

North Somerset Local Plan

Pre-commencement Document

March 2020



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Initiation document setting out the proposed scope and programme for the preparation of the North Somerset Plan 2023-2038

North Somerset Council, January 2020

Introduction

1. The existing timeframe for planning documents within North Somerset is to 2026. This is the end period for the strategic policies contained in the Core Strategy and the more detailed Site Allocations and Development Management Policies plans. The Core Strategy included a commitment to an early review of the housing requirement by the end of 2018.

Background

2. The West of England Joint Spatial Plan (JSP), a joint statutory development plan document covering the four authorities of Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire, was being prepared to cover the period from 2016-2036. It set out the strategic policies for the West of England area and was submitted for examination in April 2018. Following the first round of hearings which took place in July 2019 the Inspectors wrote to the four authorities involved in the JSP stating that they do not consider the JSP to be sound, primarily due to concerns with the spatial strategy, they considered the issues they had identified as being too difficult to overcome through modifications of the plan and therefore recommended that withdrawal of the JSP was the most appropriate option.
3. On 7 January 2020 North Somerset Council formally withdrew from the JSP process and the Council will now prepare a new Local Plan for North Somerset covering strategic and non-strategic policies whilst continuing to work with neighbouring planning authorities and other bodies under the duty to cooperate. This presents a fresh start for the local plan and an opportunity to step back and reassess the strategic context and spatial strategy options for North Somerset.
4. Prior to the withdrawal of the JSP North Somerset Council had begun preparing a Local Plan in parallel with the JSP process. As such a Local Plan Issues and Options document, based on the strategic context set out in the JSP, was consulted on in September 2018. Much of the evidence and feedback from this consultation remains relevant, but the withdrawal of North Somerset Council from the JSP process allows for a new approach.



Therefore, a new options document will be consulted on in Spring 2020 which will re-launch the new Local Plan for North Somerset.

Purpose of a pre-commencement document

5. This Pre-commencement document is the notice of intent that a new Local Plan will be prepared for North Somerset for the period 2023 – 2038 and sets out its scope, methodology and programme. It will be a development plan document prepared in accordance with Regulation 18(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Duty to co-operate

6. The Council has a duty to co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries. Strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which need to be addressed. Effective and on-going joint working is integral to the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy. The Council will prepare and maintain a statement of common ground documenting the cross-boundary matters and progress in co-operation.

Scope of the North Somerset Plan

7. The plan area will be the administrative area of North Somerset Council and the plan period will be 2023-2038. This time period is consistent with the NPPF requirement for strategic policies within Local Plans to look ahead over a 15 year period from adoption. This time period may need to be reviewed dependent on progress.
8. The purpose of the Local Plan will be to deliver the number of homes needed for the district over the plan period including the necessary supporting facilities and infrastructure. There will also be a strong focus on tackling the climate change challenge, creating healthy places and addressing inequalities. The Local Plan will also review the policies and allocations in existing development plan documents (Core Strategy and Sites and Policies Plan parts 1 and 2, including waste and minerals).
9. The Local Plan will identify the spatial strategy, strategic policies and non-strategic policies. This will involve a review of the existing approach as set out in the current development plan, taking account of new priorities (such as addressing climate change), evidence and guidance (such as the housing requirement standard method) and with continuing effective co-operation on strategic planning matters.



10. The proposed strategic policies which will be contained in the Local Plan are as follows:

- **Housing Requirement:** The overall housing requirement to be accommodated in North Somerset using the standard method as the starting point
- **Addressing Climate Change:** Maximise sustainability, carbon reduction, renewable energy, focus on active travel and public transport, flood risk and coastal change, food production, greening.
- **Spatial Strategy:** The broad strategic distribution of housing and employment land/floorspace, including strategic locations and key sites.
- **Infrastructure:** Identification of strategic infrastructure proposals, including transport.
- **Green Belt:** Consider whether exceptional circumstances warrant a review of locations within the Green Belt.
- **Employment:** Employment land will be provided to attract investment, meet business needs to support the future economy and provide a range of job opportunities at accessible locations. Consideration of the role of the port and airport and employment in town centres.
- **Regeneration:** More effective and efficient use of land, conversions, new uses, housing estates and other areas.
- **Town centres and high streets:** Working with partners to bring forward brownfield sites, re-use vacant buildings and shops, increase people living and working in town centres, investment in the public realm.
- **Place-making, quality design and provision of community facilities:** Shaping attractive and healthy communities, green infrastructure, higher density at sustainable locations, raising design quality, creating character and identity, strategic gaps between or within settlements.
- **Environmental and historic conservation and enhancement:** Protection and enhancement of landscapes, wildlife and historic assets, strategic green infrastructure, AONB.
- **Minerals:** Aggregate apportionment and supply.

The strategic policies may identify broad locations for development, but it is not anticipated that they will include site allocations – these will be set out in the non-strategic section of the plan.

The duty to co-operate discussions with strategic policy-making authorities (principally the West of England) and other prescribed bodies will identify and address the strategic issues with cross-boundary implications.



11. The non-strategic policies of the Local Plan will set out the more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development. This includes site allocations, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and other development management policies.
12. The plan preparation process will assess existing evidence as well as, where appropriate, commissioning new studies or updating existing evidence bases. The evidence base for the Local Plan will include the following:
 - Authority Monitoring Report
 - Local Housing Needs Assessment
 - Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
 - Habitats Regulations Assessment
 - Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
 - Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.
 - Infrastructure Delivery Plan
 - Transport Assessment
 - Economic Development Needs Assessment
 - Viability Assessment
 - Sustainability Appraisal
 - Green Belt Assessment

Relationship to neighbourhood planning

13. North Somerset has five adopted ('made') neighbourhood development plans at Backwell (2015), Long Ashton (2015), Claverham (2018), Yatton (2019) and Congresbury (2019) with several others in preparation, and others being considered.
14. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan and must not promote less development than is set out in the strategic policies for the area. To provide clarity for future neighbourhood plans, the Local Plan will identify the housing requirements on a parish basis in the strategic policies.
15. As work on the new Local Plan progresses, and the strategic context for the neighbourhood plans changes existing neighbourhood plans may become increasingly out of date. Communities may wish to review them to take account of any implications arising, or to work with North Somerset Council to incorporate elements of neighbourhood planning into the emerging local plan.
16. It is proposed that at the start of the process there is consultation with interested parties on how the local plan and neighbourhood plans will progress in tandem. This will cover issues such as the scope of the plans, evidence, consultation and sharing of resources.



Sustainability appraisal

17. A framework for sustainability appraisal will be agreed at the beginning of the project and used to assess and inform the plan-making process. It is intended to publish a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and an interim SA on the options for consideration.

Timescales

18. The proposed timetable for the Local Plan is below, as set out in the Local Development Scheme:

NORTH SOMERSET PLAN 2023-2038: TIMETABLE AND MILESTONES	
Pre-Commencement Document (Reg 18)	March 2020
Issues and Options Consultation (Reg 18)	May – June 2020
Consultation on Draft Plan (Reg 18)	January 2021
Consultation on Pre-Submission Plan (Reg 19)	September 2021
Submission to Secretary of State (Reg 22)	December 2021
Examination Hearings Period (Reg 24/25)	April 2022
Inspector's Report	October 2022
Adoption (Reg 26)	January 2023

Consultation

19. The Local Plan will be prepared with community and stakeholder engagement in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2019). Formal consultation stages will take place over a minimum of 6 weeks. A Consultation Statement will be prepared and updated as the project progresses.



Let us know what you think

20. Views are being sought on the proposed content, scope and programme. Consultation on this pre-commencement document runs from **10 March 2020 – 22 April 2020**. If you have any comments on the Pre-commencement document you can comment [online](#) or via e-mail to planning.policy@n-somerset.gov.uk. Please let us have any comments by **22 April 2020**.

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