

## **KEY TRENDS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

2.1 The future of Somerset and Exmoor is of concern to all who live and work in the area. Throughout the development process of the Joint Structure Plan Review, which started in 1993, a number of recurring issues have been identified. These issues have had an influence on the vision for the plan area and how that vision is translated into a strategy, for the future land use of both Somerset and the Exmoor National Park. This chapter outlines some of the key influences and their relationship with the need to move towards the more sustainable use of resources.

### **SOMERSET AND EXMOOR TODAY**

2.2 Somerset has strong relationships with adjoining areas, which exert an influence on the changes taking place in the county. The county is well placed, geographically, to serve the rest of the South West for a range of functions. Its two largest towns, Taunton and Yeovil are recognised as performing a sub-regional role in the provision of particular facilities and services to their surrounding hinterlands. A significant proportion of Somerset's working population are employed outside the county. There is a significant outflow on the northern fringes, where employment opportunities in Bristol and Bath and adjoining areas are a strong attraction. This is partially offset in the south-eastern part of Somerset where Yeovil acts as an employment focus whose influence extends into northern and western parts of Dorset.

2.3 Exmoor was designated a National Park in 1954 and covers 693 sq km of the western part of the plan area. 71% of the National Park is located within the county of Somerset and the remaining 29% is in Devon. It includes some of the most beautiful and varied landscape in England and Wales. Since April 1997, strategic planning within the National Park has been the responsibility of the Exmoor National Park Authority. It is primarily an upland area with a dispersed population living mainly in small villages and hamlets. The three largest settlements are Lynton & Lynmouth, Porlock and Dulverton, which together contain almost 40% of the National Park population.

2.4 The environment of the plan area is a major asset, locally, regionally and nationally. It is an attractive tourist destination with about 2.5 million staying visitors each year. The economy has been relatively successful over a long period with substantial growth in employment and business formation and relatively low levels of unemployment. The population has continued to increase due to a combination of growth in the indigenous population and people who are attracted to the area, primarily for economic reasons, but also a significant minority come to retire due to the attractive environment.

## **THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **Countryside**

2.5 The area covered by the Joint Structure Plan is predominantly rural. It has a countryside comprised of primarily pastoral farmland, set within a wide range of different landscapes. Outstanding landscape areas include, the uplands of Exmoor, and the Brendons, Quantocks, Mendip and Blackdown Hills. In dramatic contrast to these upland areas are the extensive, flat and low lying Levels and Moors which lie at the heart of Somerset. The remainder of the area is characterised by more rolling countryside fringing the uplands, or by lower ridges such as the Polden Hills and the Fivehead Ridge which interrupt the broad expanses of the Levels and Moors. The character of the coast varies from broad flats around Bridgwater Bay to the steep cliffs of Exmoor. These various features, in combination with woods, hedgerows, and, water courses, make up a rural landscape which is not only attractive but also one of the least spoilt in England.

2.6 This landscape contains a wide variety of wildlife habitats and important geological features. Some of these habitats are of international importance such as parts of the Levels and Moors and Bridgwater Bay. There are over 120 nationally important sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves and many County Wildlife Sites. Substantial parts of the plan area are designated as Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA), the three largest being; Exmoor, the Blackdowns and the Somerset Levels & Moors. Traditional farming practices are encouraged in the interests of wildlife conservation in these designated areas.

2.7 The physical environment of the area has experienced, and continues to be subject to change, much of which is gradual and takes place over a long timescale. This has happened throughout history and the landscape reflects the impact of economic, social and other influences upon it. Surveys of the landscape show a changing environment. An example is that 11% of field boundaries, mainly hedges, but also dry-stone walls, have been removed over the last two decades. Other significant changes include continuing loss of orchards, removal of ponds and some woodland loss, though this is now less significant. The effects of these changes were exacerbated by the loss of tree cover to Dutch Elm disease in the 1970's. The designation of a number of sites has been important in conserving particular species and habitats. However, there have been losses of important habitats; particularly unimproved grassland, ponds and heathland. This in turn has led to a reduction in a number of species, which were once regarded as common throughout the plan area.

### **Towns and Villages**

2.8 With the exception of the more remote parts of Exmoor, the plan area has experienced the development of a remarkably uniform pattern of small market towns serving a countywide agricultural hinterland. This even pattern was not significantly distorted by developments after the industrial revolution. Towns that have grown because of the development of new types of industrial activities, are evenly spread across this basic pattern. The development of these settlements, over a long period, has left the area with a legacy of many attractive features. Within Somerset alone, there are 192 Conservation Areas, 12,700 listed buildings and over 600 Scheduled Monuments. As well as these designated features, there are many attractive and locally important man made features that contribute to the high quality of the environment. In combination with the natural features they create an attractive landscape which is an important asset to residents and visitors alike.

### **THE SOMERSET AND EXMOOR ECONOMIES**

2.9 The economy of Somerset and Exmoor has performed well in recent years, in relation to the regional and the national economies. However, it should not be seen in isolation since it is an integral part of each of these. It is influenced, both directly and indirectly, by a range of wider economic factors which operate at national and regional levels. In general terms, the performance of the economy of the area tends to replicate that of the South West region and the UK but, there are variations, due to local characteristics, such as the National Park. It has tended to follow the cycle of growth and recession that has occurred in the national economy over the last three decades.

2.10 Important economic relationships exist between many neighbouring settlements and areas, and these often cross administrative boundaries. Frome, for example, is closely linked with Bath and the West Wiltshire towns of Warminster, Westbury and Trowbridge. In addition to these settlement links, there is also a significant level of commuting that takes place into, and out of, the Joint Structure Plan area and neighbouring areas. It is estimated that about 10% of the Somerset workforce travel to places of work outside the county whilst 7% of those working within it, commuted in from adjoining local authority areas.

### **Nature of the Local Economy**

2.11 A principle feature of the economy is that it is essentially a small business economy. This is illustrated by the following facts;

- only 0.5% of the estimated 29,300 businesses in Somerset and Exmoor employ more than 100 people;
- self-employment, as a proportion of total employment, is significantly higher in the county at about 19% when compared to the regional (17%) and national (13%) proportions;
- the ratio of small firms (annual turnover less than £250,000) to large firms was 4:1 in the plan area compared to 3:1 nationally.

### **Composition of Industry**

2.12 Despite the predominantly rural character of the plan area, with 80% of the land used for agricultural purposes, there exists a wide range of industrial activities within it. In addition to the agricultural and tourism industries traditionally associated with the area, it also has a significant manufacturing base particularly in the agro-food and engineering sectors. Many parts of the local economy have been, or still are, experiencing structural changes especially the agriculture, defence and tourism industries. Some of the settlements in the area are particularly dependant on one employer or type of employment. This dependence makes them vulnerable to the impact of structural change. The ability of local businesses to adapt to the new, evolving markets will affect the performance of the economy both now and in the future. Government guidance suggests that the development plan should encourage diversification of economic activities in such circumstances.

### **Economic Performance**

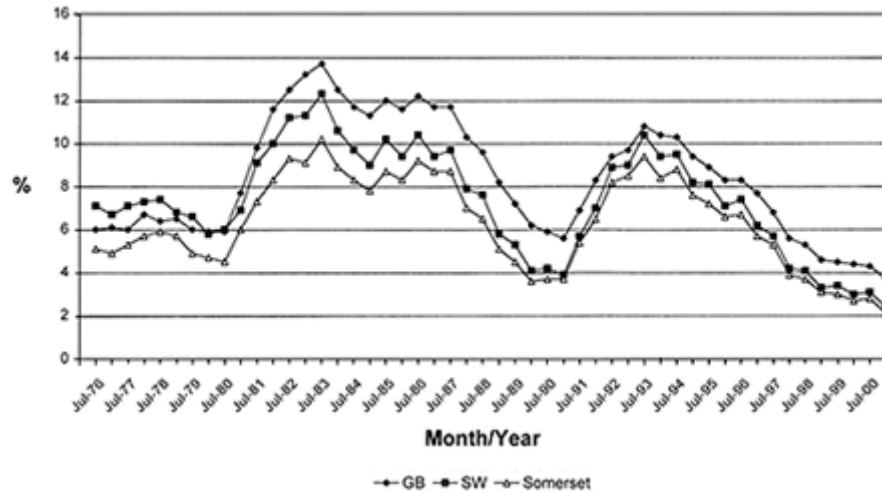
2.13 The positive performance of the local economy in recent years is confirmed by analysis of statistical data dating back to the 1970's covering three key indicators:

- number of businesses;
- unemployment rates; and
- employment change.

2.14 The net number of businesses registered for VAT in the County of Somerset, increased by 23.8% from 1979, to a total of 16,480 by 1999. This was a faster rate of growth than that which occurred in the South West or the UK. The number of VAT registered businesses is estimated to represent around 56% of the 29,300 businesses in Somerset in 1999. The structure of the economy has changed over time following the general trends experienced in the national economy. In terms of types of business, this has resulted in a decline in the number of agricultural and retail firms between 1979 and 1999, although the former are still over-represented in comparison to the national business structure. At the same time, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of financial, business, professional and miscellaneous service firms in the Somerset economy but, these are still under-represented compared to the national structure.

2.15 Unemployment rates for the administrative County of Somerset have fluctuated over the past 20 years and mirrored the changes that have occurred at national and regional level. A significant feature of the unemployment rates since 1976 has been that the Somerset rate has consistently been lower than either of these (see below)

**Figure 2.1 Unemployment Rates 1976 - 2000**

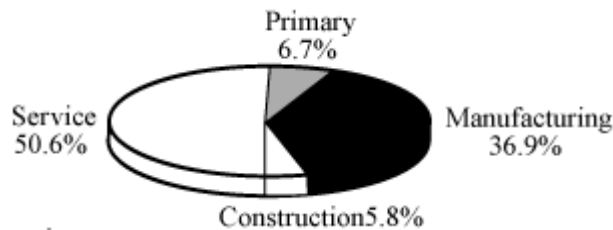


There are local variations in unemployment rates, especially for the coastal settlements of Burnham & Highbridge and Minehead, where the seasonal influence of the tourism industry leads to significant fluctuations during each year. Unemployment within the National Park has been higher than that for Somerset and it is subject to seasonal variations. This is primarily due to the fact that it is heavily dependent on the agricultural and tourism industries whose employment requirements are directly influenced by the seasons.

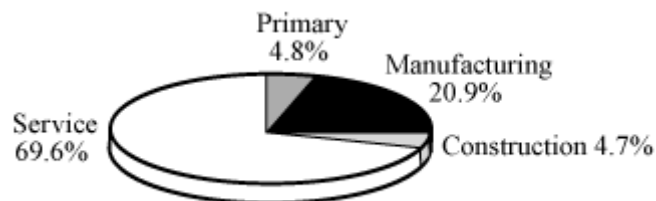
2.16 Employment within the County of Somerset has increased by 34.6% during the period 1971 - 1998, similar to that of the South West region over the same time scale. A significant contributor to the growth in overall employment levels has been the rise in the number and proportion of people who are self-employed, which increased substantially during the 1980's. It is estimated that by 1998 those who were self-employed accounted for approximately 19% of total employment.

2.17 The share of employment provided by the manufacturing sector in Somerset alone has declined during this period, following the national trend, but at a slower rate; by 1998 it represented 21.7% of employee employment (see figures 2:2 and 2:3). This has resulted in Somerset having a significantly greater level of dependency on this sector than regionally (16.9%) and nationally (17.5%). In South Somerset, manufacturing accounted for around

**Figure 2.2 - Employee Employment in Somerset 1971 Total: 137,800**



**Figure 2.3 - Employee Employment in Somerset 1998 Total: 180,600**



28.5% of employment in 1997. Employee employment in the service sector has increased by over 79.5%, during this same period, accounting for 125,300 jobs by 1998 with an increasing proportion being part-time in nature. Most part time jobs are occupied by women, but the number of men in part time employment is increasing. The service sector provided almost 72% of all employee employment in the county in 1998 but this share was significantly lower than it's regional and national equivalents of around 77% and 76% respectively. The growth in service sector employment has compensated for some of the jobs lost in the manufacturing and other sectors during this timescale and contributed to the overall increase in the level of employment. The local economies of West Somerset and Taunton Deane have become increasingly dependant on service sector industries to provide local employment opportunities.

2.18 Parts of West Somerset and the whole of the National Park have benefited from access to European Structural Funding through Objective 5b (now Objective 2) designation since 1994. The designation is a recognition of the remoteness of the area, rural nature and peripheral location in respect of access to U.K and European markets. This has helped to finance local employment and community initiatives that would otherwise not have been considered viable by commercial funding institutions.

### **Settlement Pattern and its Influence**

2.19 The Joint Structure Plan area is comprised of numerous small and medium sized settlements which are relatively evenly distributed throughout most of the area although they are a little more dispersed within the National Park as a consequence of the physical nature of the landscape. The two largest towns, Taunton and Yeovil act as important sub-regional centres and their individual influence extends beyond the county boundaries. A further thirteen settlements are also identified as Towns in the Joint Structure Plan and these perform important functions at a more localised level. The Census of Population 1991, shows that 56% of the Somerset population live in these fifteen larger settlements but they account for over two-thirds of the employment within the county. Employment increases in the past 25 years have predominantly occurred within, or on the edge of these settlements, particularly those towns that are well located in relation to the strategic communications network.

## **THE POPULATION**

### **Recent Population change in Somerset and Exmoor**

2.20 Between 1971 and 1991 the population of Great Britain increased by just 3%. Whilst the national population has been relatively static in size, there have been changes in its distribution around the country, primarily due to migration of people and/or households from one part of the country to another for economic, social and retirement reasons. Population increase through net in-migration has been a feature of recent population change in most rural counties in England, reflecting the general trend of people moving from the conurbations to smaller-sized settlements. It has mainly affected a swathe of counties around the edges of the South-East region, from East Anglia to the South West.

2.21 The number of people moving to live in the plan area has exceeded the number of people leaving the area. Between 1971 and 1991 the population of Somerset and Exmoor increased by 20%. Without these gains due to migration, the population of the plan area would have been in decline over the same timescale.

2.22 Population increases have occurred in both urban and rural areas of Somerset and Exmoor. Table 2.1 shows that during the period 1971-1991, the fifteen towns of Somerset accommodated most of the population growth. It should also be noted that the rural part of the county experienced a significant level of population increase. In both these cases this can primarily be attributed to the effects of population migration.

**Table 2.1****Urban and rural population change, 1971 - 1991****Population**

Year	Towns	Rural Remainder	Total
1971	202100	190600	392700
1991	256600	214600	471300
<b><u>% of total population</u></b>			
1971	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%
1991	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
<b><u>Change 1971 - 1991</u></b>			
No.	54500	24000	78600
%	27.0%	12.6%	20.0%

Notes

Source: OPCS population estimates, SCC

Figures may not sum due to 'rounding'

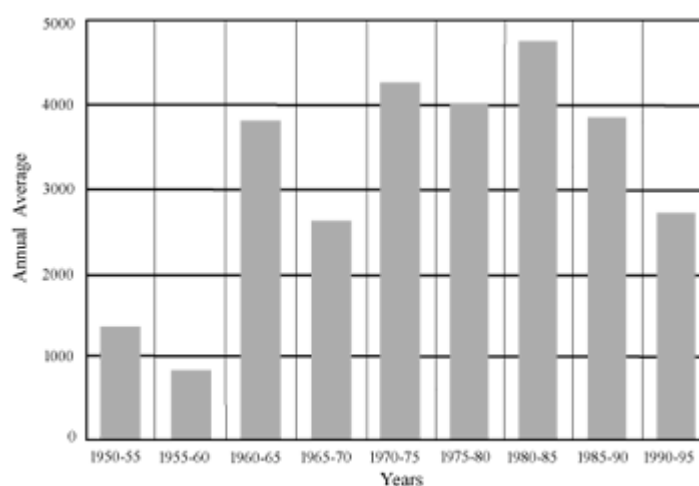
**Population Trends within Somerset and Exmoor**

2.23 Population increases have been recorded in all parts of the plan area since 1971 (see Table 2.2). The rate of population increase has been lowest in West Somerset and Exmoor. These areas have a substantially older age structure than the rest of the area covered by the Joint Structure Plan. As a result, numbers of deaths have exceeded numbers of births, which has kept down the overall rate of population increase. However, in common with other parts of the plan area, Exmoor and West Somerset have both experienced considerable levels of net in-migration during the 1971-1991 period.

**Migration**

2.24 Substantial levels of net in-migration to the area, and Somerset in particular, were first recorded in the 1960s (see Figure 2.2). Somerset has since gained population through migration from all other regions of Great Britain. This has included the rest of the South West, especially from the former Avon area and from all counties in the South East. Migration gains are in all age groups except those aged 15-19, reflecting the relative attraction, for younger people, of the larger cities for employment, higher education or other factors.

**Figure 2.4: Average Annual Net In-Migration to Somerset 1950-1995**



**Table 2.2**

**Population and Change: 1971 - 1999**

**Population change 1971 - 1999**

Year	Structure Plan Area	Somerset	Mendip	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Taunton Deane	West Somerset	Exmoor Nat. Park
1971	392700	390000	80100	81000	116400	83000	29500	10000
1981	433400	430700	89800	90000	133100	88300	29500	10000
1991	471300	468400	97800	99300	143400	95800	32100	10600
1999	N/A	493100	100400	104700	154900	100300	32700	N/A

**% change in population**

1971 - 1991	20.0%	20.1%	22.1%	22.6%	23.2%	15.4%	8.8%	13.9%
1991 - 1999	N/A	5.3%	2.7%	5.4%	8.0%	4.7%	1.9%	N/A

*Notes*

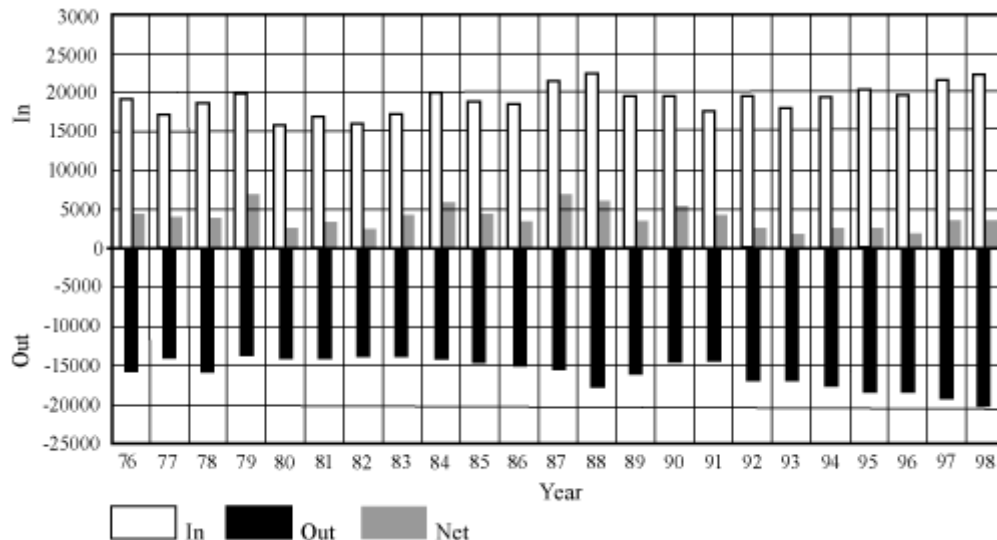
*Source: OPCS population estimates, ONS population estimates*

*Figures may not sum due to 'rounding'*

2.25 A westward shift in net migration to Somerset and Exmoor has been observed over this twenty year period. Net migration gains increased between 1981 and 1991 in Taunton Deane and West Somerset when compared with the previous ten years. The largest settlement, Taunton, accounted for over 16% of the net in-migration to the County of Somerset and almost 25% of the total for the fifteen largest settlements during the period 1981 - 1991. In contrast, net migration gains in Mendip and South Somerset were lower between 1981 and 1991. As a consequence, Mendip and South Somerset together accommodated just under 43% of the net migration gains between 1981 and 1991, compared to 56% in the previous ten years.

2.26 The numbers of migrants into and out of an area varies over time, because there are numerous economic, environmental and/or social factors that influence both in-migration and out-migration. The most useful data source for examining changing migration flows is the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR), which dates from 1975 (see Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5 In, Out and Net Annual Migration Flows, Somerset 1976-1998**



### In-migration

2.27 The rate of in-migration to the county of Somerset has consistently exceeded that of out-migration since 1950 and reached its peak levels in 1987 and 1988. At the height of this influx of people, the largest source of in-migrants was those originating from the South-East region and particularly amongst those in the pre-retirement and retirement age groups. In the two years to mid 1988, in-migration to Somerset was running at about 22,500 persons per annum. This was about 4,000 above the long-term annual average. In-migration has since declined, but not below the long-term average level of 18,500 persons per annum. The subsequent decline in the level of in-migration since 1988, especially those originating from the South-East region, have been partially offset by buoyant inflows from elsewhere in the UK.

2.28 Out-migration rates have fluctuated less over time, when compared with in-migration, and its peak was less pronounced. During the period, mid 1991 to, mid 1995, the annual average rate approached 17,000 persons per annum, which was well above the long-term average of 15,000 persons per annum. This high level of out-migration has mainly been in the 16-24 age group, particularly persons aged 18 and 19. It has been primarily attributed to young adults seeking higher education outside the area as it lacks this type of facility. This trend was confirmed by a substantial increase in the number of applications for student awards registered by the Somerset Education Services. This has been a significant contributory factor to the more moderate levels of net in-migration, and hence population increase, in Somerset since 1991.

### Average Household Size

2.29 The other main feature of recent demographic change within the plan area has been the continued reduction in average household size. This has been caused by a significant increase in the number of single person households. The growth in this type of household can be partly attributed to the reduced propensity for people to marry and, when they do, the trend is for this to occur at a later stage in their lives. In conjunction with this tendency to marry later in life, there has also been an increased incidence of divorce. An additional factor has been an ageing population as improved health and social standards, which have resulted in people



living longer as the average life expectancy increases. A combination of these processes and other factors, have contributed to the reduction in average household size in Somerset from 2.86 in 1971 to 2.43 in 1991 whilst in the Exmoor National Park the decline was from 3.01 to 2.39 over the same period (see Table 2.3). It also provides the explanation as to why the rate of increase in households for that county has exceeded that of population in this period.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.30 This is a key theme in UK Government policy towards land-use planning and is, therefore, a key factor in the preparation of development plans. The most widely accepted definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland report (Our Common Future: the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987.): Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

2.31 Whilst environmental considerations were taken into account in the development the previous Structure Plan, there is now a requirement, under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, to have specific regard to the environment. This has been reinforced by the provisions of the Environment Act 1995, which recognised the important role and function of National Parks and established National Park Authorities to provide a co-ordinated strategic approach to land-use planning within them. Previously, environmental protection policies had been used successfully for many years in protecting specifically designated areas of land or other environmental assets from harmful development. Recent legislation and guidance issued by Central Government indicates a shift away from this approach, to allow the implications of our actions to be identified in the wider context and over a longer timescale. The broadening of the range of key elements that have to be taken into consideration reflects the more balanced approach of sustainable development such as, economic opportunity, social equity and environmental conservation.

### Sustainable Development and Strategic Planning

2.32 The trends, highlighted in this chapter, raise major issues concerning the future of the plan area, the pressures on its environment and resources and, the way in which these pressures may be addressed in a more sustainable way. Throughout the development of the Joint Structure Plan, two key aspects of sustainable development have been considered. These are:

- the distribution of future development opportunities that is likely to produce a more sustainable pattern of development; and
- the protection, conservation and enhancement of the environmental resources and assets within the plan area

**Table 2.3**

**Number of Households and Average Household Size: 1971 - 1996**

**No. of households**

Mid-year	Mendip	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Taunton Deane	West Somerset	Somerset	Exmoor Nat. Park
1971	26700	27700	40300	28100	10800	133600	3500
1981	32100	33000	49300	32900	12000	159300	3800

1991	37900	39300	57600	38600	13700	187100	4500
1996	39400	41500	61600	40700	14100	197200	N/A
% change 1971 - 1991	41.9%	41.9%	42.9%	37.4%	26.9%	40.0%	28.3%
% change 1971 - 1996	47.6%	49.8%	52.8%	44.8%	30.6%	47.6%	N/A

#### **Average household size**

1971	2.93	2.88	2.85	2.86	2.62	2.86	3.01
1981	2.75	2.69	2.67	2.61	2.41	2.66	2.95
1991	2.49	2.47	2.43	2.39	2.26	2.43	2.39
1996	2.46	2.42	2.41	2.37	2.26	2.40	N/A

#### **Notes**

Source: OPCS Censuses, 1971, 1981 & 1991, DoE population estimates, SCC

Figures may not sum due to 'rounding'

Average household size is calculated from Census counts of population in households.

Persons in communal establishments (nursing homes, boarding schools, armed forces camps, prisons, etc..) data are excluded from this calculation.

2.33 The Joint Structure Plan can make an important contribution to sustainable development but it is important to recognise the limitations. In a predominantly rural area like Somerset and Exmoor, with its small towns and dispersed population, it can be more difficult to achieve a pattern of development that helps to reduce the growth in the need for travel than in more densely populated areas. Part of the pattern of new development in the plan area is already set for the short to medium term of the plan period through existing planning commitments. However, over the longer time period of the Joint Structure Plan the distribution of new development should aim to facilitate a more sustainable pattern of transport and land use activities. Other policies of the Joint Structure Plan will contribute towards the overall objectives by establishing a clear approach to the protection of the local environment. This has been informed by the sustainability appraisal. The principles of sustainable development have informed the strategy and policies of the Joint Structure Plan which are set out in the chapters that follow.