West of England Landscape Sensitivity Summary Methodology Note

Joint Spatial Plan Issues & Options

1 Introduction

1.1 To support the Issues and Options process for the Joint Spatial Plan the West of England Authorities will be drawing on their existing Landscape Character Appraisals to undertake an assessment of the landscape sensitivity and suitability of currently undeveloped or rural areas to absorb future development.

1.2 This approach is in line with National Planning policy (NPPF, para 170) which states that:

   “landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.”

1.3 The high level landscape sensitivity assessment will allow land within the West of England area to be compared against a consistent baseline and methodology.

2 Methodology in Brief

2.1 The methodology that will be used will be based on best practice guidance and national guidance on the preparation of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments from the Landscape Institute.

2.2 For each Landscape Character Area within the West of England (as identified in the Authorities’ Landscape Character Appraisals) the key characteristics of the landscape will be outlined.

2.3 A template will be used to record observations and analysis based on a predominantly desktop study considering the potential for housing-led development.

2.4 Each area will be rated based on this assessment, using a five point scale indicating areas of greatest sensitivity and areas where development would cause least harm. These areas will be mapped following this appraisal system.

3 Landscape Designations & Policy

3.1 It should be noted that parts of the West of England area are covered by two nationally designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Mendip Hills to the south west and Cotswolds to the east) – as illustrated in Figure 1.

3.2 In addition, the City of Bath is an internationally designated World Heritage site and its green and undeveloped landscape setting is critical to its significance as a heritage asset – the indicative extent of the WHS setting is illustrated in Figure 2.

3.3 At a local scale, there are a range of distinct landscape areas and valued landscapes which contribute to the special character and quality of life in the of the West of England area. National Planning Policy states that valued landscapes should be protected and enhanced, in line with their status, and accordingly nationally and internationally designated landscapes have the highest level of protection. Where a proposed

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1 The existing Landscape Character Appraisals for Bath & North East Somerset; North Somerset & South Gloucestershire can be found on each of the Authorities websites.
development would have a detrimental impact the landscape, the extent to which this effect can be moderated with mitigation strategies must also be considered.

**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

*Figure 1: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Mendip Hills to the south west and Cotswolds to the east)*

*Figure 2: Indicative Extent of World Heritage Site Setting for the City of Bath*