

# North Somerset Council

## Report to the Executive

**Date of Meeting: 6 September 2023**

**Subject of Report: North Somerset Local Plan**

**Town or Parish: All**

**Officer/Member Presenting: Councillor Mark Canniford, Executive Member for spatial planning, placemaking and economy**

**Key Decision: Yes**

**Reason: The local plan will have a potentially significant effect on communities living and working in the whole council area.**

## Recommendations

It is recommended that:

Pursuant to the Executive's resolution of 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022, the pre-submission (Reg 19) version of the plan is prepared using a locally derived housing requirement of 14,985 dwellings over the plan period 2024-2039 as the basis for identifying an appropriate scale and location of development to offer greater protection to the Green Belt and other sensitive sites

### 1. Summary of Report

- 1.1 On 7 September 2022 Executive Committee requested that the revised local plan should be developed recognising the constrained nature of North Somerset, offering greater protection to Green Belt and other sensitive sites.
- 1.2 Consultation on the national planning reforms took place December 2022 – March 2023. This included anticipated changes to the National Planning Policy Framework in relation to two topics of particular significance to North Somerset; the derivation of the housing requirement and the approach to using Green Belt and other significant constraints. The outcome of this consultation and revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework are still awaited.
- 1.3 A locally derived housing requirement has been identified which equates to 999 dwellings per annum or 14,985 dwellings over the 15 year plan period 2024-2039 and this is recommended to form the minimum housing target for the revised local plan in accordance with the Executive's previous resolution to develop a local plan that recognises the constrained nature of North Somerset.

## **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 2024-2039.
- 2.4 Government policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework which is currently being reviewed. The outcome of this review is still awaited.

## **3. Details**

- 3.1 Local Plan preparation is a statutory process requiring several 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 high-level consultations were undertaken focusing on the challenges the Local Plan would have to address (Challenges for the Future) and the broad spatial options (Choices for the Future). Consultation took place on the Preferred Options draft Local Plan March–April 2022 and the response published in the August 2022 Consultation Statement.
- 3.2 Executive Committee considered the response to the Preferred Options consultation and the principal issues to be addressed in the next stage of plan making on 7 September 2022. The committee referred the report to Scrutiny Panel to seek further input and resolved:

*‘....that the Executive requests that officers proceed to develop a revised Local Plan that recognises the constrained nature of North Somerset and identifies an appropriate scale and location of development to offer greater protection to the Green Belt and other sensitive sites, and seek legal advice including advice on implications for the Local Plan timetable and anticipated national reforms, further evidence gathering, potentially including further consultation, in order to prepare the strongest possible pre-submission draft plan.....’*
- 3.3 At the end of 2022 the government launched a consultation on national planning reforms, including proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. This consultation had significant implications for the North Somerset Local Plan.
- 3.4 In relation to the housing requirement, the consultation sought views on whether there should be more scope for local planning authorities to work on the basis of a locally derived housing requirement as opposed to using the government’s standard method, provided any alternative target was robustly evidenced. North Somerset

Council, working jointly with the West of England authorities commissioned a review of local housing need. This recommended that a robust approach would be to work on the basis of a local housing need for North Somerset of 999 dwellings per year or 14,985 dwellings over the plan period 2024-2039. This is significantly lower than the standard method figure of 1,392 per year or 20,880 over the 15 year period. However, it remains a very challenging target to deliver.

- 3.5 The national consultation also sought views on how nationally significant designations such as Green Belt should be factored in, in particular, whether local planning authorities should feel compelled to use Green Belt to meet housing targets. North Somerset has a significant extent of Green Belt as well as other sensitive areas such as areas at risk of flooding, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a range of heritage, ecological and other environmental constraints.
- 3.6 The government has yet to publish the response to consultation and any changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. In the meantime, it is important to make progress with the local plan to ensure we can adopt an up-to-date framework at the earliest possible opportunity. It is recommended that a pre-submission (Reg 19) plan is considered by Executive at its next meeting, and that that document is prepared on the basis of a locally derived housing requirement for North Somerset as the basis for identifying an appropriate scale and location of development to offer greater protection to the Green Belt and other sensitive sites to deliver the September 2022 resolution.

#### **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 The Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel considered the new local plan, its emerging content and issues at its meeting on 31 July 2023, including the issues relating to the housing requirement and role of Green Belt.
- 4.2 Following approval of the pre-submission version by Executive, there will be a minimum 6 week period of formal public consultation.
- 4.3 In the meantime, informal consultation is taking place with key internal and external stakeholders.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Local plan preparation is funded from existing budgets.

##### **Costs**

The estimated cost of preparing the Local Plan, including the supporting evidence, is anticipated to be around £400,000 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 increased planning appeals and less sustainable development solutions.

## **9. Equality Implications**

- 9.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is prepared at each stage of the plan.

## **10. Corporate Implications**

- 10.1 The new Local Plan 2039 will help support the delivery of 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.

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### **Appendices:**

None.

### **Background Papers:**

Local Plan 2038 – Update following consultation on Preferred Options: Report to Executive 7 September 2022:

[Committee Report NSC \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

[Printed minutes 07th-Sep-2022 18.00 Executive.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Preferred Options consultation document:

[North Somerset Local Plan 2038, Consultation draft, Preferred Option \(n-somerset.gov.uk\)](#)

Preferred Options Consultation Statement:

[Preferred options consultation statement - main report august 2022 \(n-somerset.gov.uk\)](#)

North Somerset Local Plan progress update: Report to Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel, 31 July 2023.

[Committee Report NSC \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Reviewing the demographic evidence for North Somerset to establish local housing need, Opinion Research Services, May 2023.