

# North Somerset Council

## Report to the Place, Policy and Scrutiny Panel

**Date of Meeting: 13 July 2022**

**Subject of Report: Local Plan 2038 update following consultation on Preferred Options**

**Town or Parish: All**

**Officer/Member Presenting: Michael Reep**

**Key Decision: No**

**Reason: Report is for information and discussion**

### Recommendations

- To note the consultation response to the Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation.
- To consider the main themes and issues to be addressed in the next stage of the Local Plan 2038.

### 1. Summary of Report

- 1.1 This report provides members with feedback on the Local Plan 2038 Preferred Options consultation which was taken place between 14 March and 29 April 2022.
- 1.2 The report includes a summary of key issues which emerged from the consultation to be considered at the next stage of plan making.

### 2. Policy

- 2.1 The Local Plan will provide the land use framework for the delivery of the key aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan, including measures to help address the climate emergency and nature emergency.
- 2.2 The planning system is plan-led and local authorities must prepare up-to-date local plans to provide a positive vision for the future of the area; a framework for addressing housing needs, and other economic, social and environmental priorities and a platform for local people to help shape their surroundings.
- 2.3 Local Plans must be kept up to date and correctly reflect government guidance. The existing Local Plan which consists of the Core Strategy, Site Allocations Plan and Development Management Plan covers the period to 2026. This is currently being reviewed and updated. The new Local Plan will cover a fifteen-year time frame from 2023 - 2038.

### 3. Details

- 3.1 The formulation of the new North Somerset Local Plan requires various stages of consultation and engagement. The process for drafting a new Local Plan for North Somerset was launched in March 2020. Later that year two consultations were undertaken focusing on the challenges the Local Plan would have to address (Challenges for the Future) and the broad spatial options the plan could consider to address the challenges (Choices for the Future).
- 3.2 The response to the Challenges and Choices consultations and an assessment of emerging evidence enabled the formulation of a preferred spatial strategy which would provide the framework for the next stage and was agreed by the Executive on 28 April 2021. The Preferred Option document was subsequently prepared in accordance with the agreed spatial strategy for consultation along with many supporting documents which provided the evidence and justification for the policies and allocations within the emerging plan. It did not plan at that stage to seek to allocate land for the Council's full housing requirement but sought views on how that requirement might be met.
- 3.3 The Local Plan Preferred Options consultation document was the first full draft of the new Local Plan. It contained:
- Strategic Policies which set out the overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design of places and make sufficient provision for housing, employment and other uses, infrastructure, community facilities, conservation and the enhancement of the built and historic environment and address climate change and mitigation. These are high level policies which provide the framework for more detailed policies in the plan and for neighbourhood plans.
  - Locational Policies which comprise allocations and other designations which are identified on the Policies Map.
  - Development Policies which comprise the detailed development management policies which cover a wide range of issues including design, residential infilling, climate change, net zero construction, renewable energy, drainage, transport, economic development, town centres, green infrastructure, affordable housing, rural development and infrastructure delivery.

#### How we consulted on the Preferred Options document:

- 3.4 Consultation on the [Preferred Options](#) document ran from 14 March until 29 April 2022. During this period a range of engagement methods were used to inform the public of the consultation and maintain interest and momentum in the process. These included:
- Website and online consultation: The Council's Local Plan 2038 [webpages](#) contained all the details relevant to the consultation including a link to the consultation where people could comment on the policies and sites set out in the document online. This information, with a link to the website and to the online consultation system, was sent out to 5,780 stakeholders who were registered on the Planning Policy database on 14 March 2022. The database includes parish councils, adjacent authorities and parishes, planning agents, statutory consultees, local pressure groups and organisations as well as individuals.

- Press/publications: Including North Somerset Life (16 March edition – reaches 70,000 people across North Somerset), In North Somerset newsletter, Noticeboard (schools), The Knowledge, Members Only, Town and Parish digest. Five media releases before and during the consultation.
- Postcards: Given out at all public events and e-version sent to Weston College for distribution at business workshops and for wider use in the college.
- Public exhibitions and events: A total of 10 exhibitions and question and answer sessions were held at various locations around the district. This allowed communities to come and speak to officers and members about the proposals in the plan.
- Social Media: Posts including an information video on the Council's Facebook page throughout the consultation period with information about the consultation and the events that were happening. Instagram post aimed at younger people.
- Direct engagement with key stakeholders including adjoining local authorities.

#### Level of response:

- 3.5 Over 4000 comments were received from over 700 respondents. Around 500 people responded online whilst around 200 responded by e-mail. Respondents included Town and Parish Councils (23), individuals, developers or their agents, organisations such as The Woodland Trust and CPRE, local community groups such as Backwell Residents Association (BRA) and Churchill and Langford Residents Action Group (CALRAG), neighbouring authorities such as Bristol City Council and statutory consultees such as the Environment Agency, Historic England, English Highways and Natural England. All responses are now available to view in full on the [consultation webpage](#) and a detailed Consultation Statement setting out the responses will be published at the end of July. A summary of the principal issues raised is set out below.
- 3.6 For comparison with the previous consultations, the response level for the Challenges for the Future consultation was 387 respondents to the consultation with a total of 2,934 comments and for the Choices for the Future Consultation was 1,675 respondents who responded to a questionnaire. However, the Preferred Options was different from the previous two consultations as it was a much more detailed, technical and lengthy document. The level of response for the Preferred Options is what might be expected at this stage of the plan-making process.

#### Main themes/comments: Strategic Policies

- 3.7 Most comments (1,555) were submitted in relation to the Strategic Policies. The following summarises the main concerns and issues raised in relation to strategic policies. There was quite a bit of overlap in relation to comments received on these policies given the interrelationships between them. The principal points made can be summarised as follows:

##### **SP1: Sustainable development** (153 comments)

- General support for the aims of the policy but question whether policy is needed as it repeats government guidance.
- Unclear how the principles listed as bullet points would be applied.
- Principles of policy have been applied inconsistently when considering detailed development options.
- Aim of '20 minute communities' principle is supported.

##### **SP2: Climate change** (123 comments)

- General support for this policy, with a range of recommended amendments.
- Some suggest that the policy wording should be strengthened to match the NPPF requirement of radical reduction in emissions.
- Some state that whilst supporting the aims of the policy viability is a key consideration in terms of delivering the objectives.
- Some suggestions for inclusion of additional objectives, such as decarbonisation of transport.

**SP3: Spatial strategy** (202 comments)

- General support for the urban focused spatial strategy.
- Significant objection that Backwell has been considered alongside Nailsea in terms of the spatial strategy. Backwell community feel Backwell is a separate village with its own identity.
- Development industry generally advocated more growth at villages to provide flexibility/deliverability.
- Communities felt the phrase '*will relate to local community needs*' for villages had not been adhered to; developers wanted it removed.
- Some developers felt development on land at risk of flooding should not be discounted and should be prioritised over Green Belt.
- Some argued for greater use of Green Belt; others that it should be protected.

**SP6: Villages and rural areas** (125 comments)

- Mixed comments regarding new policy approach which would no longer allow development adjacent to settlement boundaries. Support for this approach from local communities as it was felt it would stop speculative development, but objections from the development industry as it was felt it would not provide the flexibility for sites to come forward over the plan period.
- General support for re-use of previously developed land in rural areas.

**SP7: Green Belt** (224 comments)

- Mixed response – either objecting to proposed development in the GB or acceptance that GB needs to be considered as a more sustainable location.
- Multiple comments about specific locations which should or should not be included in the Green Belt.
- A number of respondents felt the Green Belt should be significantly extended to meet the AONB.
- Significant opposition to the proposed allocation of Land east of Backwell for development.
- A mix of objections and support for removing land from Green Belt at Yanley Lane to facilitate the proposed development allocation.

**SP8: Housing** (270 comments)

- The standard method target doesn't reflect local needs and should be challenged – it is being reviewed and may decrease.
- Need to provide the standard method figure as a minimum; some argued that plan should deliver 22,968 plus Bristol need not being met through the WECA SDS/Bristol Local Plan processes.
- Failure to provide enough small sites or sites at village locations which would be likely to come forward more quickly.
- Need to identify opportunities for self build and community housing.
- Support for affordable housing but questions about viability and 40% requirement.
- Various respondents put forward sites to address the shortfall.

**SP10: Transport** (136 comments)

- General support for prioritising more sustainable modes of transport.
- Some people felt too much emphasis was put on walking and cycling ('active travel') – particularly in relation to rural/village locations where this isn't always a practical option.
- Concerns over lack of investment in public transport to enable this policy to be effective.

Main themes/comments: Locational Policies

3.8 The locational policies received 933 comments across all the policies. The most comments were in relation to the policies relating to the strategic locations of Yanley Lane, Wolvershill and Nailsea/Backwell, as well as the Settlement Boundary and Green Belt policies. Comments received on all the other policies in this chapter will be set out in the separate Consultation Statement to be published in July. Below is a summary of the key concerns and issues raised in relation to some of these policies.

**LP1: Strategic Location – Wolvershill (north of Banwell)** (46 comments)

- Concern over the future of Wolvershill Road in terms of its role and function in the new development.
- General support for the proposed strategic gap between the existing settlement of Banwell and the new development north of the bypass. Suggestion from Banwell Parish Council to extend the proposed Strategic Gap.
- Concern of the impact on the road network of building the proposed amount of housing.
- Overall general consensus that this location is sustainable provided it is masterplanned well with the right level of services and facilities and a good range of housing types.

**LP2: Strategic Location – Yanley Lane (Woodspring Golf Course)** (106 comments)

- Opinion divided – views in favour consider it to be a more sustainable location, but others feel there isn't justification for locating development in the Green Belt.
- Strong support from the landowner, Taylor Wimpey, but their view was that the area of land proposed for this allocation wasn't sufficient to accommodate 2,500 houses plus the additional community infrastructure (secondary school, primary schools, 10ha employment, open space etc) that was required in the policy. They propose an expansion of the allocation to include two further sites to the north and south of the proposed allocation to accommodate some of the other uses.
- Responses from the development industry query the deliverability of 2,500 within the plan period.
- Queries over whether exceptional circumstances exist to develop in the Green Belt.
- Many respondents emphasised the importance of keeping the village of Long Ashton separate from the proposed new development.

**LP3: Nailsea and Backwell** (281 comments)

- Significant objection to the proposed development at Backwell. Objection to the scale of development. Concerns included:
  - Lack of proposed road infrastructure and increase in traffic on the existing road network.
  - Loss of green spaces and Green Belt.
  - Impact on services and facilities.
  - Proposed level of development will alter the character of the village.

- Loss of wildlife and natural habitats with a particular concern over the impacts on bats.
- Concern over merger of Backwell with Nailsea.
- Some suggestions for much more modest growth at Backwell – with homes suitable for first time buyers and downsizers.
- General concerns over lack of information about proposed transport infrastructure to support the overall level of growth in the Nailsea/Backwell area.
- Support from developers/landowners whose sites had been proposed for allocation as well as some respondents proposing alternative or additional sites for this area.

**LP6: Settlement Boundaries** (82 comments)

- General support for reviewing the settlement boundaries and the principle of using settlement boundaries to control where development is acceptable.
- Numerous comments on specific boundaries changes or requests to amend boundaries.

Main themes/comments: Development Policies

3.9 There are 64 policies in the development policies section of the plan grouped into the following sections: Design and Place-making, Transport, Economic Development, Historic and Natural Environment, Life Prospects, Countryside and Delivery. A total of 1,070 comments were received for this section of the plan. Comments on the policies which received the most representations are summarised below:

**DP1: High quality design** (46 comments)

Overall support for more emphasis on better design although concern from development industry that the policy may be too prescriptive.

**DP5: Climate change and adaptation** (73 comments)

General support for the aims of the policy but many specific comments relating to how it should be modified/amended for various reasons. Also comments about how proposed allocation on greenfield sites are considered to be in conflict with the aims of this policy.

**DP6: Net zero carbon** (62 comments)

A lot of support for this policy, although clarification on delivery mechanism is required. Some are not supportive, stating that net zero aspirations should be driven by national standards alone, whilst some suggest that net zero is too big a leap from current Core Strategy CS1/CS2. Some suggest potential additional requirements, such as setting standards for existing buildings.

**DP32: Nature Conservation** (46 comments)

A number of comments pointed out that some of the proposed allocations, namely allocations at Backwell and Yanley Lane, are contrary to this policy which aims to protect wildlife and the natural environment. There was concern that the policy was not strong enough regarding protection of protected species and habitats and there should be stronger links with the Biodiversity Net Gain policy.

**DP34: Homes for all** (34 comments)

There were objections to this policy requiring developers to provide older person accommodation and self-build plots on schemes of 100 dwellings or more. Objections were based on viability and whether this was the most appropriate way to

deliver these types of housing. However, there was also support for the policy in terms of delivering a mix of housing types and particular support for community-led housing and limiting the number of 4/5 bedroom homes in certain areas.

**DP42: Affordable housing** (59 comments)

Overall agreement for the need of affordable housing. Concern from the development industry that the requirement for developments of over 10 dwellings to deliver a minimum of 40% affordable housing has not been viability tested.

- 3.10 Having considered the response to consultation a number of critical issues can be identified, and which will need to be addressed as part of the next stage of plan making.

**Achieving the Housing target**

The scale of the housing challenge is the biggest issue. The Preferred Options acknowledged that the potential 18,064 dwellings identified was short of the government's standard method target which is currently 20,880 dwellings, and that the Pre-submission plan would need to address this. The standard method is a minimum requirement and the final local plan housing requirement may be higher. Several development industry representations were arguing that the housing requirement should be more than 2,000 dwellings more.

There are currently changes proposed to the planning system and some speculation that the mechanism for determining the housing requirement may change. In the absence of any clear indication of government intentions, it is important to continue to progress the local plan on the basis of current national policy and processes. The priority should be to progress the local plan as quickly as possible as adopting an up to date new local plan is the key to successfully controlling speculative development pressure.

**Addressing the shortfall**

Under the current methodology, the housing shortfall in the draft plan is a minimum of 2,816 dwellings. The spatial strategy and sequential approach set out the framework for assessing additional potential sites. Revisiting this sequential framework raises the following questions about how the shortfall might be made up.

1. Urban capacity: have we made best use of previously developed sites and optimised densities?
2. Town expansion (outside the Green Belt): What further opportunities are there at Weston-super-Mare and Nailsea in particular?
3. Larger villages with good public transport: Are there any further opportunities are there at Yatton and Backwell?
4. Villages: What is the appropriate scale of growth at the seven other more sustainable villages (Banwell, Bleadon, Churchill/Langford, Congresbury, Sandford, Winscombe and Wrington)?
5. Other options: Should the approach to land at risk of flooding, particularly around Weston and Clevedon, be reconsidered recognising however this was previously discounted given the climate emergency.
6. Green Belt: Depending on the answer to (5), if additional land is required then what further opportunities are there which are well related to urban areas, including Bristol, Portishead and Nailsea/Backwell? The spatial strategy does not currently support growth at the larger villages in the Green Belt (Long Ashton, Pill/Easton-in-Gordano), but this could be an alternative once all other options had been exhausted.

It should be recognised that the local plan needs to provide a balance between short and long term sites. Too many strategic sites with complex infrastructure requirements and long lead in times is going to be more difficult to support at examination.

### **Rural development**

Development in villages and rural areas is relatively less sustainable. What is the appropriate proportion of overall growth in these areas given the need to deliver a mix of development opportunities?

### **Green Belt**

When reviewing the Green Belt we need to safeguarding land in order to meet longer term development needs. Should this be considered on the Bristol fringe? The spatial strategy concluded that the exceptional circumstances existed for amending the Green Belt related to creating sustainable communities adjacent to urban areas. With the exception of Backwell, this excluded development at the larger villages in the Green Belt on the grounds that the exceptional circumstances were unlikely to be met at these relatively less sustainable locations. If there is still a housing shortfall, should these locations be considered?

### **Land at risk of flooding**

There were representations from promoters of sites which were well-related to the towns but required flood mitigation that these should be included and prioritised above Green Belt locations. Development in areas at risk of flooding had taken place at Weston and Portishead, but should climate concerns now rule this out?

### **Employment**

The plan is as much about the delivery of jobs and economic growth as the provision of housing. The broad quantum of employment provision proposed in the plan is supported by the evidence but is there an appropriate mix of opportunities? Further work is required to explore the potential for new employment provision as part of the new strategic growth areas at Yanley Lane, Nailsea/Backwell and Wolverhill and how this can be facilitated with new infrastructure investment, particularly transport. Additionally, settlement boundaries at villages have been amended to include rural employers allowing more flexibility for these businesses to expand and intensify over the plan period to support the rural economy. Royal Portbury Dock and Bristol Airport are key economic/infrastructure locations in North Somerset and it is important to take into account the role they play in the local and regional economy. The operators of both sites made representations on the consultation.

### **Placemaking**

It is essential that the plan provides the mechanism to achieve high quality places where people want to live, work and spend their leisure time. There is a risk that the plan is portrayed as simply a means to meet a numerical housing requirement. The plan must deliver sustainable development which secures mixed and balanced communities and includes the necessary infrastructure with good masterplanning and high quality design.

### **Infrastructure**

Delivery of the necessary infrastructure to support new jobs and homes is a key part of the Local Plan. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) will accompany the Pre-submission Plan. It will set out what infrastructure in terms of transport, schools,



parks and green spaces, leisure facilities, health services and other community facilities will be required to support new development over the plan period. Importantly the IDP will also set out when infrastructure should be delivered.

### **Viability**

Viability was a key issue raised across many policy areas including affordable housing, self-build, provision of older persons accommodation, net-zero construction, climate change adaptation and resilience, accessible and adaptable homes, biodiversity net gain and provision of infrastructure. The next stage of the plan-making process will be accompanied by a full plan viability assessment. This assessment will consider all the development requirements set out in the policies and conclude whether the plan is viable or recommend where choices may need to be made in order to make the plan viable.

- 3.11 The next stage of the plan making process is the preparation of the Pre-submission document at the end of the year. This is the version of the plan which the Council intends to submit for examination and will be subject to consultation.

## **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 The subject of this report is the response received to the Local Plan 2038 [Preferred Options consultation](#). This consultation was a second stage in the Local Plan consultation process. It followed the Challenges and Choices Consultations which took place in 2020. The next stage of consultation on the Local Plan is the Pre-submission stage and is currently timetabled for the end of 2022. A Consultation Statement for the Preferred Options consultation which sets out how we consulted, who we consulted and a comprehensive summary of the responses to each policy will be published at the end of July.
- 4.2 The views of Town and Parish Councils are a key consideration in the plan-making process as it is recognised that they represent the views of the wider communities for those areas. Responses were received from 23 town and parish councils and the Consultation Statement will set out these responses.
- 4.3 The Pre-submission Stage (Regulation 19) is the consultation on the Council's final version of the plan that is intended to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. At pre-submission stage the consultation focuses on whether the plan complies with relevant legal requirements. Consultation is for six weeks and the responses received to the pre-submission stage are submitted to the Inspector to consider as part of the examination process.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The Local Plan will be progressed using existing budgets.

### **Costs**

The estimated cost of preparing the Local Plan, including the supporting evidence, is anticipated to be around £442,000 over 5 years. It should be noted that the Council must also pay the costs of the examination process including the Inspector.

### **Funding**

The plan is progressed using existing budgets and reserves.

## **6. Legal Powers and Implications**

- 6.1 The Local Plan is being progressed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and related Regulations. There is a requirement for all local planning authorities to have an adopted local plan in place.

## **7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

- 7.1 The new local plan will play an important role in defining and delivering the Council's response to the climate emergency. It will set out the approach to climate change and environmental issues in terms of, for example, the location and form of development, renewable energy, minimising car use, encouraging green infrastructure and biodiversity, avoiding sensitive areas such as areas at flood risk and minimising waste.

## **8. Risk Management**

- 8.1 The absence of an up-to-date development plan incurs risks related to the uncertainty of future investment decisions and speculative development proposals potentially leading to less sustainable development solutions.

## **9. Equality Implications**

- 9.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment accompanied the Preferred Options consultation. Feedback from the consultation will inform the next stage of the plan.

## **10. Corporate Implications**

- 10.1 The new Local Plan 2038 will be a significant tool in delivering the Corporate Plan vision and objectives and has significant implications for a wide range of Council services in terms of, for example, the future location of population, jobs and infrastructure.

## **11. Options Considered**

- 11.1 The Local Plan preparation process requires various strategic development and policy options to be considered as set out in the background papers. Not preparing a Local Plan will expose the Council to significant risks from speculative development; increased planning appeals; and other potential interventions.

### **Author:**

Michael Reep, Planning Policy Manager. 01934 426775.

## **Appendices:**

None

## **Background Papers:**

Preferred Options consultation document:

[North Somerset Local Plan 2038, Consultation draft, Preferred Option \(n-somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-07/Local%20Plan%202038%20Consultation%20draft%20Preferred%20Option.pdf)

Challenges for the future consultation document.

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-07/Local%20Plan%202038%20-%20Challenges%20for%20the%20Future.pdf>

Challenges for the future consultation statement.

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/Local%20Plan%202038%20Consultation%20Statement%20October%202020.pdf>

Choices for the future consultation document.

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/North%20Somerset%20Local%20Plan%202038%20challenges%20and%20choices%20part%20two%20-%20Choices%20for%20the%20future.pdf>

Choices for the future consultation statement.

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Choices%20Consultation%20Statement.pdf>

Local Plan 2038 Equalities Impact Assessment

[Microsoft Word - Equalities Impact Assessment - Master version \(n-somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Local%20Plan%202038%20Equalities%20Impact%20Assessment%20-%20Master%20version.pdf)