



Gravity

Smart Campus

Consultation Draft

Locality Investment Plan

October 2021



1) Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1.1 The Gravity site was designated as an enterprise zone (EZ) in 2015, to commence from 01 April 2017 for 25 years. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the key parties including Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset County Council, and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), with the Government, to establish a simplified planning regime in exchange for business rates retention locally.
- 1.1.2 A Local Development Order (LDO) is being progressed to establish the simplified planning regime and this should be in place by December 2021.
- 1.1.3 During the mobilisation of the EZ designation, a report was taken to Sedgemoor District Councils Executive on governance and principles. Further details are provided below.
- 1.1.4 Given the scale of the site, the level of infrastructure required and the significant site remediation and preparation in advance of marketing, a site first approach was agreed in terms of business rates use and recycling. This was seen as key to creating a positive cycle of investment in infrastructure to mobilise phases of development to create certainty on delivery and job creation over the 25 years.
- 1.1.5 In progressing a market led LDO, the market is illustrating new potential opportunities for accelerated delivery. To expedite large scale or whole site accelerated development may require significant and direct government funding.
- 1.1.6 It is possible that the market may also choose a more incremental solution, with challenging infrastructure and timing needs, and this may require loans in advance, refunded through business rates income.
- 1.1.7 The Councils and the LEP will wish to consider the most suitable arrangement and authority to manage business rates income and any agreed loans in advance, to achieve mitigation and transformational objectives.
- 1.1.8 It is therefore important to prepare a dynamic and agile response to scope and determine potential infrastructure needs on site, as well as off-site which are indirectly related to the site, and meeting the needs of occupiers. In creating a transformational opportunity to attract high value occupiers to the area, they will have expectations on the scale and quality of infrastructure, its resilience and also facilities to attract and retain their workforce and ensure they can access opportunities.

* Priority projects which are necessary as part of the LDO.

- 1.1.9 This Locality Investment Plan (LIP) has been created as a management tool to scope infrastructure requirements, and to establish the approach to managing the use of business rates income derived from the EZ designation.
- 1.1.10 The LIP will set out high level potential schemes and interventions which will be required to support this 'site first approach' with particular reference to infrastructure requirements to realise the full delivery of the EZ. Schemes that are necessary as part of the LDO will be clearly identified as priorities to ensure there is a direct link between the proposals and the mitigation plans.
- 1.1.11 Business rates will be predicted on the basis of the new LDO scenario, and the total estimate will vary considerably at this early point in time in respect of delivery, with rates only being payable on occupation. An annual business rates review is recommended. Therefore, the timing and phasing of business rate expenditure must be market led and be driven by occupier requirements, with the overall primary outcome being attracting international investment, meeting their operational requirements as well as training and job creation.
- 1.1.12 The LIP builds upon the principles set out within the EZ Implementation Plan and sets out the potential candidate and priority projects to receive investment from the EZ retained business rates. This is necessary to ensure timely delivery of mitigation to meet business needs and the Gravity construction programme.
- 1.1.13 The LIP is intended to be a live and evolving document, responsive to the implementation and delivery of the Gravity with the LDO in place. This will evolve as occupiers and their proposals come forward. The process for this monitoring and review relates to the governance arrangements for the EZ and responds to the monitor and manage approach which will be employed for the Gravity LDO to ensure implementation, mitigation and subsequent monitoring are all aligned and coordinated to maximise the local benefit and minimise the impacts of Gravity. The Gravity Monitoring and Management Plan sets out more detail on this process.
- 1.1.14 The ultimate objective is to deliver Gravity as an EZ in a timely way, whilst creating the right environment for businesses to locate and grow and to support investment projects across the immediate locality to transform the economy and stimulate a clean and inclusive growth cluster at Gravity and within the locality.
- 1.1.15 The Sedgemoor Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2017) and the Transport Investment Strategy 2050 provide a list of priorities identified as needed to support growth in the District and this LIP will build on those documents to ensure strategic alignment and an up-to-date record of required projects for delivery related to Gravity.

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1.2 Introduction to Gravity

- 1.2.1 Gravity was allocated Enterprise Zone status in the 2015 Autumn Statement. A 616-acre EZ site located near Bridgwater in Somerset, encompassing a Local Development Order consenting over 1.1million sqm of employment generating uses across the full area, the site offers a unique opportunity for large scale advanced manufacturing and associated research and development and clean and inclusive growth focused development within the Heart of the South West.
- 1.2.2 The UK'S largest available single brownfield site, Gravity is located with direct access to Junction 23 of the M5 Motorway and is strategically placed on the main access route to the nationally significant developments at Hinkley Point C and in relation to the Hinkley C Connection project. The site is fully remediated and extensive preparatory work through the hybrid planning permission is complete, with the Gravity Link Road due to open in autumn 2021. The site is being actively marketed to commence sales, triggering an accelerated programme of delivery over the next decade.
- 1.2.3 An ambitious and uniquely designed vision for Gravity forms a key element of a unique opportunity as a direct investment proposition for the South West and the UK, centred on Clean and Inclusive Growth, and the business sectors within that. Sedgemoor District Council, the Heart of the South West LEP, Somerset County Council and Gravity are working very closely with various Government departments including the Ofl, DIT, BEIS and MHCLG to materialise opportunities that the site offers. Opportunities for partnerships and funding will continue to be explored to accelerate progress beyond the requirements of the LIP with the business rates presenting the opportunity to fund certain critical path schemes in totality whilst also offering match funding to leverage in other funding as opportunities arise.

2) Local Delivery

2.1 Governance

- 2.1.1 The EZ Implementation Plan sets out the governance arrangements for the EZ, the assessment of the necessary delivery of mitigation schemes and interventions and the responsibility for managing those processes. These will be linked to the Gravity LDO through the s106 agreement. Moving forward the responsibility for delivery of the required mitigation and interventions will fall initially to Sedgemoor District Council as the Local Planning Authority and Somerset County Council as the upper tier authority and transport authority, and then evolve to the new single unitary Somerset Council to be established by April 2023.
- 2.1.2 The business rates which will be collected through the businesses which locate to Gravity will obviously not begin to be generated until such time as those businesses are in place, operating and on the conclusion of any business rate relief period, if that is agreed and offered by Government to attract a high value occupier. As such, where

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any early critical interventions may be required the Council(s) may need to consider potentially taking a loan against those business rates in advance of receipt and in order to deliver on the full objectives of the EZ and the associated transformational benefits it will deliver. This will need to be considered in the context of the landowner and or occupier(s), depending on disposal and development mechanism.

- 2.1.3 It is also possible for the Government to assist with implementation and offer incentives up front to potential occupiers by way of a loan or grant to accelerate implementation, and then this is repaid from business rates income. An alternative mechanism would be for the Government to set up a revolving infrastructure and investment fund to pump prime early works and solutions including workforce development. This again would be refunded through business rates income.
- 2.1.4 Governance and administration arrangements will need be formally put in place by the Council's and partners through the EZ Board in time for the delivery of any early schemes or interventions.
- 2.1.5 A multi-agency local delivery team will be established to have oversight of the funds and commission initiatives / projects as required.

3) Locality Investment Plan Schemes

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 As set out within the Government's Enterprise Zone guidance, each Enterprise Zone / LEP must clearly identify how relevant revenues raised from the site(s) are to be utilised to facilitate local growth. The EZ Implementation Plan sets out the key principles related to prioritisation agreed between the EZ partners, with the site first priority a key principle of that for Gravity. This LIP is intended to identify the specific projects which will likely be supported over the lifetime of the EZ, noting it is a live document which will evolve.
- 3.1.2 Consideration should be given on the central financing of core infrastructure such as rail and highways, and also as to how business rates income can be leveraged to add value to other funding bids, to attract additional investment through strong business case submissions. This will enable the greatest outcomes for the locality and optimum position to achieve transformation.

3.2 Candidate Schemes

- 3.2.1 In identifying potential schemes which would be capable of supporting the objectives of the EZ, ensuring effective and well managed delivery of Gravity, and mitigating any impacts of the LDO scheme it is necessary to first define potential categories of candidate schemes. These are defined, as follows:

1. **On site schemes that enable delivery i.e., on site roads, rail, water treatment and energy connections,**

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2. **Off-site schemes that enable delivery and transformation i.e., highway and transport improvements, walking and cycling, public transport, infrastructure, and services.**
3. **Investments in innovation, test beds, skills & training linked to clean and inclusive growth,**
4. **Minor improvements in immediate locality i.e., within the villages of Puriton and Woolavington to support the community and destination,**
5. **Locality projects to aid, enable and support economic transformation of the locality and to attract, support and retain occupiers at Gravity.**

3.2.2 In terms of potential schemes which could be the subject of investment, these could include:

On site Schemes

- Establishing a revolving infrastructure fund to accelerate site preparation, and to be refunded by business rates to expedite commissioning and delivery.
- On site strategic transport priorities: estate roads and mobility network linked to the transport assessment *
- Rail restoration and station
- Multi story car parking with integral EV Charging*
- Any other initiative included within the Framework Travel Plan not defined elsewhere*
- Training, welfare, conferencing, and workforce development
- Smart mobility hubs
- Water / waste treatment
- Energy infrastructure
- Digital / smart connectivity
- Community infrastructure: Replacement and Upgraded 37 club
- Sports facilities
- Land and environmental management facilities including biodiversity net gain

Off-site Delivery and Transformation

As well as those projects which are either on site or directly related to Gravity as a project there are a number of off-site projects which could benefit from investment which would support realisation of the full EZ objectives and benefits and also mitigate potential impacts. Some of these projects could include:

- National Centre for Electric Vehicle Manufacture @ BTC
- High frequency bus services to Gravity (linked to transport assessment)*
- M5 J23 Strategic improvement (linked to transport assessment)*

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- Active travel improvements across Bridgwater: Bridgwater to Gravity walking and cycling links (including A38 and A39 corridors) linked to transport assessment*
- Other potential transport improvements on the MRN / LRN, including Dunball Rbt and the A38 / A39 corridors*
- Park and ride facilities
- Asset acquisition
- Housing / accommodation
- Smart Mobility Hubs within Bridgwater (linking to Gravity)
- Burnham on Sea / Highbridge to Gravity walking and cycling link
- Education contributions linked to residential units*
- Health contributions linked to residential units*

Investments in innovation, Skills & Training

- Recruitment and workforce development *
 - including Inspire programme, development of training and career pathways, adult training / re-training, National centre for electric manufacturing internships, PHDs, relocation packages and immigration support. Clean growth pilot projects on smart mobility, electric / hydrogen public transport and freight etc. MOBIE young people's engagement in training and development in the construction / transport decarbonisation sector
- Curricular development and revenue support for individuals - skills and social outcomes enhancements
- Social value – resilience and health support in schools*
- Innovation / SME space related to supply chain development
- Drone / EVTOL logistics - trials / business case development.

Minor Improvement Projects

In addition to those more project specific and more strategic projects and interventions there could also be some minor, local projects which meet objectives of the nearby community and would broaden the benefits of Gravity for those nearest the site. These should not duplicate or replicate schemes which should come forward through other funds that are already available through Villages Together or parish CIL receipts. Schemes could include:

- Walking and cycling enhancements within the villages
- Enhanced village signage / wayfinding
- Provision of parish length services
- Soft landscaping and biodiversity enhancements
- Environmental improvements and linkages
- Community activities and events
- Family and community support
- Community facilities enhancement / diversification
- Maintenance

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Locality Projects

- Delivery team*
- Projects created in collaboration with occupier and workforce
- Leisure, health, and wellbeing facilities including 37 club*
- EV Infrastructure in Bridgwater
- Bridgwater Tidal Barrier*
- Bridgwater Rail Station Accessibility Enhancements
- Digital investment – superfast broadband, 5G
- Mass transport connectivity to Bristol Airport from Gravity and Bridgwater
- Natural capital asset development / carbon management: Avalon Super Reserve*
- Community inclusion initiatives

3.3 Administration & Governance (EZ Management & Development Team)

- 3.3.1 In order to ensure suitable capacity within the Council(s) to manage and deliver on these priority projects, as well as to ensure the related processes set out within the EZ Implementation Plan and Gravity Monitoring and Management Plan can be resourced, it will be necessary for business rates to be utilised to create an agile and highly responsive strategic development team and assist in funding necessary resources. This will need to shift and adapt depending on occupiers needs and implementation, and will need to have a global perspective, work collaboratively with national and regional partners, as well as an attention to detail on local delivery and integration, and could include short term, part time or full-time support including for example:

- Management
- Executive Support / administration
- External Relations: ESG, Communications and marketing
- Transport and Infrastructure Manager
- Planning Manager
- Finance Officer
- Project management as required
- Consultancy support as required
- Specialist short term/ temporary support from statutory consultees (Environment Agency, Natural England, National Highways etc.)

4) Implementation and Monitoring

- 4.1 As described above, this LIP is intended to be a live document which evolves as the Gravity LDO is implemented and develops. This initial draft of the LIP has been drafted in advance of LDO implementation, prior to any occupiers being known or on site. As such it has set out high level potential projects, schemes and interventions which could be implemented to ensure the EZ and the Gravity LDO are delivered and realised in a timely way. Inevitably the final schemes which will be realised and delivered through

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the utilisation of the retained business rates from the EZ will need to market and occupier led.

- 4.2 On that basis it will be necessary to update this LIP on a regular basis, at least annually, and for it to be reviewed as and when occupiers land, set out their proposals, requirements, and expectations at Gravity. This process will be aligned to the governance arrangements set out within the EZ Implementation Plan and Gravity Monitoring and Management Plan to ensure consistency of the process and the smooth delivery of Gravity in realising the EZ objectives and the associated benefits.

5) Conclusions

- 5.1 This LIP has set out the approach to managing the use of business rates income derived from the EZ status and designation of Gravity to support delivering Gravity and the EZ and wider connectivity and accessibility to the site to deliver the EZ objectives set out within the EZ Implementation Plan. The LIP has set out high level potential schemes and interventions which will be required to support this 'site first approach' with particular reference to infrastructure requirements to realise the full delivery of the EZ.
- 5.2 The LIP has defined categories of candidate schemes which could fall into a number of categories to meet those objectives and includes a number of suggested projects, schemes and interventions which could be delivered using the retained business rates derived from the EZ. This LIP will make up part of the key, live management documents which will support the delivery of the EZ and the Gravity LDO.

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