

North Somerset Council

Report to the Council

Date of meeting: 8th November 2022

Subject of report: Development Programme consultation outcomes

Town or Parish: All

Member presenting: Cllr. Mark Canniford, Executive Member for Placemaking & Economy

Key Decision: NO

Reason: Not an Executive discussion

Recommendations

1. To note the outcomes of the consultation on development sites held April – June 2022, including the detailed information about response numbers and reasons for supporting or opposing development that are detailed in Appendix A.
2. To re-endorse the agreed objectives for the Development Strategy and Programme, as set out in paragraph 3.12.
3. To agree recommendations in relation to individual sites as follows:
 - (i) Weston Town Centre sites / Parklands phases 2 & 3 / Castlewood: to agree that work to promote and bring these sites forward for development should continue, with a focus on maximising affordable housing and sustainability / low carbon development.
 - (ii) Churchill Avenue (Clevedon) / Oldmixon Recreation Ground (Weston) / Downside (Portishead) / Fryth Way (Nailsea) / Hutton Moor (Weston) / West Leigh (Backwell) / Hangstone Quarry (Clevedon): to agree that officers should engage further with ward members and local communities to explore issues and options in more detail, including options for partial development of sites, 100% affordable, self-build or community-led housing, and/or Town/Parish Council purchase of land.
 - (iii) Eastermead Farm (Banwell) / Grange Farm (Hutton) / Youngwood Lane (Nailsea): that the council as landowner commence work to promote these sites for consideration through the Local Plan allocations process, and where appropriate enter into discussions with adjacent or interested landowners/developers interested in joint masterplanning, promotion or development of sites.
 - (iv) Car parks: that work be undertaken with highways colleagues to identify any car parks that may potentially be suitable for development, where those car parks are underutilised, or where they may be suitable for development above parking.
4. To note discussions on the possible disposal of the Nailsea library site, as set out in paragraph 3.30 of this report.

1. Summary of report

- 1.1 This report provides members with information on the outcomes of the Development Programme sites consultation, which was held from April – June 2022.
- 1.2 The report summarises the consultation outcomes and makes recommendations on the next steps for the sites involved.

2. Policy

- 2.1 In February 2021, North Somerset Council adopted a Development Strategy setting out ambitions for the use of land it owns to deliver new homes and jobs.
- 2.2 The Development Strategy can be viewed on the council's website at www.n-somerset.gov.uk/developmentstrategy
- 2.3 The Development Strategy supports delivery of the Council's Corporate Priority objectives of Creating a Thriving and Sustainable Place.

3. Details

Development strategy and sites consultation

- 3.1 In February 2021, North Somerset Council adopted a Development Strategy setting out ambitions for the use of land it owns to deliver new homes and jobs. The Strategy can be viewed at: www.n-somerset.gov.uk/developmentstrategy
- 3.2 On agreeing the Strategy, the Council made a commitment to undertake public consultation on the programme of sites to be developed. This consultation was held from April to June 2022, focusing on whether or not individual sites should be taken forward for development, and if so, what the priorities for development should be. The consultation document can be viewed at: www.n-somerset.gov.uk/nscsites
- 3.3 The consultation was held by the council in its role as a landowner, and not as the Local Planning Authority. Council landholdings are subject to the same planning policies and requirements as those of any other landowner.
- 3.4 All ward members and Town and Parish Councils with potential sites in their local areas were notified of the consultation. A briefing was offered and in most cases this was taken up. Where necessary, Town and Parish Councils were permitted an extension to the consultation closing date to allow for completion of their formal decision-making processes in agreeing a response. Press releases and paid-for social media campaigns sought to draw attention to the consultation.
- 3.5 The consultation was hosted on the council's website and received 673 individual responses. An additional 20 responses were received from organisations such as Town and Parish Councils, some via the website and some via e-mails or letters.
- 3.6 The web-based consultation element was anonymous other than that respondents were asked for their postcode. An individual may have responded more than once, likewise they may have responded via e-mail, participated in a workshop and/or have signed a petition as well as having responded via the website.

- 3.7 Respondents were able to select which questions they answered, i.e. they could comment on one specific site, a selection, or all of them. The number of responses per question varied significantly.
- 3.8 An analysis of the consultation responses is attached at Appendix A. The full set of responses including free text responses, is several hundred pages long, however officers can arrange for members to view this on request, should they wish.

Other engagement and consultation activity

- 3.9 Additional engagement on sites in Clevedon and Nailsea took place through work led by Design West to formulate placemaking strategies for those towns. This included surveys at public events, and in-person workshops for a range of community stakeholders.
- 3.10 A petition of 152 physical and 541 virtual signatures was received opposing development of the Churchill Avenue site in Clevedon. Further detail is provided in Appendix A.
- 3.11 One site (Slade Road / Downside) was subject to a separate Town Council consultation prior to the North Somerset consultation being launched. 306 people responded to this consultation, with 93% of them opposing the development of the site. Further detail is provided in Appendix A.

Development objectives

- 3.12 The consultation included a question about the objectives agreed by the Council when adopting its Development Strategy in 2021. Respondents were asked to rank the objectives by order of importance, with the following results:

Objective	Ranking by individuals	Ranking by organisations
Deliver sites that the market won't deliver, such as difficult brownfield land and employment sites	1	3
Create better quality and more sustainable developments	2	2
Provide homes and jobs that meet the needs of our communities, whilst also helping deliver the government targets for housing supply	3	1
Generate funding to help deliver other priorities such as improvements to schools, transport or leisure facilities	4	4

- 3.13 The overall scoring of the first three objectives was very close, suggesting that these three objectives were seen as of similar importance. The fourth ranked objective of generating funding to deliver other priorities was rated slightly further behind.
- 3.14 Respondents were offered the opportunity to suggest their alternative objectives. Key themes included provision of infrastructure to support development; climate and sustainability considerations; quality of building and life; protection of green spaces / community facilities; and provision of affordable housing.

- 3.15 On the basis of the above, officers do not propose any changes to the objectives as previously agreed.

Sites supported by respondents

- 3.16 Respondents to the consultation supported the development of the following sites:

Site	Total number of responses	% supporting development	% opposed to development	% unsure
Parklands Village phase 2	11	73	27	0
Weston town centre sites	36	69	25	6
Castlewood, Clevedon	96	63	31	6
Parklands Village phase 3	8	63	38	0

- 3.17 Respondents were asked to rank a list of priorities for the development of these sites in order of importance. The top three priorities identified for each site are set out in the table below. The percentage relates to the number of respondents who rated each priority as one of their top three.

	Weston town centre	Parklands phase 2	Parklands phase 3	Castlewood
New, good quality affordable housing	40%	55%	38%	46%
Community uses	37%	27%	-	-
Low carbon development / high standards of environmental sustainability	34%	36%	38%	-
New, good quality private housing to buy	-	27%	-	-
Quality of landscaping and green infrastructure	-	-	38%	29%
Pace of delivery	-	-	38%	-
Commercial uses	-	-	-	30%

- 3.18 Members are asked to agree that work to promote and bring these sites forward for development should continue, seeking in particular to maximise affordable housing and sustainability / low carbon development as the two priorities most consistently identified across the sites.
- 3.19 A further report on proposals for the Castlewood site will be brought to Council in January 2023.
- 3.20 If delivered, these sites have the potential to deliver more than 900 new homes as well as commercial and community opportunities. The anticipated capital receipt from the sites is approaching £7m; this takes into account a significant negative figure in relation to the Weston Town Centre sites. All of the sites in question face viability challenges to a lesser or greater extent; this means that the achievement of high levels of affordable housing and/or sustainability criteria will be challenging.

Sites opposed by respondents

3.21 Respondents to the consultation opposed development on the sites listed below:

Site	Number of responses	% supporting development	% opposed to development	% unsure
Churchill Avenue, Clevedon	308 (excl, petition)	4	95	1
Oldmixon Recreation Ground, Weston	101	7	89	4
Downside / Slade Road, Portishead	97	5	95	0
Hangstone Quarry, Clevedon	57	40	53	7
West Leigh, Backwell	32	6	81	13
Land at Hutton Moor playing fields, Weston	32	16	75	9
Fryth Way, Nailsea	19	26	53	21
Future sites dependent on Local Plan: Eastermead Farm, Grange Farm, Youngwood Lane	36	44	56	0

3.22 Further detail on the response to each site, including a detailed breakdown of reasons for opposition, is provided in Appendix A. Across the combination of sites facing opposition, the following were the most common:

- Opposition to the loss of green and open spaces: 273 comments made on this theme.
- Opposition to the loss of community facilities: 323 comments made on this theme.
- Concern that there has or will be excessive levels of development in the area, that the development is of the wrong type, or that the site's current use should be maintained: 90 comments made on this theme.

3.23 In relation to sites at Churchill Avenue (Clevedon), Oldmixon Recreation Ground (Weston), Downside (Portishead), Fryth Way (Nailsea), Hutton Moor (Weston), West Leigh (Backwell), and Hangstone Quarry (Clevedon), members are asked to note the significant levels of opposition, and to agree that officers should engage further with local communities to explore issues and options in more detail, including options for partial development of sites, 100% affordable, self-build or community-led housing, and/or Town/Parish Council purchase of land.

3.24 In relation to 'future Local Plan sites': Eastermead Farm at Banwell; Grange Farm at Hutton; and Youngwood Lane near Nailsea, the level of consultation responses was relatively low and the strength of opposition to development less marked than for other sites. Officers recommend that the council as landowner should promote these sites through the Local Plan process, where they will be subject to further consultation and assessments. In addition, where appropriate, officers should enter

into discussions with adjacent or interested landowners/developers interested in joint masterplanning, promotion or development of sites.

- 3.25 An alternative option would be to remove some or all of the sites opposed by respondents from the development programme list. Reasons for recommending further engagement and consideration prior to such a step include that:
- Although significant levels of opposition were recorded, there were other voices who took a view that development, or partial development, might have benefits, particularly if it delivered much-needed affordable housing. In some cases this includes local ward members.
 - The sites in total could deliver more than 600 homes and would be expected to generate a financial return of around £15m. Given the pressures on housing supply and council budgets, these are valid factors to be taken into consideration.
 - The sites identified in paragraph 3.23 are within settlement boundaries and/or are located in relatively sustainable locations. The sites identified within paragraph 3.24 would be subject to the Local Plan process and associated tests of sustainability and acceptability.
 - The Downside, Churchill Avenue and Fryth Way sites are allocated in the Sites and Allocations Plan and are included in the North Somerset five-year housing supply. If not delivered, alternative sites will have to be found that can deliver similar numbers of units (c. 100 – 120 homes) within an equivalent timescale. There is no guarantee that any other site would be more popular than those that are currently proposed.
 - It may be possible to address or mitigate some of the concerns expressed by respondents. For example, at some sites there was a perceived threat to sports pitches and/or allotments, however the development proposed in the consultation related to adjacent land, or would require replacement provision nearby.
 - If only taking forward the four sites that were supported for development, this would be extremely limiting for the development programme in terms of its ability to deliver the council's stated objectives in relation to increasing the supply of affordable and sustainable homes and employment premises.
- 3.26 Such an approach would not always seek (or be able) to deliver immediate development. Sites with existing tenants, for example, such as Hangstone Quarry, would require negotiated solutions and/or could not be developed until the end of current leases. The land at Fryth Way is home to a thriving football club which has invested in facilities; no development could take place there unless alternative and ideally improved pitch provision could be made within the wider masterplan for the area of land around that site. Other sites will require decisions to be made through the Local Plan before they can come forward. However the creation of a development programme requires a long-term pipeline of sites, with some more immediately deliverable and some only delivered 5 – 10 years in the future.
- 3.27 The proposed engagement would enable officers to discuss alternative (non-development) options for land, including whether a sale to Town or Parish Councils would be possible. Priorities for early engagement would be Churchill Avenue, Downside and Oldmixon Recreation Ground, due to the strength of feeling in relation to these sites, and because they would be likely to be amongst the first sites to be taken forward, if a decision were made to pursue development.

Nailsea library and surrounding land

- 3.28 A specific set of questions were asked in relation to the building currently used to deliver library services in Nailsea, which is located in the town centre precinct. The consultation document highlighted that the library service was likely to move out of the current building due to its poor condition, high energy costs and non-compliance with disability access requirements.
- 3.29 Respondents were asked what they would like to happen with the building and surrounding area if the library service moved elsewhere. 54 responses were received, with the following results:
- Prefer that the building be retained, but leased or sold to another user: 41%
 - Prefer that the building be sold to allow a comprehensive re-development of this part of the shopping precinct: 59%.
- 3.30 Over the past few months, the council has been in discussion with potential purchasers of the library site. This includes at least one potential purchaser interested in the building as part of a comprehensive re-development of the site and surrounding area, which would be in line with the majority of wishes of respondents as expressed through the consultation.
- 3.31 Any such re-development of the site would be subject to a planning application. This would be the responsibility of the purchaser of the building, if a deal is reached.

Car parks

- 3.32 In line with the principle of prioritising brownfield land, the consultation asked respondents for views on the possible re-development of car parks for homes or employment.
- 3.33 The question saw very mixed responses, with some respondents strongly opposed but others more in favour, if sites could be identified which were underused, or if homes or commercial premises could be built on 'stilts' above parking.
- 3.34 Officers do not at present propose any specific car park sites to be taken forward for development (other than those already included in the package of Weston Town Centre sites), however recommend that work be undertaken in partnership with highways colleagues to identify any potentially suitable opportunities.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 This report summarises the outcomes of public consultation on the programme of sites. Information about the consultation process and other engagement activities in relation to the sites is provided in paragraphs 3.1 – 3.12 above.
- 4.2 All sites that are taken forward for development are or will be subject to further internal and external consultation. This includes statutory consultations on appropriation (where required) and on planning applications.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 The total value of the development programme could be as much as £20 – 25m, if all sites were taken forward.
- 5.2 In the event that members decided only to take forward those sites that were publicly supported, this figure would be reduced to around £5 – 10m. This is because many of those sites that were opposed were of a higher financial value, and those that were supported were generally of a lower value and in some case face significant viability and delivery challenges.
- 5.3 The revenue costs of commercial, procurement and legal advice to dispose of sites is the realm of £150 – 250k for each procurement exercise. Officers are seeking to create efficiencies and reduce costs by grouping sites together, as is being done for the Weston Town Centre and Parklands phase 2 sites.
- 5.4 In some cases there may be need for direct or indirect subsidy to support site delivery. An example would be the £700k grant agreed for the Weston Town Centre sites in February, which will be used to boost affordable housing and sustainability.
- 5.5 Officers will seek grant from Homes England, One Public Estate and other government sources or investors to assist in delivery of sites and to minimise the council's financial exposure and risk.

6. Legal powers and implications

- 6.1 The Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council the power to acquire and dispose of land held by it in any manner it wishes provided that the council achieves the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained.
- 6.2 The decisions taken in this report are not sufficient for any of the sites to proceed directly to development. Additional approvals that are required (dependent on the specific site) include approval of business cases, appropriation, commissioning and procurement plans, planning determinations and financial approvals. These decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis in line with the standing orders of the council and national regulations.

7. Climate change and environmental implications

- 7.1 The development programme has significant climate change and environmental implications.
- 7.2 An aspiration of the programme is to provide high sustainability homes and employment premises that minimise environmental impact, create good conditions for end-users, offer better choices for those buying or renting, and which encourage other developers to in turn increase their own standards.
- 7.3 The development of land can have negative environmental implications. However North Somerset has a government target to deliver over 1,000 new homes per year. If homes are not delivered on sites owned by the council, they will be required to be delivered by other parties who may have lower standards of sustainability.

8. Risk management

- 8.1 Development projects hold a significant number of physical, financial, environmental and reputational risks, which will be assessed on a site-by-site basis.

9. Equality implications

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? – Yes

- 9.1 A Stage 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed.
- 9.2 The EIA found moderate to high positive impacts could be delivered through the development programme, as a result of an improved supply of good quality, sustainable and affordable homes. This would have benefits (including health and wellbeing benefits) for a wide range of people, but in particular for those who are eligible for affordable, low-cost or specialist housing, including those on a low income, younger people seeking to enter the housing market, older people, care leavers and victims of domestic abuse.
- 9.3 Potential negative impacts of a moderate level identified related to the potential loss of open space and or community amenity resulting from the development of sites. This could have a particular impact on those who are suffering from mental health issues and for those with less opportunity or ability to travel further afield to other open spaces, for example those who are disabled, older and younger people, and those on a low income.
- 9.4 Due to the moderate impacts identified (both positive and negative), stage 2 EIAs will be required. These will be carried out for individual sites as and when they are taken forward for development, as part of the business case decisions for those site and proposals.

10. Corporate implications

- 10.1 The Development Strategy supports delivery of the Council's Corporate Priority objectives of Creating a Thriving and Sustainable Place.
- 10.2 The delivery of a development strategy will require input and support from a wide range of council teams, including planning, legal and finance.

11. Options considered

- 11.1 Not to pursue a Development Programme: the principle of a development programme was agreed at Full Council in February 2021 and set a number of objectives to be delivered.
- 11.2 To immediately start work to bring forward development on all sites: this is not appropriate, given the level and nature of concerns raised by respondents.
- 11.3 To cease work on those sites that have been opposed by respondents to the consultation and to remove the sites from the potential development programme: this option is not being pursued at the present time, for the reasons set out in paragraph 3.25.

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Appendices:

- Appendix A: summary and assessment of consultation responses

Background papers:

Report to Full Council, 21st February 2021 recommending approval of Development Strategy: www.n-somerset.gov.uk/developmentstrategy

Better places, homes and jobs: consultation on a development programme for land owned by North Somerset Council, April – June 2022: www.n-somerset.gov.uk/nscsites

Full access to all consultation responses can be provided on request. This includes a scanned version of the petition in relation to the Churchill Avenue site in Clevedon.

Stage 1 Equalities Impact Assessment: available on request