scale and type of proposal is compatible with the countryside location;
 - (ii) The extension of existing tourism development will result in improved layouts or landscaping or other environmental improvements;

- (iii) It will not lead to increased visitor pressures on such a scale that it would harm the natural environment, heritage or distinctiveness of the locality;
- (iv) Proposed buildings and structures respect the scenic quality and distinctive character of the local landscape;
- (v) The development would not harm the amenity of nearby users, and
- (vi) Proposals for development giving rise to a significant number of employee or visitor travel movements are in a location accessible by public transport.

5.2.16 Turning to accessibility, Policy SN23 states that major travel generating development may be permitted, if accessibility can be improved to ensure that the development would be highly accessible by public transport, on foot and by bicycle, and the development is designed to demonstrably restrict potential use of the motor car.

5.2.17 In terms of sustainable energy use, Policy ER1 of the Local Plan requires all practicable measures for the conservation of energy to be included in the design, layout and siting of proposals.

5.2.18 On-site renewable energy is supported. Policy ER2 relates to wind turbines, which will be permitted where they are sited to minimise visual impact, will not detrimentally affect the amenity of occupiers of nearby properties and will not damage identified sites of archaeological or ecological value. Policy ER4 relates to proposals for solar energy and states that photovoltaic cells will be permitted on buildings where they will not have detrimental impact on a listed building or conservation area and can be satisfactorily incorporated into an existing or new building.

5.2.19 The Local Plan does not consider freestanding solar panels, but states:

'It is important to use all viable opportunities to generate power without producing harmful emissions to the environment. In some cases, therefore, renewable energy developments may exceptionally be permitted in areas where other forms of development would not, because of the benefits of this type of power generation' (para 8.7).

5.3 NATIONAL POLICY

PPS1

5.3.1 Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) 'Delivering Sustainable Development' indicates the underpinning principles of sustainability, which should inform every planning decision. This includes not only protecting the environment from development which could damage its special character, but also supporting the economy and providing for the needs of the community.

5.3.2 In terms of sustainable development features, paragraph 22 of PPS1 identifies that Local Authorities should promote rather than restrict proposals for renewable energy generation. They should also promote resource and energy efficient buildings, community heating schemes, the use of combined heat and power, small scale renewable and low carbon energy schemes in developments, the sustainable use of water resources, and the use of sustainable drainage systems in the management of run-off.

PPS4

5.3.3 Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth' (December 2009) has recently been published to update the government's approach to planning for economic development, responding to difficult economic conditions. The new PPS4 has replaced the guidance in the former PPS4 'Industrial commercial development and small firms' and PPS6 'Planning for Town Centres'. It also replaces the majority of PPS7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'.

5.3.4 PPS4 sets out plan-making policies to guide the formation of the emerging regional and local guidance, and development management policies to guide development proposals and decisions.

5.3.5 Policy EC7 is the most relevant. It states that Local Planning Authorities should support the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations, where identified needs are not met by existing facilities. The policy recognises that facilities requiring new buildings in the countryside may be justified in locations outside of settlements, where they are required in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction, and there are not suitable existing buildings or developed sites available for reuse.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.3.6 In the development management policies, there are a number of relevance to the proposed improvement of the Showground. Policy EC10 relates to the determination of planning applications for economic development. It indicates that Local Planning Authorities should take a positive and constructive approach towards planning applications for economic development. In considering proposals, Councils should assess:

- (i) The impact of the development in relation to whether climate change considerations have formed part of the design;
- (ii) If the accessibility of the site would be acceptable once public transport and traffic management measures have been secured;
- (iii) The quality of design;
- (iv) The impact of the proposals on economic and physical regeneration of the area, and
- (v) The impact on local employment.

5.3.7 Policy EC11 indicates that it is relevant to consider market and economic information alongside environmental and social information. Account should also be taken of the long-term benefits of the development such as job creation, improved productivity and wider benefits to the national, regional and local economies, and how the proposals would contribute to meeting the wider objectives of the Development Plan.

5.3.8 In considering proposals for economic development in rural areas, Policy EC12 states development should be supported if it enhances the vitality and viability of market towns and other rural centres. Planning applications for conversion and re-use of existing buildings should be approved where the benefits of the proposals outweigh any environmental or other harm.

5.3.9 Policy EC14 relates specifically to applications for main town centre uses which include retail, leisure and entertainment facilities, offices and tourism development, such as hotels and conference facilities. This policy generally seeks to direct town centre uses to town centre locations, and where this is not possible, to ensure a sequential approach to site selection has been followed. However, there is a notable exception to this rule identified policy EC14, which states that where such uses are ancillary to another use (such as the Showground), the restrictions of town centre use policies may not apply.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.3.10 PPS4 is also accompanied by a Practice Guidance Note on Need, Impact and the Sequential Approach. This document provides more extensive advice on the application of the sequential test, where this is required under policy EC14. It recognises that there are some situations where the qualitative need for the development proposed is necessarily tied to that location to facilitate its regeneration. In this circumstance the guidance states:

'If the applicant asserts that the proposal is, by its nature, locationally specific, and cannot be accommodated in a more central location, or that it is not possible to adopt a flexible approach to accommodate any need/demand more centrally, it will be necessary to clearly justify this position.' (paragraph 6.54)

5.3.11 Policy EC16 of PPS4 identifies a range of impacts resulting from proposed development that will need to be assessed in relation to main town centre uses outside of an identified town centre. This will set out how the proposals will impact on the vitality and viability of the relevant town centre(s), which in this case would be Shepton Mallet. Policy EC17 provides guidance on how applications should be determined having assessed the impact of the proposals and states that applications should be positively determined where the sequential approach has been complied with and no significant negative impacts have been demonstrated.

PPG13

5.3.12 Planning Policy Guidance 13 (PPG13) on Transportation seeks to direct development to the most accessible locations available. It also and recognises that in order to reduce long-distance out-commuting to jobs in urban areas, it may be appropriate to allow development to deliver rural employment.

PPS22

5.3.12 Planning Policy statement 22 (PPS22) on Renewable Energy sets out the Government's targets for increased renewable energy generation as identified in the Energy White Paper in 2003. It promotes positive planning for renewable energy which can contribute to all four elements of the sustainable development strategy being:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone – by contributing to the nation's energy needs, ensuring all homes are adequately and affordably heated, and providing new sources of energy in remote areas;

- Effective protection of the environment – by reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases and thereby reducing the potential for the environment to be affected by climate change;
- Prudent use of natural resources – by reducing the nation's reliance on ever diminishing supplies of fossil fuels; and,
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment through the creation of jobs directly related to renewable energy developments, but also in the development of new technologies. In rural areas, renewable energy projects have the potential to play an increasingly important role in the diversification of rural economies.

5.3.13 PPS22 states that 'the wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects, whatever their scale, are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be granted planning permission' (paragraph 1(iv)).

5.3.14 The government has recently published a consultation on a new Planning Policy Statement 'Planning For a Low Carbon Future in a Changing Climate'. This document is published for consultation until June 2010 and is proposed to replace the Supplement to PPS1 'Planning and Climate Change' and PPS22. It is strongly supportive of a positive planning approach to delivering renewable energy.

5.4 OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Emerging Local Development Framework

5.4.1 Mendip District Council is currently preparing its Core Strategy. It is anticipated that the Preferred Options consultation will be published in December 2010 with adoption of the Core Strategy in mid 2012.

5.4.2 The most recent consultation document is the Core Strategy Further Issues and Options, published in December 2008. There is no specific reference to Royal Bath and West Showground in this document.

5.4.3 In terms of employment development, the Issues and Options document notes that there is a need to diversify from declining

established sectors, such as manufacturing. It notes, in Section 2.1, that there has been a loss of employment sites in recent years and that an employment land shortfall has been identified in Shepton Mallet. The Strategy sets out a requirement for an increase in employment land at Shepton Mallet to meet projected demand (Section 3.2.5).

5.4.4 With regard to tourism, the emerging Core Strategy identifies a need to improve leisure/tourism provision within Mendip, which is identified as one of the district-wide key issues.

5.4.5 In relation to renewable energy, the document recognises that the Government has set targets for increased renewable energy generation over the period to 2050 and that the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy also identifies specific targets for Somerset. It is stated that the Council will plan positively for renewable energy development, whilst giving due consideration to the wider environmental, social and economic implications of such proposals.

5.4.6 In recognition of the emergence of the improvement proposals for the Showground, the Council intends to include a statement of support within the next version of the Core Strategy. This will note the Showground's importance to the local economy and confirm support for proposals that maintain and develop its role in the economy.

5.5 POLICY DISCUSSION

5.5.1 This Planning Framework is prepared as a Planning Brief under Local Plan Policy Q8. Whilst the Showground has never been formally designated in the adopted Development Plan, its longstanding function and local economic importance is recognised and this will be confirmed in the emerging Core Strategy. In the meantime, it is proposed to progress proposals to bring forward improvement and enhancement of the Showground facilities by approving the Planning Framework which sets out a coordinated and comprehensive approach to improvement of the Showground. The Framework has been prepared in consultation with local communities and interested parties in accordance with Policy Q8, as set out in the Consultation Statement in Appendix 1.

5.5.2 This Planning Framework will form a basis for detailed applications coming forward in due course but does not remove the need for any planning application to be fully justified in accordance with the relevant planning policies.

Out of Settlement Development

5.5.3 The most up to date policy guidance is that set out in PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth. Plan making policy EC7 of the PPS supports 'sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and which utilise and enrich rather than harm, the character of the countryside, its towns, villages buildings and other features'.

5.5.4 In accordance with this policy, it is considered that the Showground is a clear example of an established and valued 'countryside attraction' where the guidance provides for the improvement of visitor facilities, including new buildings, where these are justified and of suitable design. Ensuring the long-term viability of the Showground, along with enhancement of the facilities and improvements to the sustainability of the site's operation is an appropriate basis on which to plan for new development under this policy.

5.5.5 In terms of the development management policies of PPS4, policy EC10 places weight on the impact of proposals on economic and physical regeneration, and on local employment, along with energy efficiency, accessibility and design quality. The plans for improvement and enhancement of the Showground set out in this Framework are focused on delivering such benefits in accordance with these principles.

5.5.6 Policy EC12 states that in rural areas the re-use of buildings for economic redevelopment will be preferable. The proposals for enhancement of the Showground will be wholly enclosed within the Showground site where there is a long-established mix permanent and temporary structures throughout the year. Whilst the proposals will result in an increased level of permanent development, buildings will be carefully scaled, sited and landscaped to address potential visual impacts and maintain the open feel of the site.

5.5.7 Policy EC12 also supports development in Rural Areas which will enhance the vitality and viability of market towns. It is expected that the increase in visitor numbers that will result from the

Showground improvements will provide a significant boost to the economy of nearby Shepton Mallet through linked trips.

5.5.8 In considering the appropriateness of the proposals for development in this out of settlement location, it is recognised that:

- The Showground is a unique facility within the region and, by reason of its function and purpose, has to be located in its existing out of settlement location, at the heart of the rural communities which it serves;
- Improvements to the Showground including supporting ancillary permanent uses cannot be located elsewhere to generate the benefits required;
- The site is located relatively close to several settlements, particularly Shepton Mallet, and is accessed off the A371 and the A37, which are identified in the Structure Plan as Strategic Transport Corridors;
- The site is already widely accessed by permanent staff and over 1 million visitors a year and the development associated with improvement can provide funding and the opportunity to improve the site's accessibility;
- Increased permanent, year-round uses on the site in particular provide the opportunity to improve regular sustainable transport modes; and
- Improvement proposals will strengthen the rural economy, provide increased levels of employment and community benefits, whilst also increasing accessibility of the site, delivering renewable energy and maintaining/improving landscape impact.

5.5.9 On this basis, subject to detailed consideration at the planning application stage of issues such as design, visual impact and accessibility, the principle of out of settlement development to secure the improvement and enhancement of the Showground is acceptable in accordance with relevant planning policies including PPS4 Policies EC7, EC10 and EC12, Structure Plan Policy STR6 and Local Plan Policies S1 and SN23.

Employment

5.5.10 Existing commercial occupiers already operate from permanent premises on the site all year round. The Framework includes proposals for a consolidated and improved employment area

which will provide premises for specifically rurally-focused enterprises. It is expected that this will comprise a range of B class employment uses, although office space would be limited and predominantly ancillary. This area will provide an important year-round income supply for the Society and help to fund the upgrading and maintenance of existing facilities. Furthermore, it will provide a centre of rural excellence, facilitated by the Showground's location and function, supporting innovation in the rural and local economy.

5.5.11 Policy EC11 of PPS4 is of particular relevance to this element of the proposals, emphasising the importance of weighing market and economic information alongside environmental and social benefits and the long term benefits of employment and improved productivity.

5.5.12 The proposed rural economy business zone offers employment benefits and will positively contribute to the local economy, which merits support in its own right, where other issues such as visual impact and accessibility are comprehensively addressed.

Tourism

5.5.13 The Showground is a well-established visitor facility, which provides an important destination for visitors throughout the year, including the spring and winter 'low season'. The proposed improvements to the site will enhance the Showground's attraction as a year round visitor destination, through improving and increasing the event facilities and by providing permanent leisure, educational and specialist rural retail attractions. The adopted and emerging Development Plan supports the improvement of tourism facilities within the District. PPS4 provides for the improvement and enhancement of established countryside attractions. Therefore, subject to detailed considerations at application stage, including environmental impact, accessibility and justification retail and hotel uses the provision of improved facilities at the site accords with PPS4, Structure Plan Policy 23 and Local Plan E14.

Town centre uses

5.5.14 As identified in Section 2, the established sui generis use of the site includes some 'town centre uses' such as retail and offices. The proposals for improvement and enhancement seek to maintain the overall character of the Showground use, with the introduction of some permanent facilities to improve the site's

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

attraction and viability. A retail destination zone, with specialist rural and outdoor living retail and onsite hotel accommodation are two important elements of this.

5.5.15 The retail area will provide important support for the Showground's future and will be key to achieving the funding required for the new conference facilities. In terms of the retail floorspace, the area proposed (up to 13,000 sq m) is less than the retail floorspace that is permitted on the site for a third of the year under the existing planning consent. In contrast with the unrestricted range of goods sold regularly at temporary Showground events, The product range in the permanent retail area will be limited to a complementary range of agricultural and countryside products. This will ensure that it does not compete with local town centres. However, in preparing the detailed retail proposals, full assessment of impact will be undertaken in accordance with PPS4 (Policies EC16 and EC17). In addition the proposals will be the subject if a sequential assessment (under Policy EC15). Planning applications for retail use at the Showground will only be permitted if the issues of impact and sequential assessment have been satisfactorily addressed within the application submissions.

5.5.16 The Planning Framework also identifies the potential for two hotels. It is anticipated that these hotels will largely serve Showground visitors. In particular, they will support the proposed conference centre. Initial market research indicates that on-site good quality accommodation is essential to support modern conference centres and will help to secure its viable future. The level of accommodation proposed (up to 100 rooms per hotel) would only provide accommodation for a fraction of the total site visitors and would not detract from positive impacts resulting from increased demand for hotel and B&B accommodation in the surrounding area. Overall the number of overnight stays is likely to increase in line with visitor numbers. As a 'town centre' use, the proposals for on-site hotel space will also need to be considered against the sequential and impact tests in PPS4. This will be fully addressed in any planning applications for hotels.

Renewable Energy

5.5.17 The relevant Planning Policy at local and national level is supportive of renewable energy development informed by national and county targets for delivery. Local Planning Authorities are advised to take a positive approach in planning to deliver renewable energy where environmental, social and economic

implications are acceptable. Provided that issues including visual impact and amenity can be addressed, appropriate renewable energy development at the Showground would be supported accordingly.

5.6 CONCLUSION

5.6.1 The planning policy framework identified above, provides 'in principle' support for proposals for the improvement and enhancement of the Showground. Whilst the site is located in the Countryside where development would not normally be encouraged, the economic and social importance of the established Showground is a material consideration in favour of development to support its future and expand its role in the local and regional economy.

5.6.2 Moving forward, specific proposals stemming from those outlined in this Framework will need to be fully justified through detailed planning application submissions. These submissions will identify the acceptability of the proposals within the wider Showground use and demonstrate due regard to the requirements of planning policy, including the tests of PPS4.

5.6.3 In particular, the detailed development proposals will need to identify how issues of accessibility would be addressed and incorporate sustainable transport modes. Suitable, sensitive design, minimising landscape impact, will also be important in order to protect the rural landscape.



6. ECONOMIC APPRAISAL

6 ECONOMIC APPRAISAL

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 The primary purpose the improvement and enhancement of the Showground is to secure its ongoing and increased contribution to the local and wider economy and, in doing so, to achieve a viable future for the Society and the Show.

6.1.2 This chapter of the Framework summarises the regional and local economic background to the improvement proposals. It then identifies the specific economic impact of the Showground, and considers the potential to increase its economic impact through the proposed site improvements.

6.2 THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

6.2.1 Mendip is a district of Somerset, within the South West Region of England. The South West has the highest rural population of all of the English regions. Despite this, long-term decline in agriculture has been experienced and in 2007 agriculture contributed just 1.3% to regional Gross Value Added (GVA), which is a key measure of productivity. In comparison, the three main generators of wealth in the region are real estate, renting and business activities (22.6% of GVA 2007), manufacturing (14% of GVA 2007) wholesale/ retail (11.8% of GVA 2007).

6.2.2 Tourism is an increasingly important industry for the South West contributing an estimated £4.6bn to the regional economy in 2007 (around 5% of GVA). In the year to June 2009, the South West attracted 20% of England's domestic tourist trips, the highest share of any region, and 7% of overseas visits to England. (Figures from the ONS and Government Office for the South West, 2010).

6.2.3 In terms of economic performance with the region, 53% of the region's GVA is generated in the northern Counties of North Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, where there is a concentration of larger settlements and the best transport links. The economy of Somerset and Dorset combined generates around 22% of the region's GVA, which compares favourably to Devon and Cornwall at 18% and 7% of GVA respectively. (South West RDA, 2009)

6.2.4 Mendip is one of the more rural districts of the region. There are no dominant cities or large towns. As such, in Mendip there is a reliance on the economic success of the rural economy and the

small market towns. In addition, approximately one third of the working population commute outside of the District for work (Census, 2001).

6.2.5 In terms of employment sources, the local economy has been affected in recent years by a decline in traditional manufacturing and there has been a shift to a service led economy with a high occurrence of small businesses employing less than 10 people. Unemployment in Mendip has risen during the recent economic downturn to 4.4%, although unemployment levels for the District remain slightly below the regional average and 2% less than the national average. (Mendip Interim Economic Strategy Update 2010)

6.2.6 Mendip District Council has recently published an Interim Economic Strategy Update 2010. This strategy recognises that, given the rural nature of the district, 'in terms of the economy, the rural areas are regarded as integral to the fabric of the rural economy and not seen in isolation'(para 6.31).

6.2.7 The updated Economic Strategy identifies a number of Key Delivery Themes and these include:

- Stimulating the local economy by supporting local businesses and residents to prosper, building on existing and potential strengths of the area;
- Focusing on key sectors which are appropriate for the region, which are food and drink, advanced engineering and aerospace, creative industries, business services, energy and environmental technologies. Also to reflect tourism, land-based activities and rural businesses which are important to the local economy.

6.2.8 These themes support the principle of the Showground's improvement.

6.3 ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE SHOWGROUND

6.3.1 In anticipation of the proposals to improve the Showground, in 2005, the Society commissioned Roger Tym Associates to prepare the 'Bath and West Showground Economic Impact Assessment'. This report was funded by South West Regional Development Agency in recognition of the Showground's regional importance. The purpose of the report was to understand the economic impact of the Showground and to consider the potential for the improvement and enhancement of the Showground to deliver

additional economic benefits. The report specifically considered upgrading the existing facilities to include a new conference centre and permanent business premises.

6.3.2 The report quantified the economic impact of the activities that took place at the Showground during 2005. It was informed by information gathered using a range of methods including desk-based research, postal surveys, and telephone and personal interviews with stakeholders. The report identified that the Showground generates direct economic impact from the following sources:

- The in-situ employment associated with occupiers of premises on site;
- Jobs generated by the Royal Bath & West Show and other events at the Showground;
- The number of bed-nights occupied in local hotels and other accommodation establishments by users of the Showground;
- The revenue generated by the Society, Showground tenants, exhibitors, event organisers and attendees at the Showground events; and
- Expenditure of the Society and other users of the Showground.

6.3.3 On the basis of these sources, the Assessment found the direct annual economic impact from the Showground could be summarised as follows:

Element of Impact	Royal Bath & West Show	Other showground Events	Showground Occupants	Total
Mendip Economy	£4.048m	£8.803m	£2.256m	£15.107m
Rest of Somerset Economy	£8.389m	£12.935m	£4.247m	£25.571m
Rest of South West Region Economy	£9.331m	£13.726m	£3.848m	£26.905m
Rest of UK Economy	£15.884m	£29.947m	£2.919m	£48.750m
Total Estimated Economic Impact	£37.625m	£65.411m	£13.270m	£116.333m

(Source: Roger Tym & Partners 2005)

6. ECONOMIC APPRAISAL

6.3.4 These figures do not include economic multipliers relating to the wider indirect effects of the jobs and monetary spend arising from activities at the Showground. If this is included, the impact of the Showground on the Mendip Economy would raise to 18.9m, the regional economy to £40.36m and the national economy to 73.1m. The total annual economic impact of the Showground would therefore be £164.3m (as at 2005).

6.3.5 In terms of the site's future, the Economic Impact Assessment demonstrated strong occupier support for improved and expanded facilities at the Showground from existing site uses. For example, 83% of the Showground's permanent tenants wanted to expand their businesses on site, increasing employee levels. In addition, 40% of traders who attended events at the Showground expected trade levels to increase if the Showground improvements went ahead and 28% stated they would attend more events.

6.3.6 The Economic Impact Assessment also identified a shortage of conference facilities within the region and scope for this part of the South West to attract a larger share of the events market if better facilities were available. If suitable improvements were achieved in relation to the Showground facilities, the Economic Impact Assessment estimated an additional economic impact of £13 to £20 million may result.

6.4 SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

6.4.1 The 2005 Economic Impact Assessment provides a useful assessment of the financial importance of the Showground within the District and beyond. It identifies that annually the Showground generates around £19 million in total for the Mendip economy, over £40 million for the regional economy and a total national economic contribution of nearly £165 million.

6.4.2 Clearly the Showground is a valuable asset to the Mendip and regional economy. However, without urgent investment, the future of the Showground is uncertain and its economic contribution may be seriously reduced or lost altogether. This would be a serious blow to the local and regional economy.

6.4.3 The proposals for improvement of the Showground will secure its continued significant contribution to the South West economy and will increase the site's potential economic output. Until the specific improvement proposals are identified, it is difficult to precisely quantify the level of increased economic

output which could be expected, albeit the Economic Impact Assessment suggests up to £20 million. Notwithstanding this, the Showground's improvement should result in the following outcomes, leading to tangible economic benefits in the short to medium term:

- Increase the number of visitors to the site throughout the year, which will increase on and off site expenditure within the District and the wider Region;
- Support and improve the economic output of the site from existing events;
- Increase the economic output of the Showground outside of the main show period; and
- Increase the actual and equivalent number of full time jobs on the site and within the District.



7. ECOLOGY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

7.1.1 As a substantial site within a rural setting, ecological matters are an important consideration in preparing proposals for the intensification of uses at the Showground. In order to guide preparation of the Planning Framework, initial investigations have been undertaken with the preparation of an up-to-date Tree Survey and Baseline Habitat Assessment. The findings of these reports are attached at Appendix 3 and 4 and summarised below.

7.2 TREE SURVEY

7.2.1 The Showground contains a number of trees of varying species, age and quality. The majority of trees are located in clumps around the site boundaries and within hedgerows, but there are also some free standing specimens across the Showground. Trees and hedgerows were removed in the 1960s and as a result most of the trees and hedges on site are less than 50 years old.

7.2.2 None of the trees on the site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. Nevertheless, the trees and hedgerows are considered to be an important feature of the Showground, which should be maintained and enhanced where possible. Existing trees and hedgerows are plotted on the Constraints Plan in Section 15 and have been duly considered in the preparation of the indicative Masterplan. A full Tree Report and detailed landscaping proposals will be submitted in support of detailed planning submissions in due course.

7.3 BASELINE HABITAT ASSESSMENT

7.3.1 The assessment was carried out during March and April 2010. The methodology included a desktop review of records held by the Somerset Environmental Records Centre as well as other sources, including a number of reports and surveys relating to onsite flora and fauna previously commissioned by the Society. The assessment also utilised three field surveys during which a methodical assessment of observed and potential species on the site was undertaken.

7.3.2 The key aims of the assessment were:

- To identify habitat areas on the site;
- To verify the occurrence of, or potential for protected

species within those habitats, and

- To identify areas for possible future investigation.

7.3.3 The desk-top study revealed that there are no protected environmental designations within or close to the site and no protected species have been recorded in the Somerset records.

7.3.4 The site has been subject to relatively intensive use over the past 50 years, prior to which it was open agricultural land. This has resulted in a limited range of habitats on the site, which is considered to be relatively insignificant in ecological value – i.e. mowed short grassland and hardstanding areas. The trees and hedgerows provide some habitat value, particularly for birds. The quieter areas, away from the Showground Core, are considered to have better ecology potential. In particular the lake and the small ponds on the site have ecological potential. The Darling Pond in the north west corner of the site provides the most secluded habitat.

7.3.5 The site survey did not identify any rare flora on the site. In terms of fauna the key findings can be summarised as follows:

- Badgers – A secondary badger sett was identified on top of Prestleigh Ridge just to the north of the Showground. No setts were identified on the site.
- Birds – No protected birds were observed or are known to be resident on the site. A pair of Buzzards are identified to be nesting on top of the ridge.
- Bats – No signs of bat roosts were identified on the site visits.
- Newts – The smooth, Great Crested and Palmate Newt have all been identified in the Darling Pond but not elsewhere on site.

Reptiles and Amphibians – There are no recorded signs of any reptiles on the site although frogs and toads are thought likely to exist in the Darling Pond and the Lake. There are no recent reports of snakes and it is considered unlikely in view of the high levels of human activity and generally unsuitable habitat.

7.3.6 The Baseline Habitat Assessment is an initial study and more detailed studies will be undertaken to support detailed planning submissions in due course. Having regard to the findings in

7. ECOLOGY

the Baseline Habitat Assessment and the nature of the site, it is expected that additional survey work required in relation to detailed development proposals may include a detailed badger survey and a newt survey. Proposals for the alteration or removal of existing buildings and trees on the site may require a Bat Survey. The requirement for additional surveys and supporting information will be formally scoped with the Council in relation to future planning applications.



8. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

8 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

8.1 RELEVANT POLICY DESIGNATIONS

8.1.1 Mendip District Local Plan Policy Q1 states that development proposals should relate satisfactorily to site surroundings in terms of, interalia, landscape.

8.1.2 Neither the Showground nor the surrounding land is subject to any nationally or regionally significant landscape designations. Locally, the Landscape Assessment of the Mendip Hills (1997) identifies the site as within the Lias Lowlands and Ridges Landscape Character Area, within which the site is in the Whitelake Lowlands area. This part of the district is described as follows:

‘Much of the area is quite flat and open, with low hedges, few hedgerow trees and large irregular fields. On the lowest ground these open areas are pasture, but in the east, particularly east of the A37 Fosse Way, there is extensive arable. Here the Bath and West Showground, and the villages of Evercreech and Stoney Stratton are quite prominent’ (para12.2.6).

8.1.3 The Mendip Landscape Assessment does not set out any requirements for new development within the context of these landscape areas. In accordance with Local Plan Policy Q1, improvement proposals for the site would need to be sensitive to the character of the Whitelake Lowlands area, but would be considered within the context of the existing development at the Showground.

8.2 KEY VIEWS

8.2.1 The southern half of the site is largely flat. The northern half slopes upwards from 80m AOD to a highpoint of approximately 125m AOD in the north. Along the north eastern boundary, where the site adjoins Prestleigh, there are a number of houses and a public house with gardens that adjoin the Showground. Views from some of these properties extend to the west and south west across the north half of the site, where existing built development is limited. This boundary is identified as ‘sensitive’ on the Constraints Plan in Section 15.

8.2.2 On the southern edge, the Showground borders Lower Bagborough Cottages, representing another potentially sensitive boundary. However, this part of the site is flat and views are

more limited. In addition, bunding with planting on top has been installed along this boundary to limit the visual impact of the adjacent car parking area for residents.

8.2.3 The A371 runs along the eastern boundary of the site and presents the Showground’s most commonly viewed aspect. Although views into the site along this frontage are broken by trees and fencing, it is possible to see glimpsed views into the centre of the site. There are no views beyond the Showground across the site, other than distant views of Pennard Ridge which lies to the south.

8.2.4 From within the site, views out of, or across the Showground are limited by the existing buildings, trees and hedgerows. Even from the northern tip of the site, which is the highest point, there are not clear views of the southern fields predominantly used for parking. The main views within the site are along the existing internal road network and particularly north to south along Avenues A and D.

8.2.5 Turning to views of the Showground from the wider area, the 1997 Landscape Assessment identifies the Showground as being quite prominent. The exhibition halls and the surrounding hardstanding within the core area of the Showground to have the greatest landscape impact. That said, the Showground is not highly visible from the majority of viewpoints in the largely flat sounding area. The northern half of the Showground is visible from the top of Prestleigh Hill, although public viewpoints in this area, other than from the directly adjacent properties, are limited. The Showground is visible as a distant landscape feature from two hills – Pennard Ridge approximately 2.5km to the south west of the site and Lamyatt Beacon approximately 4km to the south east.

8.3 MITIGATION

8.3.1 The Showground is in a rural location, which is central to its purpose and function. As such, a key consideration will be to ensure that its visual impact on the landscape is minimised.

8.3.2 The Showground’s improvement provides the opportunity to manage and reduce the site’s visual impact through measures including:

- Retention of existing mature landscaping wherever possible and new, additional tree planting and landscaping as appropriate;

- Identification of sensitive boundaries close to adjacent residential properties, which will be subject of careful design consideration and additional landscaping;

- Maintenance of substantial open Showground areas, which will continue to be used for open showground functions and temporary structures;

- Replacement of existing less attractive buildings;

- New and improved buildings of appropriate scale and high quality design, with a suitable ‘rural’ appearance, incorporating local vernacular features; and

- Improvements to the frontage with the A371 including boundary landscaping and visually and functionally improved access arrangements.

9 ACCESSIBILITY AND CAR PARKING

9.1 INTRODUCTION

9.1.1 Due to the large number of visitors to the Showground, and its out of settlement location, issues of accessibility and car parking are clearly important in assessing proposals to increase visitation.

9.1.2 In recognition of this, an Accessibility and Car Parking Assessment has been prepared by transport consultants Mayer Brown Ltd. The assessment considers the existing and future accessibility and parking arrangements for the site and identifies further information which should be provided in support of planning applications for the Showground’s improvement. The assessment was prepared in April 2010 and is attached at Appendix 5.

9.2 ACCESSIBILITY OF THE SHOWGROUND

9.2.1 The Showground’s location and function mean that for the majority of visitors walking and cycling would not be a viable option, although cycling is possible from Evercreech and Shepton Mallet.

9.2.2 There is bus service that runs along the A371 past the site linking Shepton Mallet with Yeovil via Castle Cary train station. This is a ‘hail and ride’ service in the vicinity of the site and the frequency of buses is fairly low at around one per hour.

9.2.3 The assessment identifies that there is clear potential to improve the accessibility of the Showground through a number of measures including:

- The provision of new pedestrian access points;
- Improved bus stop arrangement/services.
- A potential shuttle bus service to Castle Cary rail station during major shows and events, and
- Improved, dedicated coach parking.

9.3 Specific measures to improve accessibility will be identified in a Transport Assessment and a Travel Plan in support of planning applications in due course.

9. ACCESSIBILITY AND CAR PARKING

9.4 SITE ACCESSES

9.4.1 The assessment identifies that there are some deficiencies in relation to the existing access arrangements. The proposals for the Showground’s improvement will include physical improvement to the access arrangements including a roundabout on the A371 to upgrade the existing main access. Details of the proposed new site access arrangements will be prepared in conjunction with the detailed Showground improvement proposals. It is intended that the access alterations will improve capacity of the site and will also deliver highway safety benefits by providing adequate visibility and calming traffic passing the site.

9.5 INTERNAL CIRCULATION & PARKING

9.6 Proposals for the Showground improvements will require alterations to the internal circulation of the site and some alteration to the existing car parking strategy. The proposals should seek to ensure that there is separation of event traffic and that related to permanent uses on the site. They should consider issues of pedestrian and cycle permeability, vehicular circulation and segregation, possible internal visitor transit and car parking arrangements during shows and events. These issues would be addressed by an Access & Movement Strategy and a Car Park Management Plan to be submitted in support of detailed planning proposals.

10. FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

10 FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

10.1 INTRODUCTION

10.1.1 The Environment Agency (EA) normally requires that a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) is produced if a proposed development site has an operational development greater than 1ha. Having regard to this requirement, an up to date FRA has been prepared for the Showground by EWE Associates Ltd.

10.1.2 This has been used by Rodgers Leask Ltd to prepare a Report on Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy, which has in turn been used to inform the Planning Framework and emerging improvement proposals. It identifies the flooding and drainage issues that should be considered in developing improvement proposals for the site. The FRA is attached at Appendix 6 and the Report on Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy is attached at Appendix 7.

10.2 BASELINE CONDITIONS

10.2.1 The site lies wholly within Zone 1 of the EA Flood Map (version 2.8.2), where there is a risk of 1 in 1,000 year (0.1% AEP) or less for river flooding. The general flood risk in this area is considered to be of a low probability. Consequently, there are no records of past flooding within the area of the Showground.

10.3 FLOOD RISK AND MITIGATION

10.3.1 There are two potential sources of flood risk affecting the Showground. These comprise overflow from the local watercourse and surface water run-off.

10.3.2 The FRA tested the site for flooding during a 1 in 100 year storm event plus 20% for climate change. This has identified potential for flooding of a limited area of land in the vicinity of the watercourse during extreme events. The land affected is marked as the Flood Risk Area on the Constraints Plan in Section 15.

10.3.3 The small chance of flooding identified does not preclude development in the vicinity of the watercourse provided the appropriate mitigation is incorporated into proposals for the affected part of the site. However, specific assessment of flood risk mitigation will be undertaken in relation to detailed planning proposals.

10.4 SURFACE WATER DRAINAGE

10.4.1 To reduce the impact of surface water run-off from built development and in accordance with best practice and the anticipated requirements of the EA, Sustainable Drainage (SUDS) techniques will be employed. SUDS is a method of dealing with runoff from development that mimics natural drainage and uses landscape features to manage rainfall rather than gully or channel collection and pipe conveyance characteristic of conventional drainage.

10.4.2 In preparing the detailed drainage strategy for the site, an appropriate rate of discharge will be agreed with the EA.

10.4.3 The detailed Drainage Strategy will divide the Showground into a number of sub-catchments with their own drainage characteristics and, wherever possible, the whole rainfall volume for each sub-catchment will be managed within the SUDS features in the immediate locality.

10.4.4 The SUDS arrangement proposed will be considered with long term maintenance as a major design criterion. All components selected will have a long design life and the control structures will be simple and easily maintained. Any storm water storage ponds, underground storage facilities, swales and associated flow control units should be constructed at an early stage to ensure the surface water discharge from buildings and roads on the site is restricted to the existing green-field run off during the construction phase.

10.4.5 In addition, all rainfall falling on or through the proposed hard surfaces should pass through one, two or three 'treatment stages' before it reaches the receiving watercourse, in accordance with the recommendations of the SUDS Manual CIRIA C697 2007. These hard surface areas comprise:

- Building Roofs – 1 treatment stage;
- Driveways – 2 treatment stages, and
- Site Road Network / Communal Parking – 2 treatment stages.

10.4.6 This will ensure that the SUDS strategy will deliver a controlled flow of clean water to the local watercourse and that any risk of flooding is reduced to an acceptable level, with a low risk of fluvial flooding.

10.5 FOUL WATER DRAINAGE

10.5.1 The proposed foul water drainage strategy is to continue the of discharge the foul water flows via a gravity sewer system into the existing public foul water pumping station, located towards the south of the site.

10.5.2 It is anticipated that the improvement proposals may lead to an increase in the capacity requirements above those which can be readily accommodated within the existing foul water system. If this is the case, improvements to the capacity of the foul water drainage system will be made as part of the improvement proposals. Once the Masterplan and Drainage Strategy proposals have been sufficiently developed, discussions will be held with Wessex Water to determine whether any improvement works will be required to the existing public foul water pumping station and associated rising main to allow for the increased foul flows.



11. GROUND CONDITIONS AND CONTAMINATION

11 GROUND CONDITIONS AND CONTAMINATION

11.1 INTRODUCTION

11.1.1 In April 2010, Rodgers Leask Environmental prepared an Environmental Desktop Study to identify any potential for contamination or unstable ground conditions on the site. The report is attached at Appendix 8.

11.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

11.2.1 The key findings of the report can be summarised as follows:

- HISTORY - The earliest records from 1887 show the site to be occupied by fields, the existing watercourse and two quarries and associated lime kilns. Significant changes occurred between 1903 and 1931, when the largest of the quarries was backfilled, and between 1951 and 1971 when the current showground was constructed.
- RADON - The site is not within an area requiring radon protection measures as indicated by the BRE publication, Radon: 'Guidance on protective measures for new dwellings, 1999'.
- GEOLOGY - No superficial deposits are shown to be present according to on British Geological Survey mapping. The site is underlain by the Langport Member of the Blue Lias Formation and Charmouth Mudstone Formation. This typically comprises interbedded limestone and mudstone.
- MINING - The Coal Authorities Gazetteer for England and Wales indicates that the site is not in an area affected by coal mining activities. The likelihood of non-coal mineral related shallow workings being present is negligible.
- HYDROLOGY - The solid strata underlying the site have an aquifer classification of Secondary A. This is defined as being strata with permeable layers capable of supporting water supplies at a local rather than strategic scale, and in some cases forming an important source of base flow to rivers. These are generally aquifers formerly classified as minor aquifers.

11.2.2 The published geological mapping for the site indicates that no made ground or superficial deposits are recorded, though localised areas of made ground associated with the development

of the current site use and historical quarrying and quicklime production activities can be anticipated.

11.2.3 In light of the recorded geology in the area, it is anticipated that trenchfill foundations will be generally appropriate for lightly loaded buildings whilst other foundation solutions may be necessary in the infilled quarry area. In addition, the likely presence of limestone means that it is possible that the use of soakaways may be feasible for surface water drainage, although this should be investigated through trial pitting and soakaway testing.

11.2.4 It is also considered that the potential for significant contamination on the site is low. However, there could be two potential areas of contamination, being the infilled quarry and lime kilns. The infilled quarry appears to be on the very northern edge of the site, whilst evidence suggests the infilled lime kilns are located more centrally to the north east of the core showground area.

11.2.5 In order to confirm the ground conditions, and the contamination risks, it is likely that geo-environmental investigation will need to be undertaken in the future, in relation to detailed development proposals.

12. INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

12 INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

12.1 INTRODUCTION

12.1.1 An Infrastructure Services Report (April 2010) was prepared by Rodgers Leask Ltd to inform the Planning Framework. The purpose of the report was:

- To identify the infrastructure services already present on the site and to locate these so that they could be plotted on constraints plan;
- To consider the impact of the site's improvement on the maintainance of existing services to existing site users, and
- To consider the capacity of the site's infrastructure services to accommodate additional demand as a result of improvement proposals.

12.1.2 The report is attached at Appendix 9.

12.2 DETAILS OF SURVEY

12.2.1 Consultations were carried out with Bristol Water, Western Power Distribution, British Gas / National Grid, BT and Virgin Media. The presence of current services has been identified in the vicinity of the site and these are shown on the Constraints Plan in Section 15.

12.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

12.3.1 The improvement proposals are likely to increase the demand for services on the site, and if this is the case, detailed proposals will include plans to improve infrastructure capacity. Network reinforcement may be required to accommodate the improvement proposals and should be determined via consultation with the appropriate utilities companies once service loading demands for the site are known.

12.3.2 The construction impacts of the implementation of additional infrastructure will be short term in nature and will be undertaken, where possible, in line with internal road alterations.

12.3.3 In addition, improvement works could disturb existing services during the construction phase if the position of services is not carefully mapped and considered during construction works. Any diversions of existing apparatus can be minimised by careful consideration of levels during detailed design.

12.4 SITE CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE ADDITIONAL DEMAND

12.4.1 From the initial service enquiries and the established information to date, it is considered that the provision of infrastructure services will not preclude the Showground improvements, although this is subject to further communication with utilities companies. The additional services required to support improvement of the Showground should not result in any significant environmental impacts.

13. ARCHAEOLOGY

13 ARCHAEOLOGY

13.1 INTRODUCTION

13.1.1 An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment was undertaken in April 2010 to identify any existing or potential archaeological features on the Showground, which should be taken into account in developing the improvement proposals.

13.1.2 The report was prepared based on an assessment of existing archaeological databases, a review of historical and topographical records for the site and a walk-over site visit. A full copy of the report is attached at Appendix 10.

13.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

13.2.1 The Showground lies outside all specified areas of High Archaeological Potential and contains no Scheduled Ancient Monuments. There is one site recorded in the County Sites and Monuments Record on the Showground, which is a post-medieval limekiln, but there is no longer any physical evidence of this feature on the site.

13.2.2 There are a number of significant archaeological sites within 1km of the Showground. It is also noted that site lies within a landscape that has almost certainly been exploited by man since prehistory, wherein sites or findspots of the prehistoric and Romano British periods may reasonably be expected to occur. Such remains are by virtue of their nature not necessarily visible as surface features.

13.2.3 In the recent historic past, the assessment area has principally comprised arable or pasture land, and been subject in part to extensive quarrying. There is currently no visible indication of any significant archaeological structures within it.

13.2.4 Based on the evidence available, the research identifies a low potential for identifying archaeology of major significance on the site. However, whilst large areas of the site have produced no visible indication of archaeological features, it is possible that features are present which have been masked by later development or agricultural activity.

13.3 MITIGATION

13.3.1 It may be necessary to undertake additional assessment to establish the existence of archaeological features which are not visible but could be disturbed by groundworks. This could be carried out by geophysical survey utilising resistivity, magnetometry or ground-based radar as appropriate. With regard to features already identified, it is expected that sampling may adequately be undertaken by means of an archaeological watching brief during any development phases.



14. SUSTAINABILITY

14 SUSTAINABILITY

14.1 RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICY

14.1.1 As identified in Section 4, National, Regional and Local Planning Policy is supportive of proposals to deliver on-site renewable energy development subject to environmental and amenity considerations. In particular government guidance in 'Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22' provides guidance for Local Authorities and Developers to assist in the delivery of renewable energy developments.

14.1.2 The 2007 Energy White Paper entitled 'Meeting the Energy Challenge', established a Government commitment to achieving significantly increased renewable energy generation in the UK. In line with European targets, the White Paper set out a target of achieving 10% of national energy supplies from renewable sources by 2010, with the aim of increasing this target to 20% by 2020.

14.1.3 Government targets identify that Somerset should achieve an installed renewable energy generating capacity of 61 to 81 MWe by 2010, increasing to over 100 MWe by 2020. However, this target has proved challenging and in 2009 the total installed renewable electricity capacity achieved in Somerset was just 10.5 MWe (Department of Energy and Climate Change 2010).

14.2 RENEWABLE ENERGY AT THE SHOWGROUND

14.2.1 The Showground improvements provide the opportunity to consider options for on-site renewable energy sources. The Society is committed to achieving development which will positively contribute to the rural environment and economy. It is considered that appropriate renewable energy development on the site will contribute to local and national renewable energy targets and could provide an exemplar scheme within the region.

14.2.2 In assessing suitable options for the site, a range of on-site renewable energy sources have been considered, including a Combined Heat and Power unit, wind turbines and photovoltaic cells. An assessment of the constraints and opportunities of the site in relation to the requirements of energy generation has identified that photovoltaic energy generation seems to be the best option. This is on the basis that:

- There is a significant area of largely flat land to the south

and west of the site, which has been identified by experts in the field as suitable for free-standing photovoltaic cell facility;

- This area of land is not within a protected landscape, would have limited visual impact and could be subject to additional screening/mitigation;
- A photovoltaic facility, would be the least intrusive form of producing renewable energy available on the site and would not have implications in terms of substantial additional noise or traffic related to its function, and
- The cells would be mounted on frames, but would be maintained as grass beneath, which means that the land can still be used for sheep grazing and natural drainage.

14.2.3 Feasibility work has been undertaken and this demonstrates that the site has favourable climatic conditions and suitable land areas to accommodate a 5MWe facility. This level of energy generation would be enough to power the entire Showground after improvements are completed. It may also be possible to provide energy to local residents nearby and to sell excess energy back to the grid. The Solar Photovoltaic Feasibility Brief for the Royal Bath and West Showground prepared by Eco First is attached at Appendix.

14.2.4 Whilst photovoltaic facilities of this size are common on the continent, this would be the first of its kind in the UK and, as such, it would be a nationally important scheme. In addition to the energy generation benefits, it is envisaged that proposals could include an educational visitor centre, supporting the Showground's established role as a visitor destination.

14.3 SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

14.3.1 In addition to the on-site renewable energy proposed, the improvements at the Showground will include a range of sustainability measures aimed at reducing the environmental impact of the Showground and improving the overall quality of the environment. This will not only limit the impacts of the proposed improvements, but will improve the sustainability credentials of the Showground as a whole.

14.3.2 Sustainability measures may include:

- The use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems where any additional buildings or hardstanding are proposed;
- Improvements to landscaping, including new areas of planting of aesthetic and ecological benefit, and
- Accessibility improvements with improved bus and coach facilities.



15 THE MASTERPLAN

15.1 OBJECTIVES

15.1.1 This section sets out an informed but indicative Masterplan for the Showground's improvement and enhancement. As well as securing viability, the following improvement objectives have been identified to guide the proposals:

- Improving the core Showground facilities in terms of the quality of buildings, infrastructure and landscaping;
- Improving the character and appearance of the Showground and minimising its impact on the landscape;
- Increasing the Showground's range of facilities as a year-round tourism destination and a valued rural innovation resource;
- Enabling permanent site uses, which will support improvements in public transport serving the site on a daily basis, and
- Delivering on-site renewable energy which can provide a significant contribution to the site's energy use.

15.1.2 The indicative Masterplan focuses on the principles of use, layout and scale with some consideration of design principles. All aspects of design will be formalised at the planning application stage, once occupier requirements are established. This should be informed by pre-application consultation with the Council.

15.2 SUMMARY OF CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

15.2.1 In order to demonstrate a deliverable and sustainable approach to masterplanning an assessment of the site's constraints and opportunities has been undertaken. The Constraints Plan below identifies key features which should guide development proposals including:

- Trees and landscaping;
- The ponds, lake and watercourse;
- The Flood Risk Area;
- Sensitive boundaries (adjacent to or overlooked by residential properties);

- Existing infrastructure services and rights of way, and
- Existing site accesses and buildings;

15.2.2 Initial investigations have found that none of these 'constraints' are prohibitive to appropriately sited and designed improvements. Moreover, many of the 'constraint' features identified also offer significant opportunities, which should inform the improvement proposals:

- The existing mature trees and hedgerows offer substantial, structural landscaping features, which minimise the visual impact of the Showground. The existing trees and hedgerows should be retained wherever possible and reinforced where appropriate.
- The existing watercourse, lake and ponds provide the opportunity to be incorporated into a SUDS drainage strategy as well as providing ecological and aesthetic benefits.
- The existing accesses to the site are substandard in highway design terms. Improvements to the Showground provide the opportunity to upgrade site access, which will improve highways safety on the A371. It may also provide the opportunity to upgrade public transport facilities serving the site and wider area.
- The scale, character and orientation of land to the south of the site, provides significant potential to generate renewable electricity from on-site solar photovoltaics. This could have benefits in terms of improving the site's viability by reducing energy costs, as well as providing an exemplar scheme and learning facility.

15.3 THE CONCEPT PROPOSALS

15.3.1 Indicative proposals for the Showground improvements have been drafted having regard to the identified opportunities and constraints and relevant planning policies. In addition, to ensure that the proposals will be deliverable and viable, the indicative plans are based on discussions with existing site users, research undertaken by Roger Tym Associates and advice from the Society's Agents.

15.3.2 The Masterplan vision is to create a vibrant and high quality environment, which not only complements the aims of the

15. THE MASTERPLAN

Society, but adds to the visitors' perception and enjoyment of the site. The guiding principle is to provide development that will minimise the overall impact on the site, whilst allowing the Showground to develop in a sustainable, organic fashion, seamlessly combining the new with the established.

15.3.3 To this end, the majority of the existing road pattern, structural landscaping, trees and hedgerows will be retained and incorporated into the proposals as far as possible. Using these features as cues in the development of the improvement plans will aid the integration of the proposals with the existing site.

15.3.4 As well as the use of these existing features, the layout concept has focused on making the best use of the various opportunities and challenges offered by the site and these too have been carefully considered. Where possible opportunities have been exploited and incorporated, constraints addressed and potential impact minimised.

15.3.5 To enable the Masterplan to develop in a structured way, the site has been conceived as a series of zones, each with a defined function. This is illustrated in the Zone Layout Plan. The Indicative Masterplan goes on to define the way in which each zone might be developed including an indication of the building typographies, forms and functions to be found there.

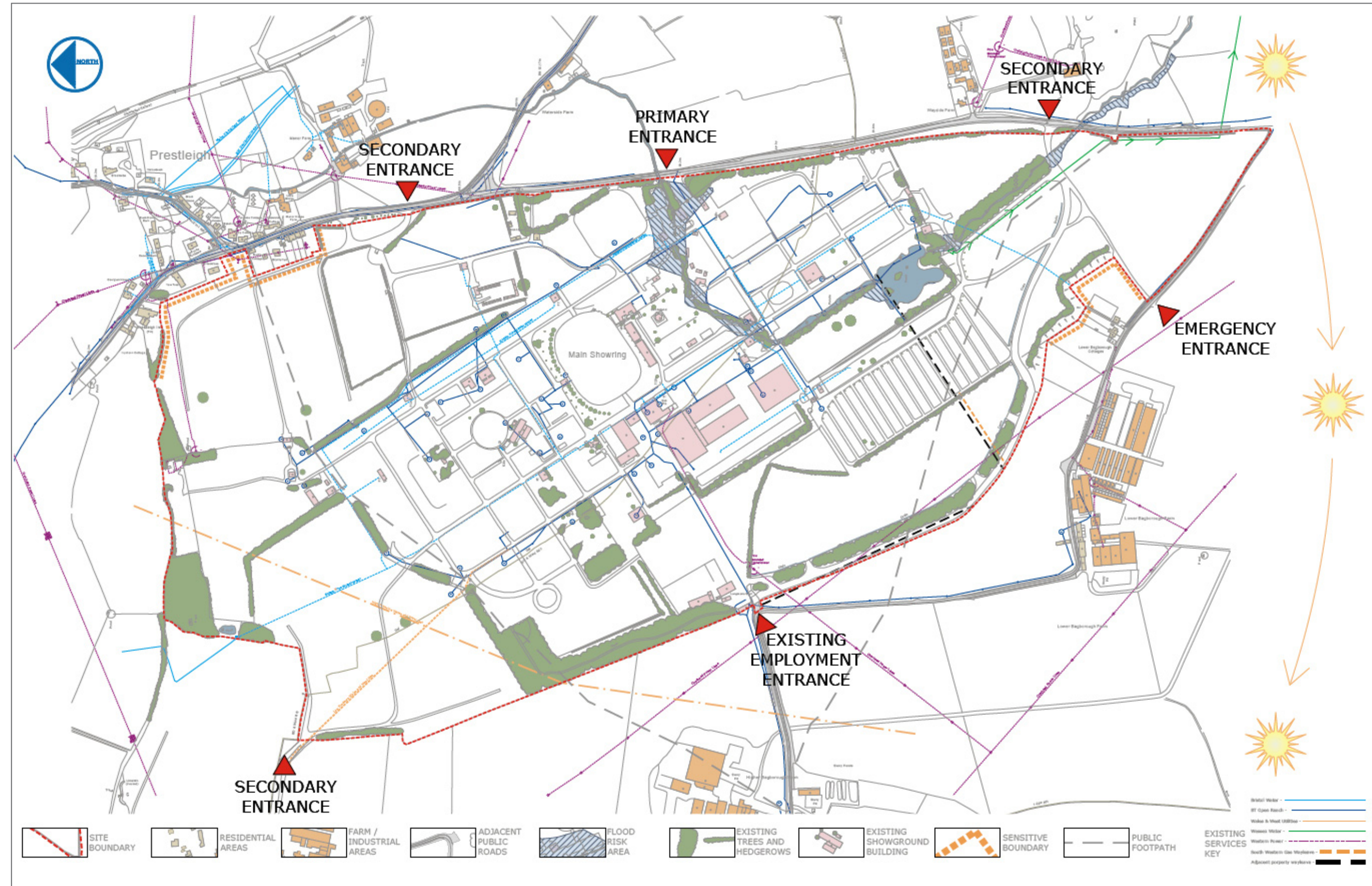
Rural & Countryside Leisure Zone

15.3.6 This part of the Showground includes land already dedicated to various outdoor pursuits. The western part is visually sensitive due to its location on the ridge and proximity to Prestleigh. The zone currently houses an 'Xtreme' 4x4 track and a specialist disabled games area. It is intended that these uses are retained and the area may be further developed to include other appropriate open leisure pursuits, subject to detailed planning considerations.

Potential Future Opportunity Zone

15.3.7 This area is used primarily for parking and/or camping during the various events which are staged at the Showground. It is intended that this use will continue for the foreseeable future. However, this part of the Showground could have potential to accommodate additional showground development in the longer term future.

15. THE MASTERPLAN



CONSTRAINTS PLAN

15. THE MASTERPLAN

Rural Economy Business Zone

- 15.3.8 This zone comprises a consolidated and expanded range of permanent employment/commercial premises to accommodate occupiers related to the Showground and/or rural economy who will benefit from the Showground location. The Indicative Masterplan proposes a range of units over an area of 8 hectares which can be delivered as either one or two storey buildings ranging from 325 sq m to 2,325 sq m (3,500 sq ft to 25,000 sq ft). This will allow flexibility to respond to market demand.
- 15.3.9 At the southern end of this zone, adjacent to the main entrance to the site, it is proposed to locate one of two new hotel developments intended to frame a new main entrance roundabout and roadway into the site.
- 15.3.10 A 4* quality hotel is proposed, possibly with a spa facility, which could provide accommodation for business and tourist clients throughout the year. A 'feature lake' is proposed doubling as an attenuation pond for this part of the site.

Regeneration & Improvement Zone

- 15.3.11 This is the established core of the Showground. The majority of development proposed in this zone will relate to the improvement and upgrading of existing facilities, such as the exhibition halls and other buildings, in conjunction with (and funded by) the wider development of the site.
- 15.3.12 The principal 'new' development on this part of the site will be the Exhibition & Conference Centre approximately 9,290 sq m (100,000 sq ft) in size, designed to improve and complement the existing showground facilities. It will incorporate exhibition space capable of flexible subdivision for various sized events.

Visitor Destination Zone

- 15.3.13 It is proposed to utilise currently underused land within the south east of the site to provide a permanent Visitor Destination Showground element based on specialist retail of local and rural products. The visitor destination will provide a permanent flavour of the products and visitor experience at the annual Royal Bath and West Show, which will provide important funding to support the Show as well as increasing the Show's public profile.

- 15.3.14 This zone will consist of relatively small retail units arranged as a human scale 'village' consisting of a 'street' of retail units with

public spaces at either end.

- 15.3.15 The retail units can provide outlets for local produce and trades, with potential for linking up with businesses based in the 'Rural Economy Business Zone'. Some products may be produced on site. The products sold could include:

- Specialty foodstuffs;
- Local food and drink produce/Farm shop;
- Cycling and outdoor activity equipment;
- Wools, textiles and clothing;
- Local crafts, and
- Restaurants, café-bars and tea rooms.

- 15.3.16 At the centre of the village is the 'Market Square'. This is intended to be the focal point of continual and varied activity for the zone. Within this multi-functional space, regular farmer's markets (as indicated) and other outdoor retail events can alternate with small scale cultural activities.

- 15.3.17 It also includes a 'station' for the nearby model railway, with the adjacent new footbridge providing a pedestrian link to the multi-use activity space to the west of the existing watercourse.

- 15.3.18 To the south of the zone, a garden/horticultural centre is proposed, providing up to 6,000sq m of specialist retail floor space for the sale and supply of plants and garden equipment. This unit will provide a focal point at the southern end of the site and will have its own access, parking and external display space. This larger unit is considered an important element of the zone to 'anchor' the retail village and ensure a critical mass of visitors necessary to support the uses proposed.

- 15.3.19 To the northern end of the Zone it is proposed to locate a budget hotel to provide onsite visitor accommodation and complement the 4* hotel adjacent. This is co-located with a family pub/restaurant and local transport drop-off point at the entrance to the Zone.

Photovoltaic & Energy Park Zone

- 15.3.20 On-site renewable energy production at the Showground offers a number of benefits and open land to the south and west has been identified as having significant potential to generate renewable electricity from on-site solar photovoltaic arrays. Accordingly, it is

proposed to use two areas of land (totalling 12 hectares) which currently comprise overflow car parking, for the installation of a photovoltaic 'farm'. These areas of the site are considered to be the most suitable for solar energy generation. They are on largely flat ground where visual impact will be limited. The photovoltaic 'farm' of the scale indicated will generate up to 5MWe of power. This would enable an opportunity to take maximum advantage of the Government backed Green Energy Cash-Back Scheme or Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) whereby the Society will be able to sell additional power back into the Grid. It would save also approximately 2360 tonnes of carbon dioxide every year.

- 15.3.21 In conjunction with the PV farm, a Renewable Energy Control, Research & Learning Centre is proposed. This could provide an interactive learning experience for visitors to the site and act as a security control point to the PV farm.

- 15.3.22 At the more exposed southern end of the site it is intended to provide a moat/ha ha to the perimeter. Together with careful planting this will provide a natural screen to the A371, enhance security, and act as a wildlife corridor.

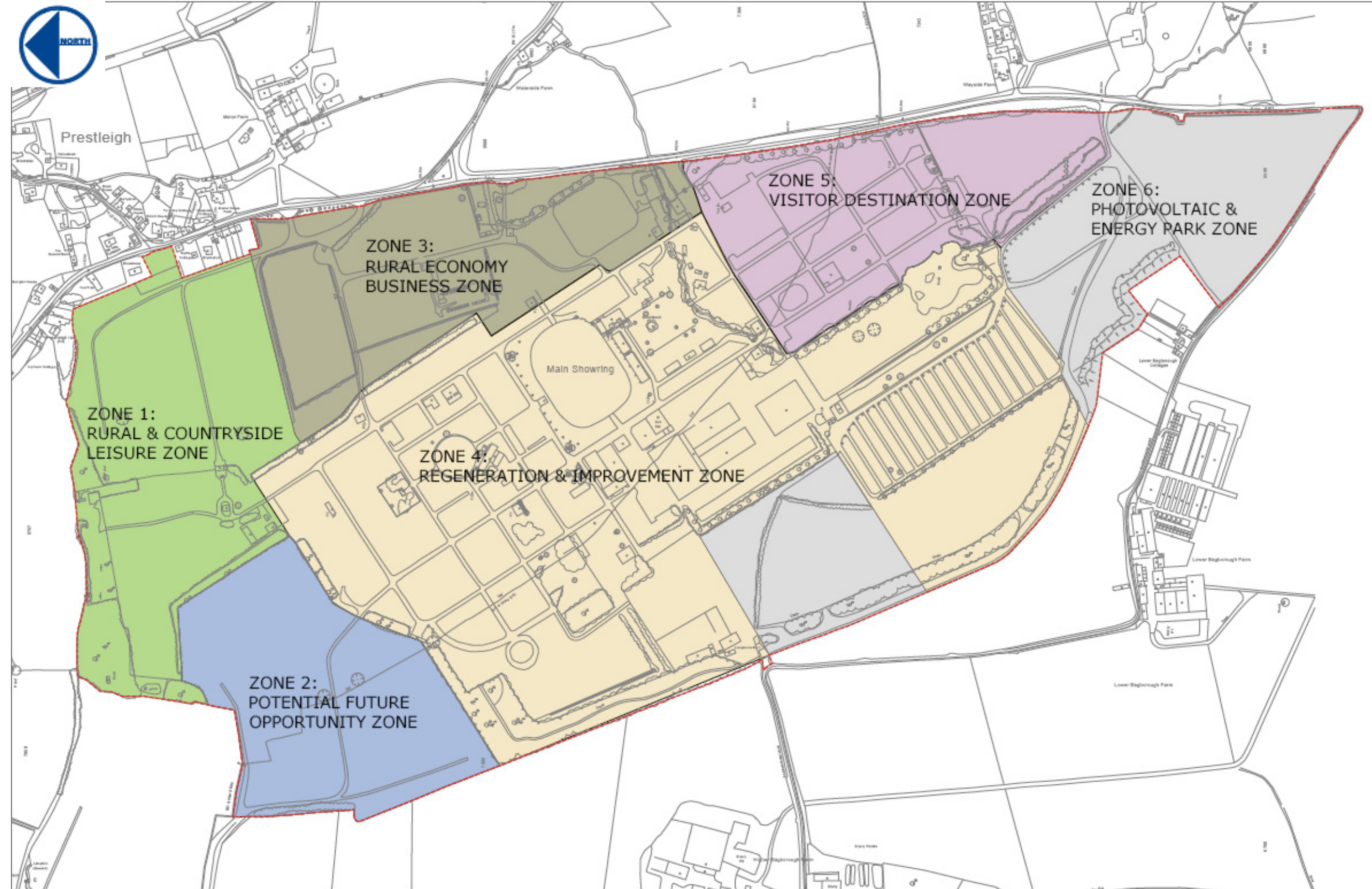
15.4 DESIGN AND BUILT FORM

- 15.4.1 Having regard to the rural setting and the scale of most buildings on the site (outside of the Showground's core), it is intended that, in terms of massing, the overriding scale of the development will be relatively low key with only a few selected buildings potentially exceeding two storeys in height, subject to detailed planning considerations.

- 15.4.2 Notable exceptions are the two hotels, which due to their larger scale and gateway location could extend to three storeys. However, it may be possible to achieve this by the use of high roof pitches giving the opportunity to incorporate a third storey, whilst externally reducing the perceived height of the building.

- 15.4.3 The Exhibition Centre will be one/two storeys, but due to its location it will be prominent within the core Showground area. The southern elevation of the building will bound the main show ring and it will offer the possibility of providing viewing facilities at first floor level and access from the ground floor to the ringside. Accordingly, it is anticipated that elements of this elevation will be two storeys, with external balcony space for corporate use.

15. THE MASTERPLAN

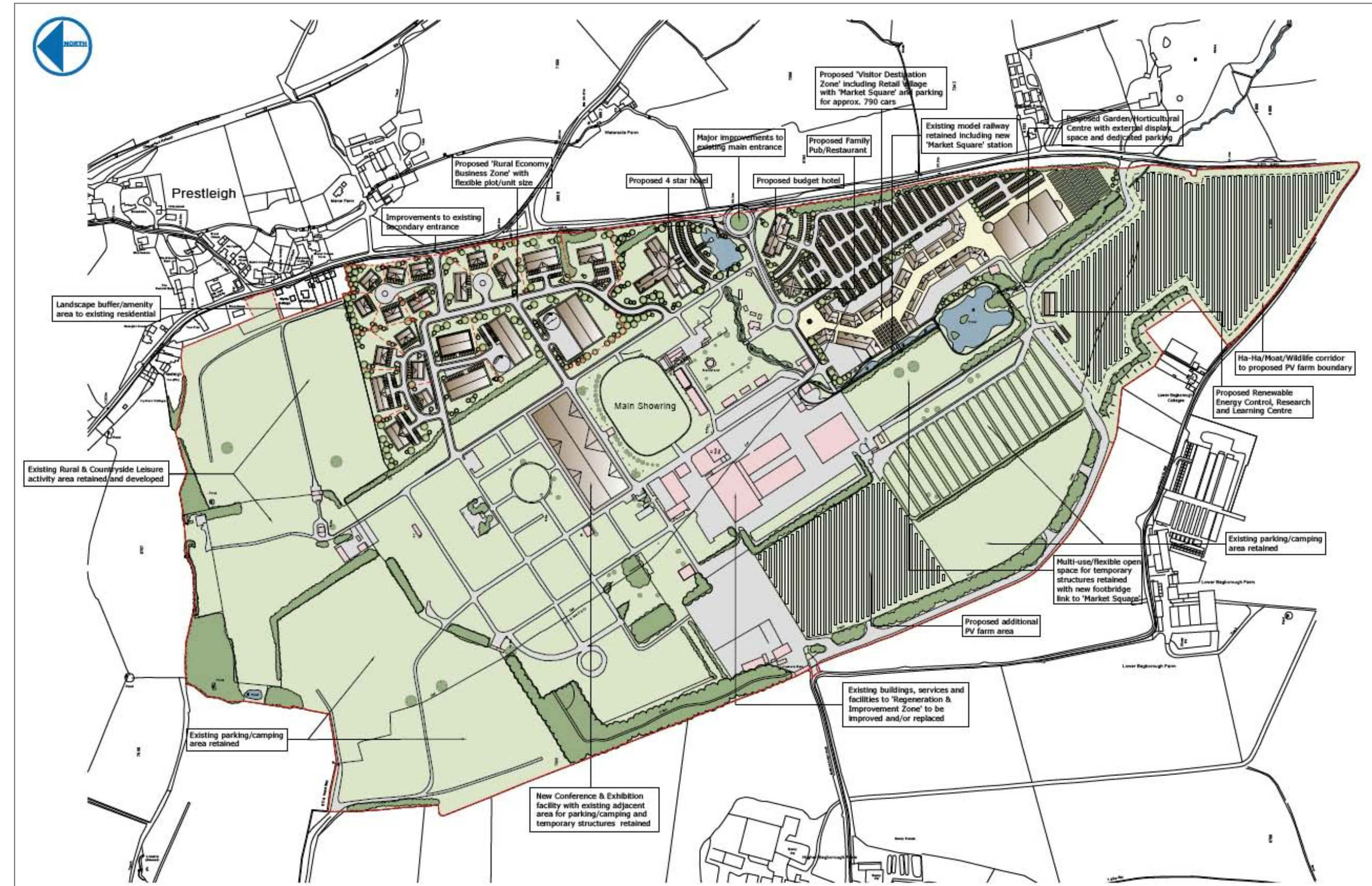


PROPOSED ZONE LAYOUT

15. THE MASTERPLAN

- 15.4.4 The Garden/Horticultural Centre is proposed at only one storey with sufficient height to incorporate mezzanine floorspace, thereby making the best use of the building. The external envelope will be carefully designed to minimise visual impact.
- 15.4.5 In terms of the retail village 'street', it is intended to take inspiration from the scale of a traditional market town/square. It is not the intention to create a historical pastiche or unconvincing urban scene within the rural setting, but a design which would positively enhance its environment. Therefore the 'street' will be flanked by predominantly timber framed and clad buildings, which, will offer an organic, unobtrusive appearance by careful use of varying heights, finishes and detailing.
- 15.4.6 Materials throughout the development are envisaged as being of a natural feel, texture and look, reflecting the rural nature of the surroundings and the sustainability aspirations of site users, combining aesthetically traditional and contemporary appearance.
- 15.4.7 Soft landscaping elements are seen as being key, with trees and shrubs being used not only to reinforce existing planting but to create views, vistas and pathways in and around the development.
- 15.4.8 Hard landscaping materials will be chosen to create a robust design to allow for a wide range of pedestrian and vehicular activities with size and texture being used to reflect the use of different areas. For example, the more intimate scale areas will be paved with smaller paving units, whilst paving in more open spaces will be upsized accordingly.
- 15.4.9 Lighting and street furniture will be carefully considered at the appropriate stage, to facilitate the function and enjoyment of the public realm whilst consisting of simple elegant items with a strong rural feel.

15. THE MASTERPLAN



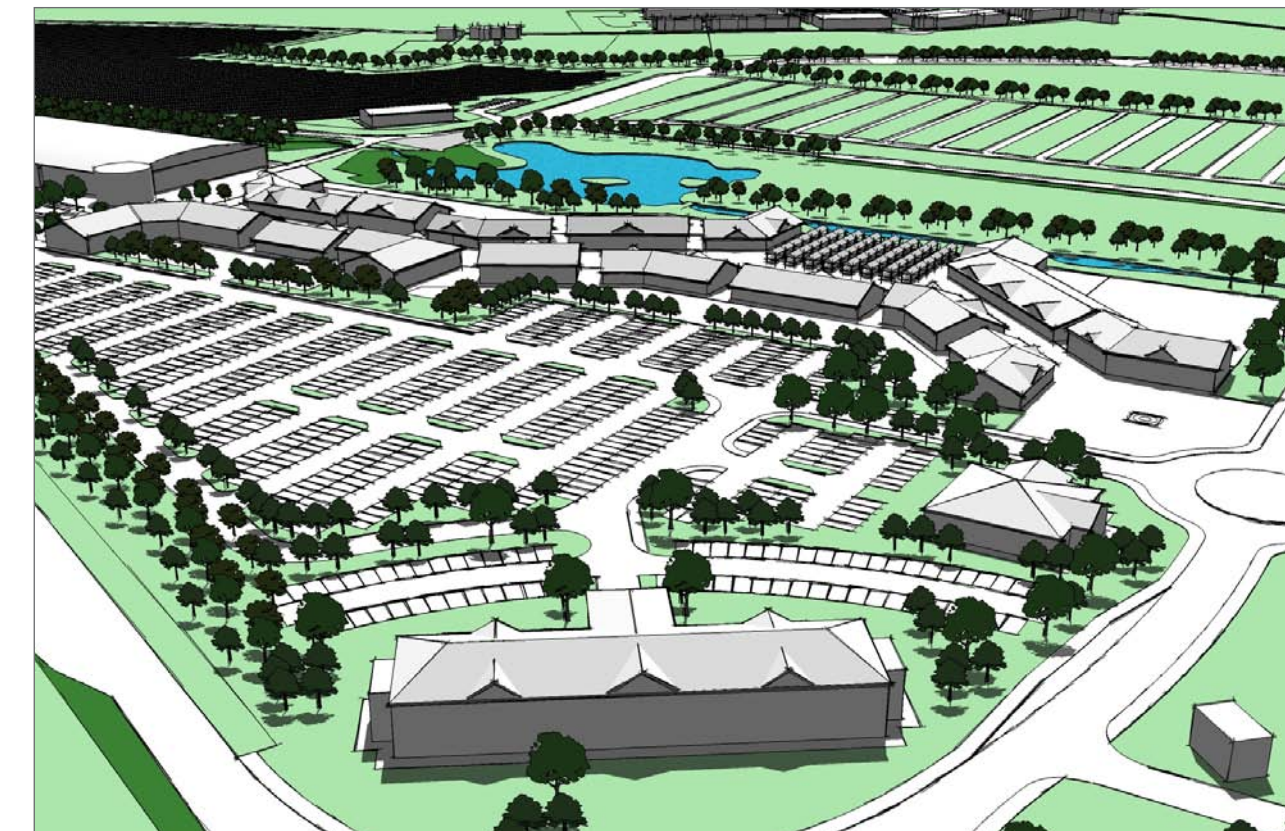
INDICATIVE MASTERPLAN LAYOUT



GENERAL VIEW FROM SOUTH



VIEW TO MAIN ENTRANCE



VIEW TO 'VISITOR DESTINATION ZONE' FROM NORTH EAST



GENERAL VIEW FROM NORTH

16. PHASING

16 PHASING

16.1 PHASING CONSIDERATIONS

16.1.1 The enhancement works at the Showground will be commenced as soon as possible to ensure the Showground's financial security. It is expected that the improvement proposals will be brought forward in market-led stages, allowing for geographically targeted development, which will limit the disturbance to the Showground's ongoing operation.

16.1.2 It is anticipated that the detailed development plans for the site will come forward, in discussion with the Council, through a number of full planning applications relating to discrete elements of the proposals. Notwithstanding this, the Planning Framework has identified that the refurbishment of the Showground has been considered strategically as a whole, in terms matters such as infrastructure requirements and environmental impact. Each planning application will therefore be considered within the context of this Planning Framework and will contribute to achieving the principles for the site approved in this Framework.

16.2 INDICATIVE TIMESCALES

16.2.1 The Showground's improvement will be market-lead and accordingly it is not currently possible to identify precisely the order in which elements of the scheme will come forward ahead of others. However, it is anticipated that the Photovoltaic and Energy Park Zone will be an early priority. The improvement of the existing facilities will be an ongoing process and upgrading/ replacement of existing buildings will inevitably be delayed until after some of the more profitable elements of the scheme have been realised.

16.2.2 It is intended that the main elements of the indicative Masterplan will be developed by 2014.

17. REFERENCES

17 REFERENCES

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