



North Somerset Liberal Democrats
(formerly Woodspring)

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Planning Policy Team
North Somerset Council
Somerset House
Oxford Street
Weston-s-Mare BS23 1TG

Dear Sir

Core Strategy Consultation

North Somerset Liberal Democrats wish to make the following response to the Core Strategy consultation on North Somerset Futures Local Development Framework. We accept the fact that there is a need for more housing of all types but the planning system needs to rethink how this is provided. Any development in the countryside, towns and cities must be sustainable, reduce our carbon footprint and work with nature not against it. Whilst we talk about sympathetic development, we see little results on the ground in many of the large developments recently built in North Somerset. All developers should provide sustainable developments built with low-impact materials, which improve our quality of life, provide green space for recreation and protect our wildlife corridors. With climate change, greater emphasis must be put on the health of our ecosystem – flood reduction control, carbon absorption, aquifers and soil conservation.

Q1) We question the concept of providing two urban extensions.

Any extension to the southwest of Bristol would be reliant on Bristol for employment and core facilities. The present plan is to utilise the already-congested radial roads for commuting into Bristol. The proposed South Bristol Ring Road will certainly add to this congestion. Long Ashton would be subsumed by Bristol. North Somerset must keep its own identity separate from Bristol with expansions to existing towns not villages near Bristol.

An urban extension at Weston-super-Mare would be dependent on the creation of new local employment and a reliable public transport system between the extension and town centre, (where we presume new employment would be located). Weston has its own transport problems, which will be less costly to solve than at Bristol. We believe the District Council must focus its attention on the redevelopment of the town centre in an attractive way. We see this as requiring not just a face-lift, but wholesale re-planning, (on the lines of Bristol's Harbourside development). Here again, the cost may not be bearable by a development of only 9,000 homes. Serious consideration should be given to just one urban extension in Weston-super-Mare.

Q2) We fail to see how one can 'protect and increase the distinctive natural and cultural heritage of North Somerset' and 'improving the quality of residents' by expanding Bristol into the greenbelt on North Somerset and destroying the rural nature of the villages near Bristol. We strongly support the aim of employment-led growth at Weston but development close to Bristol is not sustainable especially in transport terms. We oppose any alteration to Bristol's greenbelt.

Q3) Transport is the biggest issue in any development near Bristol. Funding should be sought to provide affordable frequent public transport not just by bus but improved rail links and alternatives such as LRT and kerb-guided rail. LRT should be considered from Bristol international Airport in to Bristol city centre and Temple meads station if passenger numbers are likely to exceed 8 million per year. Bypasses should only be provided where the intrusion of traffic has reached intolerable levels (i.e. Barrow Gurney) . Emphasis needs to be on public transport, walking and cycling, especially in high-density developments and the reduction of car use. New link roads will increase car use. Extra housing and new roads close to Bristol will only add to further overcrowding of cars on roads that cannot cope with the present commuter traffic. Whilst Bristol is also providing considerably more housing, its needs must be met from within its own boundary. We think you have identified the right economic and housing issues. An urban extension SW of Bristol does not sit well with maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and taking account of risks of flooding in this low-lying area.

Q4) Whilst we oppose removal of greenbelt around Bristol, any extension further into North Somerset should not prevent some sympathetic expansion around existing towns and villages. If greenbelt adjoining Bristol is sacrificed, a distinct identity must be kept between the city and nearby villages such as Long Ashton.

Q5) There should be sympathetic development of a cohesive nature. No one village should take the bulk of development. We support the local Plan policy H7 v).

Q6) There should be adequate affordable housing for young people and young families to enable them to stay in their local area should they wish. Allocation should be provided as part on new developments and not completely segregated.

Q7-9) It is important that North Somerset recognises its responsibilities for gypsies and travellers by providing facilities whilst being sympathetic to any nearby communities.

Q10) North Somerset should be looking for an increase in the present figure and should be aiming to bring in companies who would employ highly-skilled, well paid workers as well as continuing to employ seasonal workers in tourism around Weston-super-Mare.

Q11) There will still continue to be a high proportion of out-commuting in the villages near Bristol so the ratio of 1.5 is unrealistic in the north of the area covered by North Somerset. However, additional employment opportunities should be provided.

Q13) We should continue to reflect the rural and coastal aspects of the existing areas as distinct from a city.

Q14) If there should be any urban extension proposed close to built-up areas in Bristol (ie Highridge), this could include some high-density development with some apartments. However green areas must be incorporated into such developments. Any developments adjoining villages should be sympathetic to the existing character of the area and have a rural rather than urban style of building.

Q15) Transport provision by means other than road must be seriously considered, the cost being greatly outweighed by the benefit to the environment and the well-being of future generations.

Q16) Housing types must be distinct to each location and compliment existing buildings. There must be a large proportion of smaller properties for first-time buyers, and a range of sizes to enable people to upsize or downsize within any given area. High rise should only be used close to the city boundary. Any brown-field site must be utilised first before building on green field areas. All houses should meet the highest standards and conform with the government challenge to be zero-carbon by 2016. This includes being energy and water efficient, building with low-carbon and recycled and low-impact materials. No more 'any house, any where' developments.

Q17) There is a need to provide new homes with green space and larger gardens, linear parks and open recreational space. There is a high need for more allotment provision. There should be no encroachment into the greenbelt between Long Ashton and Bristol. This corridor must be protected to preserve the rural nature as distinct from the urban area of Bristol.

Q18) We do not see any one scenario as being appropriate. Whilst much of the consultation document talks of an 'urban extension SW of Bristol' we feel that sensitive development in a number of villages would be less damaging than mass slaughter of one village.

Q19) We have no opinion on this issue.

We believe that concentration of housing near Bristol will only encourage more out-commuting and traffic chaos. Development of housing and business parks further south in the area would be more beneficial to the economy of North Somerset. Attracting employment to Weston-s-Mare can best be achieved by town centre improvements. Developments must be public transport based and not car based.

Jean Lord
Secretary, North Somerset Liberal Democrats