

North Somerset Council  
**Local Development Framework**

# Core Strategy

**Topic paper**  
Spatial portrait of North  
Somerset

# **Spatial Portrait of North Somerset**

This paper summarises the evidence given in other topic papers. Its purpose is to give a brief description of the district, its people, and facilities and list of issues which have arisen from the work on the Topic Papers.

Fuller evidence is available in the main Topic Papers which are listed below:

- Demography, health, social inclusion and deprivation
- Housing
- Economy
- Culture, Leisure and Recreation
- Retail
- Settlement function and hierarchy
- Resources (including minerals, waste, recycling, energy consumption)
- Natural environment (including climate change, biodiversity, green infrastructure, countryside, natural environment and flooding)
- Transport and communications
- Sustainable construction / design quality including heritage
- Summing up / spatial portrait

**For further information on this topic paper please contact:**

**Planning Policy Team  
Development and Environment  
North Somerset Council  
Somerset House  
Oxford Street  
Weston-super-Mare  
BS23 1TG**

**[planning.policy@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@n-somerset.gov.uk)**

## 1.0 **Our District**

### 1.1 **Location**

North Somerset covers an area of around 37,500 hectares (145 square miles). The district is south-west of Bristol abutting the Bristol City Council boundary. It has a coastline with the Severn Estuary and includes the coastal towns of Weston-super-Mare, Clevedon and Portishead. Inland is the town of Nailsea and numerous smaller villages. To the east the district adjoins the Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) area whilst to the south it includes part of the Mendip Hills adjoining both Mendip and Sedgemoor District Council areas.

### 1.2 **Physical Geography and Biodiversity**

North Somerset has a varied landscape ranging from the flat lowlands of the levels and moors to the steep slopes of the Mendip Hills. A large part of the district is characterised by alternating ridges and broad valleys with some steep wooded slopes and open rolling farmland. Extensive areas of coastal mudflats in the Severn Estuary support internationally important populations of wintering and migratory wading birds and wildfowl. Adjacent areas of low-lying levels and moors are rich in natural and historic heritage with important habitats such as grazing marsh, mudflats, salt marshes, a network of rhynes, hedgerows and old orchards. The Mendip Hills in the south are designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty and contain important habitats of limestone grasslands.

### 1.3 **Local Character and Distinctiveness**

North Somerset has a variety of settlements each with specific characteristics. Much of the area can be described as rural and the built up areas are, in the most part, developed at relatively low density. The character is heavily influenced by the natural environment, particularly the coast and topography but also by building technologies, fashion, local vernacular skill and the economy. North Somerset has 34 designated conservation areas and over 1,000 listed buildings. In all four towns the listed buildings are almost exclusively confined to the town centres where much of the early development originated.

### 1.3 **Main Settlements**

**Weston-super-Mare** is the largest of the settlements and is recognised in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) as a strategically significant city or town (SSCT). The promotion of Weston as a focus for growth is a key goal of the RSS with employment-led regeneration being a key theme for both the town centre and a major urban extension.

Traditionally seen as a seaside town the economic base of the town has weakened considerably over the last twenty years with structural changes in the tourist economy compounded by the loss of key manufactures and the closure of RAF Locking. Volume housing building to the north-east of the town with ready access to Junction 21 of the M5 has resulted in significant out commuting to better paid employment in Bristol and its north fringe.

Recent work to develop a Weston Area Development Framework and Weston Area Action Plan has identified a need for a step-change in the town's economic and development performance.

### **Clevedon**

To the north of Weston along the coast is Clevedon the second largest town in North Somerset with a population of 21,957<sup>1</sup>. It is a sedate seaside town which grew considerably in the nineteenth century. Today the town retains much of its Regency and Victorian elegance although could benefit from some regeneration in its town centre. It has a high proportion of elderly people. New employment development adjacent to the motorway junction has been created in recent years. Although it is mainly a commuter town for Bristol, it has the highest self-containment level (percentage of residents who live and work in the same town) of the towns outside Weston (45%). Any further development on the edge of the town is constrained by either Green Belt policy or flooding issues.

**Portishead** has witnessed extensive urban renaissance and regeneration in the last few years and mixes traditional buildings with modern waterside urban living. Consequently it has become a highly desirable place to live. Existing housing allocations and planning permissions will continue to ensure there is a significant supply of new homes well into the time period of the Core Strategy. Proposals to reinstate the passenger rail service to Bristol have so far failed to materialise.

**Nailsea** and most of the **villages** act mainly as dormitory settlements. Many of the settlements, particularly those closest to Bristol, experience considerable pressure for new housing development. House prices are high and finding affordable housing is increasingly a problem for local people.

### **The Bristol Fringe**

North Somerset abuts the Bristol urban area with Green Belt covering the vast majority of land up to the administrative boundary. An area of land to the SW of Bristol has been designated in the draft RSS as an area of search for an urban extension. 9,000 of the 10,500 homes planned in this area would be on green field land in North Somerset.

## 1.4 **The People**

North Somerset has a population of 195,100 people<sup>2</sup> 40% of which live in Weston-super-Mare. Population projections predict significant growth by 2026. It has a high percentage of older people, is generally a prosperous area but this masks the extremes in both deprivation and prosperity. Average income of residents is one of the highest of the south-west authorities yet for those working in North Somerset income is lower than the national average. Car ownership is high and the amount of people who travel to work by public transport is half the national average. The number of people who live and work (self-containment) in the same town is low.

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<sup>1</sup> 2001 census

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics Mid-year Estimate 2005

Generally crime is below the national average although it is concentrated in specific areas.

### 1.5 **Economy**

Whilst the West of England experiences higher levels of economic growth than the region this masks poor performance in Weston-super-Mare. Here it is recognised that a step change in perception and performance is required. Considerable efforts to deliver a turn-around are being actively pursued to ensure the town is an attractive location for employers. The council is committed to delivering a strategy of employment-led regeneration in the town which will continue throughout the time period of the Core Strategy.

The district contains Bristol International Airport, and a deep-sea west coast port (Royal Portbury Dock), both of which are important employers for North Somerset but also economic drivers for the south-west region.

Unemployment throughout the district is low and school exam results are above the national average. Although for both of these there are variations across the district.

### 1.6 **Housing**

Owner occupation is high although there are again significant variations across the district. The average house price is above the national average. House price rises in recent years have been much greater than the rise in incomes. This has inevitably contributed to affordability issues. Additionally affordable housing completions continue to fall well below the required amount. Since 2001 an average of 1,170 new dwellings has been completed each year. This will need to rise significantly to meet new government targets.

Many of the towns and villages are attractive places to live for people wishing to commute to Bristol, coupled with high achieving state schools this creates pressure for housing development in many places.

### 1.7 **Transport**

The M5 motorway runs from north to south through the district with junctions 19 to 21 at Gordano, Clevedon and Weston-super-Mare respectively. Further to the east the A38 (Bristol to Taunton) also runs north south through the district passing Bristol International Airport. Other major routes include the A371 and A368 from Weston to Churchill, the A370 Weston to Bristol and the A369 Portishead to Bristol. The mainline railway from Bristol to the south west also crosses North Somerset stopping at five stations along its route.

### 1.8 **Shopping**

Weston-super-Mare is the main focus for shopping in the district. However in comparison to other towns of similar size it is underperforming and is heavily influenced by competition from Bristol and Bath. A recent retail study forecasted the need for both additional supermarkets and comparison shopping. Whilst the town centre currently provides for the day-to-day shopping needs of its residents there is very little linking the main tourism features and events with the shopping area. A need for more bars and restaurants has been identified and in order to lift the image of Weston it is

recognised that there needs to be a change in the quality and quantity of retail and leisure provision in the town centre.

Clevedon, Nailsea and Portishead support a smaller range of shops and a need for additional retailing in Nailsea has been forecast. Yatton and Winscombe both have district centres.

#### 1.9 **Culture leisure and recreation**

Participation in sports and active recreation in North Somerset is slightly higher than the national average. However demand from commercial operators for new leisure space in Weston-super-Mare is negligible. This might be explained by the proposals for the redevelopment of the Tropicana having either 'soaked up' local interest or delayed investment in associated activities. The Tropicana will include indoor swimming, ten pin bowling, multi-screen cinema, health and fitness centre, hotel and restaurants providing an all year round venue for tourists and residents alike.

North Somerset's tourism industry has traditionally focussed on Weston-super-Mare. However, changes in tourism in recent decades have resulted in a need to redefine tourism needs. Short breaks have become more popular and people's expectations of accommodation standards and facilities are much higher. Over 6m visitors came to North Somerset in 2006 and tourism forms a significant part of the economy.

Whilst Weston-super-Mare falls within the same category as Bath and Bristol in the draft Cultural Infrastructure Strategy for the South West, the focus of activity is in Bristol. The South West, in general, falls short in terms of major events and venues compared to other countries and regions. North Somerset has 16 libraries, the North Somerset Museum Service, and two significant venues, The Playhouse and Winter Gardens. A series of major outdoor events take place regularly on the beach/seafront e.g. The Beach Race, T4 on the Beach, and the Weston Carnival.

#### 1.10 **Waste**

Currently North Somerset deals with more than 108,000 tonnes of waste. A third of this is recycled but this needs to increase if the amount of waste going to landfill is to be reduced. In terms of landfill there is a transfer station at Weston-super-Mare. The destination landfill sites are at Yanley in the north of the district and at Broadpath, Devon. The dates at which these sites are expected to reach capacity are 2008 and 2010 respectively.

#### 1.11 **Minerals**

There are currently three active quarries in North Somerset principally working carboniferous limestone. Around 1.75 million tonnes of aggregates are produced each year.

#### 1.12 **Climate change and flooding**

Significant areas of North Somerset are low-lying and are liable to flood risk. The impact of climate change and increased risk will be assessed in a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which will form part of the evidence base for this Core Strategy.

## 2.0 Issues to be addressed

Listed below are the main spatial planning issues that have been identified in the Topic Papers, Sustainable Community Strategy and Weston AAP work.

### General:

- **Population growth** – at least a 17% increase by 2026
- **Growth concentrated in specific areas** – Two urban extensions of 9,000 houses at either end of the district.
- **Coping with an older/ageing population** – and specific health issues.
- **High levels of localised deprivation** – particularly in Weston-super-Mare.
- **Huge range of inequality within the district** (health, access, housing).
- **Creating sustainable new communities** with a sense of place, purpose and local distinctiveness which are well designed but which also relate well to the wider urban area.
- **Lack of local identity** – assist in promoting the distinctiveness of North Somerset in design, support for local employment, local markets, produce, events and cultural experiences.

### Economy:

- **Achieving employment-led growth at Weston-super-Mare** - promoting economic development and regeneration in both the regeneration areas and town centre, addressing the dominance of the service sector, providing more high quality office accommodation and skilled employment.
- **The imbalance between housing and employment in the towns and villages across North Somerset** which results in out-commuting to other areas for work.
- **Ensuring the South West Bristol urban extension relates to the wider Bristol urban area** particularly to the regeneration of South Bristol.
- **Establishing the quantity and type of employment floor space required for the South West Bristol urban extension.**
- **Safeguarding enough land** of the right type to accommodate business growth and inward investment particularly in the key sectors for North Somerset.
- **Restructuring in the tourism market-** need to supporting the tourism sector as a key employment base especially at Weston-super-Mare.
- **Balancing the needs of the large businesses in the district** including the Port and Bristol International Airport, with local communities, sustainability and the environment.
- **Ensuring rural enterprises contribute effectively to the economy**, whilst minimising the environmental impacts (how people and places may be affected).

## Housing:

- **Building the allocated number of homes within the required timescale** without compromising on quality.
- **Lack of affordable housing** – both generally and for rural affordable housing, and for other specific housing needs.
- **Locating the remaining housing growth** - outside the urban extensions.
- **Phasing housing growth** particularly in relation to employment especially at Weston-super-Mare.
- **Ensuring efficient use of land to increase overall densities** but providing flexibility to achieve high quality environments and to respond to differing characteristics across the district.
- **Identifying locations for additional pitches for travellers and Gypsies.**

## Settlement function and hierarchy:

- **Establishing which towns, if any, outside Weston-super-Mare should be the focus for locally significant development-** and establish what local objectives could be pursued which would not worsen their dormitory status.
- **Establishing the rural settlements where development to meet local needs would improve their vitality and viability.**
- **Determining the green belt boundary extension.**

## Transport:

- **Congestion, high levels of commuting and increasing use of cars-**worsened by free work place and retail parking.
- **Local traffic using the M5** for example improvements needed at Junction 21.
- **Growth which could make problems worse but could also contribute to delivering improvements to the transport network.**
- **Ensuring accessibility for all to education, health and employment.**
- **Obtaining funding, prioritising and safeguarding transport schemes and facilities to 2026** for example, South Bristol Link Road, second River Avon crossing, Banwell improvements.
- **Poor public transport usage.**
- **Local road, rail and cycling constraints.**
- **Co2 and pollution from transport.**
- **Accommodating the need for parking** -particularly in high density developments.
- **Increased passengers at the Airport.**

## Culture leisure and recreation:

- **Improvements to quality and quantity of leisure, recreation and cultural facilities especially in Weston-super-Mare.**
- **Lack of regionally significant sporting, leisure and cultural facilities.**
- **The need to protect existing cultural and community facilities from alternative development.**



- **Enabling appropriately located new facilities** to meet the needs of existing and future communities including any new open spaces or sports facilities identified in the emerging Sports Pitch, Built Facilities and Green Space strategies.
- **Ensuring new development contributes towards the provision of facilities.**
- **Ensuring new facilities in the urban extensions act as a focus for community life and are phased with the development.**

#### **Retail:**

- **Establish which centres should grow or where new shopping facilities should be situated** such as within the new urban extensions.

#### **Biodiversity and Landscape:**

- **Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity** in the context of pressure for development and climate change.
- **Ensuring development reflects and supports the local landscape character.**

#### **Design:**

- **The need for increased quality of design** throughout North Somerset including sustainable eco-friendly development, innovation and design that responds appropriately to its context.
- **Ensuring effective 'place making'**, (giving places their own special identity) **prevent mediocre design** by provide a more robust design framework.
- **Ensuring the opportunity is taken to deliver excellent standards of design and construction at the urban extensions.**
- **Poor local identity in some the towns and villages** with poor urban fabric and built environment.

#### **Infrastructure:**

- Ensuring appropriate infrastructure (for example school play areas roads) is delivered to enable new development and upgrade deficiencies in existing provision.

#### **Flood Risk:**

- Ensuring that new development takes into account the increased risks of flooding as a result of changes to the climate and how this affects North Somerset.
- Protecting vulnerable areas from sea and river flooding.

**Energy:**

- Improving energy efficiency, the smarter use of new energy techniques and the reduction in energy demand to help communities move towards being carbon neutral
- Balancing the advantages that can be gained from the use of energy technologies with the possible effects on the environment, ranging from micro-generators to making use of tidal power resources of the Severn estuary.

**Waste:**

- Securing the promotion of sustainable waste management in the provision of waste treatment facilities.

**Minerals:**

- Balancing the protection of un-worked mineral resources with a strategy to ensure the continued supply for development and industrial purposes.

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**For further information please contact**

**Planning Policy**

North Somerset Council, Somerset House, Oxford Street, Weston-super-Mare BS23 1TG

E-mail: [localplan@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:localplan@n-somerset.gov.uk)

Tel: **01275 888 545**

Fax: **01275 888 569**