

Non-technical summary of the Interim SA Report published alongside the Draft Test Valley Local Plan 2042 (June 2025)

Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) is currently consulting on an updated spatial strategy and suite of proposed allocations following consultation on a Draft Local Plan in 2024. An Interim Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report is published alongside, with a view to informing the consultation and subsequent plan finalisation, i.e. preparation of the 'proposed submission' version of the Local Plan.

The Interim SA Report is presented in three parts:

- **Part 1** – explains work that has been undertaken to explore **reasonable alternatives (RAs)** in the form of alternative approaches to growth, or 'growth scenarios'. Specifically, work is explained to define RAs (Section 5), appraise RAs (Section 6) and then feed-back to TVBC officers in order to inform a final decision on the preferred growth scenario to take forward for consultation (Section 7).
- **Part 2** – appraises **the current preferred spatial strategy and associated site allocations**, also mindful of wider aspects of the Draft Plan previously published in 2024.
- **Part 3** – explains **next steps**, i.e. work to prepare the Proposed Submission Local Plan (in light of the current consultation) and then submit the Local Plan for an Examination in Public.

Part 1 comprises the bulk of the Interim SA Report and, in particular, the report explains an in-depth process to define RA growth scenarios (Section 5). The starting point was an understanding of the emerging preferred growth scenario, and then key questions were around:

- **Lower growth** – the emerging preferred approach involves providing for local housing need (LHN) in full, and LHN is now 78% higher than was previously understood to be the case in 2024. Providing for the new higher LHN figure is clearly highly challenging, i.e. involves accepting wide-ranging trade-offs and impacts, but it is nonetheless difficult to see a strategic case for lower growth, i.e. setting the housing requirement at a level below need such that Test Valley generates unmet need. This is essentially because Test Valley, whilst subject to wider ranging significant constraints to growth, does not stand-out as highly constrained in the sub-regional context, such that it is very difficult or impossible to envisage any of Test Valley's neighbouring local authorities being able to provide for unmet need generated by Test Valley under the Duty to Cooperate.
- **A different spatial approach** – all of the current preferred site allocations are discussed in detail in Section 5, including their in-combination impacts (positive and negative), and consideration is also given to many 'omission sites'. There are numerous aspects of the current preferred approach that will require further scrutiny following the consultation, and it is entirely possible that certain allocations will be removed and/or omission sites added and/or adjustments made to site capacities. However, the analysis in Section 5 does not serve to highlight any 'stand out' strategic choices such that, on balance, there is considered to be only one reasonable growth scenario that delivers the preferred growth quantum, namely the preferred growth scenario.
- **Higher growth** – the analysis in Section 5 reaches the conclusion that there is a high level case to be made for higher growth, with a view to: A) boosting the supply whilst retaining a housing requirement set at LHN as a contingency for unforeseen delivery issues (recognising that under-delivery risks punitive measures); and/or B) setting the housing requirement at a figure above LHN such that Test Valley makes some provision for unmet need from elsewhere recognising that unmet need is a significant issue across South Hampshire (and/or the housing requirement might be set above LHN in order to more fully provide for local affordable housing needs).

Focusing on the possibility of higher growth, the analysis in Section 5 identifies two omission sites that could potentially be allocated in order to deliver this. Both sites are associated with clear issues but, on balance, the decision is reached that the possibility of additionally allocating either one or the other of these sites (to deliver higher growth) should be appraised and consulted-on at the current time, with a view to exploring the full range of issues and impacts (positive and negative).

The conclusion of Section 5 is that there are three RA growth scenarios:

1. The emerging preferred scenario
2. Scenario (1) plus additional allocation of Southwest Andover
3. Scenario (1) plus additional allocation of Grateley Station / Palestine garden village.

Section 6 of the SA report then presents an appraisal of the three RA growth scenarios under the 'SA framework' which is essentially a series of sustainability topics / objectives (see Section 3).

The appraisal concludes as follows:

In summary, the appraisal finds all of the RA growth scenarios to be associated with pros and cons and it is for the Council to weigh these 'in the balance', trading off between competing objectives as necessary before then arriving at a conclusion regarding which of the scenarios best represents sustainable development.

Scenario 1 ranks highest across the greatest number of topics, but this should not be taken as in any way confirmation that it is best performing overall or best represents sustainable development. That is because: A) the sustainability topics are not assumed to have equal weight; and B) there is also a need to factor-in the significance of predicted effects. Furthermore, numerous of the topic-specific appraisal conclusions are themselves reached on balance and are open for discussion through the current consultation. As part of this, there is a need to acknowledge the inherent challenge of factoring-in the benefits of higher growth in terms of reducing pressure on a constrained sub-region.

Elaborating on Scenario 1, the key point to note is that, whilst it is predicted to perform well relative to Scenarios 2 and 3 under several headings, and most notably under the "accessibility" topic heading (which deals with access to community infrastructure, e.g. schools with capacity), it is predicted to perform least well under the 'Homes' topic heading (but still fairly well in absolute terms).

Elaborating on the final point, the issue is that, whilst higher growth to accommodate unmet need in Test Valley would lead to negative environmental and socio-economic impacts locally, it could also serve to reduce the pressure to accept negative impacts across the wider sub-region. For example, Winchester and East Hampshire Districts are under pressure to accept unmet need, and New Forest District is under pressure to provide for LHN in full despite this being clearly highly challenging given major constraints (and noting that LHN is now 106% higher than it was a year ago). SA must attempt to weigh up positive and negative impacts across the sub-region but doing so is highly challenging.

Finally, with regards to Part 2 of the Interim SA Report, this essentially elaborates on the appraisal of Growth Scenario 1 presented in Section 6, recognising that the appraisal in Section 6 is mainly focused on the *relative* merits of Growth Scenario 1 in comparison to the two higher growth scenarios.

The appraisal concludes as follows:

The appraisal does not predict any significant positive effects but predicts a **moderate or uncertain positive effect** under three headings (accessibility, homes and economy). It then predicts a **moderate or uncertain negative effect** under six headings (biodiversity, climate change mitigation, landscape, soils/resources, transport and water). No significant negative effects are predicted.