

Somer Valley 2nd Stakeholder Workshop Report

Bath and North East Somerset Council

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Quality information

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council was successful in achieving a funding bid from West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to commission Strategic Planning work to assist in the formulation of its new Local Plan. AECOM has been commissioned to undertake the strategic planning commission for the Somer Valley Area.
- 1.2 There are two phases of the studies, the Strategic Place Assessments which are high level and cover a broad area of search looking at character and capacity issues such as ecology, landscape, transport, historic environment, and the development potential of particular locations. The second phase will produce updated or new Strategic Planning Frameworks for identified development areas. These are more detailed and place specific and provide the basis for allocating sites within the Local Plan.
- 1.3 The workshops form part of an engagement activity to capture the opinions of local representatives to guide new development ideas and locations and gain insight into to what will best improve people's lives in the surrounding areas.
- 1.4 The second set of B&NES stakeholder workshops were held in July 2023 to inform the Strategic Planning Frameworks for the key study areas.
- 1.5 This Stakeholder Workshop Report will outline the key findings and ideas from the second workshop, broken down into themes that align with the Council's new Corporate Strategy, to ensure all views have been accurately recorded.

2. Methodology

2.1 A stakeholder workshop was held on the 26 of July 2023 to cover the areas within Somer Valley with various stakeholders including representatives from local third sector groups, town and parish councils, and local ward councillors.

2.2 The purpose of this workshop was to:

- Gain feedback on the emerging placemaking principles; and
- Identify opportunities for the future.

2.3 The session started with a welcome and introduction from B&NES, followed by details on the Local Plan process and an outline of the development of the district-wide spatial strategy.

2.4 The new B&NES Corporate Strategy 2023-2027 was summarised. This consists of:

- One overriding purpose: to improve people's lives
- Two core policies: Tackling the climate and ecological emergency and giving people a bigger say
- Three principles: Prepare for the future; deliver for local residents; and focus on prevention.
- Four values: bold, empowered, transparent and supportive.

2.5 The Corporate Strategy comprises nine priorities to deliver the three aforementioned principles:

- Delivering for local residents:
 - The right homes in the right places - improving availability of affordable housing, accessible to local jobs and services.
 - More travel choices – making it easier for people to walk, wheel and use public transport to reduce transport emissions.
 - Clean, safe and vibrant neighbourhoods - working with local communities to promote civic pride and preventative approaches.
- Focusing on prevention:
 - Support for vulnerable adults and children – securing safe, effective services that meet the needs of our changing population.
 - Delivering for our children and young people – working with our partners to narrow the early years attainment gap.
 - Healthy lives and places – working with health and other partners to tackle inequalities, promote healthy places, and support people to live healthier lives.
- Preparing for the future:
 - Good jobs - aiming to increase the median wage in a regenerative economy.
 - Skills to thrive - an inclusive economy where prosperity is shared.

- Cultural life - valuing and developing its contribution to Bath and North East Somerset.

2.6 The Placemaking principles synthesised specifically for Somer Valley are as follows:

- Become climate resilient, carbon neutral and nature positive by 2030;
- Create a Nature Recovery network;
- Generate countryside ecological corridors;
- Enhance the access to the countryside;
- Interact with nature and promote health and wellbeing;
- Maintain the existing character;
- Protect and enhance the heritage assets;
- Maximise the delivery of affordable housing;
- Provide a variety of jobs, services and community facilities;
- Promote active modes of transport;
- Build a network of fully integrated transport exchange hubs;
- Enable an inclusive transport system; and
- Seek opportunities for large scale renewable energy generation.

2.7 The workshop participants engaged in two sets of open discussion sessions to provide feedback on the above placemaking principles and to identify future opportunities related to the climate and ecological emergency, health and wellbeing, local economy, sustainable transport and housing need.

3. Outcomes

- 3.1 The workshop structure consisted of open discussion on feedback for the placemaking principles (listed in paragraph 2.6) and identification of possible development locations, drawing upon known Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) sites.

Feedback on Placemaking Principles

- 3.2 The group asked if B&NES Council saw any of the principles as a surprise. B&NES responded to confirm that the principles tally well with what the Council is looking to achieve.
- 3.3 The group felt that some of these principles would not work on a parish-by-parish basis and that some were seen to conflict with each other. B&NES Council confirmed that these will be considered on a wider scale across the Somer Valley area as a whole.
- 3.4 The group expressed that there needs to be a collaborative approach between the wider and smaller councils to ensure that the benefit from the development goes to the appropriate places and to better understand how development will be delivered across boundaries. For example, further development will impact travel across boundaries and therefore there will be a need for greater collaboration.

Become climate resilient, carbon neutral and nature positive by 2030

- 3.5 Concerns were raised about expansion causing flooding and further issues with run-off. The existing run-off attenuation is already deemed to be insufficient. This concerns climate resilience but also a desire for appropriate supporting infrastructure.
- 3.6 A query was raised about how grey water could be used and if there is an opportunity to generate power - either at a small or large scale.
- 3.7 After representatives reviewed the key principles, there was a discussion if all the principles were relevant for the Somer Valley. A concern was placemaking principles were primarily 'Bath centric' and were not focused on the smaller settlements in the Somer Valley. When considering the principles surrounding 'pollution', the attitude was that Somer Valley is not a primary contributor within B&NES.

Create a Nature Recovery Network

- 3.8 Participants expressed that careful thinking needs to be taken around nature recovery, rather than losing land for nature to housing.
- 3.9 A similar concern was that agricultural land should not be lost to housing. Representatives are aware of the importance of eating locally and supporting a local sustainable food chain. While they raise that local produce is more expensive, they recognise that farming will be important in the future.
- 3.10 The group want to encourage the relationship between the environment and the residents. Representatives are concerned that greenspaces could be lost due to

development. Instead, development should deliver greenspace and promote access to it. There was an agreement on the possibility for a community orchard.

Generate countryside ecological corridors

3.11 Nothing specific was mentioned regarding this placemaking principle.

Enhance the access to the countryside

3.12 Access to nature needs to be maintained and properly joined up.

3.13 Public transport is identified as having a dual benefit to enable people to access towns as well as the countryside.

3.14 Representatives are proud of their countryside and want to ensure residents can easily access it. A barrier to accessing the countryside is busy roads which can often make access for people, especially children, unsafe. An agreed possible solution included pedestrian crossing and bridges. An area discussed was access to the countryside and water side valley.

Interact with nature and promote health and wellbeing

3.15 There should be greater priority for active travel modes, enabling walking and wheeling in a safe environment.

3.16 There was encouragement of liveable neighbourhood principles and implemented in rural areas to mitigate fast moving traffic that deters active travel and makes people feel unsafe.

3.17 Promoting healthy eating and understanding of the benefits of better eating was mentioned.

Maintain the existing character

3.18 It was identified that there may be a stronger community feel in the smaller settlements.

3.19 A feeling that the sense of community/place is lost when developments are built causing coalescence, as such conversations should be had to ensure boundaries are maintained. However, it was noted that coalescence can lead to the appropriate infrastructure being introduced.

3.20 New development sites need to accommodate and go hand in hand with the current infrastructure. There was concern that new residents will increase traffic and congestion in the area.

Protect and enhance the heritage assets

3.21 Nothing specific was mentioned regarding this placemaking principle.

Maximise the delivery of affordable housing

- 3.22 It was noted that a planning policy is currently being developed on affordable housing.
- 3.23 There were queries about the definition of affordable housing – social vs affordable vs shared ownership and other tenures. A mix of affordable housing is required, and the right type in the right place.
- 3.24 It was queried that if a settlement is considered uneconomically viable (for example, no shops, no services or no public transport), how would this fit with the placemaking principles. It was suggested that people will be left isolated if they do not have a car, and that development should viably and sustainably bring improvements and growth to the smaller settlements if it is to be supported.
- 3.25 Concerns were raised around delivering appropriately sized houses. It was acknowledged that there is a need for additional housing that benefits the existing residents (such as smaller houses that enable people to downsize, or smaller houses that are more affordable) such that new residents can utilise existing housing. This needs to be combined with appropriate public transport to enable these retained residents to retain their mobility. It was suggested that homes are typically built to be ‘in character’ (3-4 bedrooms houses which are actually bigger than needed). Concerns were raised regarding older persons having to decide to move to either smaller homes or assisted homes.
- 3.26 As part of the affordable housing plan they are also looking at the overall housing need, mix and density (as well as affordability type).

Provide a variety of jobs, services and community facilities

- 3.27 Requests were made that healthcare and schools are provided along with new housing.
- 3.28 There is a desire to ensure economic growth is encouraged without encouraging private car use.
- 3.29 There were concerns surrounding what the impact of additional residents will cause for Councillors and community governance review, for example boundary reviews and the number of Councillors required.
- 3.30 Services and jobs need to be the right type in the right place. Encouraging employment that is skilled but not low density and encouraging significant amounts of car use is important. There was support for technology industries with good internet connections.
- 3.31 It was queried whether there is potential for developments to generate employment, particularly in construction. It was suggested that developers could be required to either hire local tradespeople or provide a number of local apprenticeships.
- 3.32 There was a desire that new developments also provide employment opportunities but there was resistance to huge factories and warehouses that would need motorway access and to be served by HGV. It was preferred to provide hot desking facilities for smaller businesses.

- 3.33 It was put forward that individual small developments should be integrated and comprehensively planned to ensure that smaller developments cannot be introduced without the inclusion of supporting services and infrastructure.
- 3.34 The group highlighted several facilities which will need further investment and development including police services and medical facilities.
- 3.35 There was a discussion about the type of workers that developments would bring into the local area. As settlements are close proximity to the major urban areas of Bath and Bristol there was a concern that developments would only bring congestion to these routes by those commuting to Bristol or Bath. There is a concern that new residents would not contribute to the local economy.

Promote active modes of transport

- 3.36 It was noted that the greenway is a major attraction but difficult to access via active travel.
- 3.37 Cyclists would usually choose to cycle on the road rather than a diverted pavement route that is not well maintained. There was agreement that cyclists and pedestrians should be segregated but noted that this is difficult to manage as pedestrians often do not follow the segregated routes that they have been provided with.
- 3.38 An interesting point was made about how the choice of school can often lead to more people travelling, rather than encouraging people to utilise their local school that may be within active travel distance.
- 3.39 There was an awareness that not everyone will want to or be able to integrate active travel into their day-to-day travel behaviour. There was a concern that parents would not feel comfortable allowing their children to cycle on the roads due to safety. A solution discussed was to encourage those more able to cycle which would reduce traffic for those road users who are unable to mode shift. The elderly will not want to considerably increase their active travel and parents often drive as it is the most convenient and safest method for picking up children from school.
- 3.40 The group recognised the opportunity to improve the current cycle network. Improving access to and length of the greenway would promote cycling and make this mode of travel safer for users.

Build a network of fully integrated transport exchange hubs

- 3.41 There is some concern that there has already been some development that has resulted in people being 'trapped' in their village as there is no public transport.
- 3.42 People often drive to the Two Tunnels cycle path and then cycle to Bath; this causes congestion by those who drive and park up. It was asked whether there could be better active travel connections provided to enable more sustainable access.
- 3.43 Representatives are concerned about the number of bus services which have been cut in B&NES. A proposed solution was to create bus hubs and encourage active travel to these hubs which would provide bus routes to key locations such as Bristol and Bath.

Enable an inclusive transport system

- 3.44 A point was raised that places, services and transport should have an accessibility focus to ensure that everyone (walkers, wheelers, and those with mobility aids) are able to utilise all services.
- 3.45 There should be a range of travel opportunities for those who are less mobile and may not want/be able to actively travel.
- 3.46 It was noted that the level of traffic makes it dangerous to cycle around the Charleston areas near Two Tunnels.
- 3.47 There was concern that Quiet Routes will result in roads closing to traffic which will only displace the traffic and rat running to other routes.
- 3.48 Single track country roads that link two major roads often end up congested with people avoiding congestion on the larger routes. These routes are also sometimes used by horses, cyclists and walkers. There are safety concerns around pinch points created by cars passing other road users.

Seek opportunities for large scale renewable energy generation

- 3.49 Representatives respected B&NES Climate Emergency and were comfortable with potential renewable development projects. While there was a mixed amount of enthusiasm, the group were recognised that potential for renewable sites where land use was unsuited for housing.
- 3.50 Battery storage was raised as a concern, particularly if more electric vehicles are being brought into the area. It was suggested that solar panels plus battery storage could be contained within a local development such that it offloads the National Grid.
- 3.51 There were concerns that large scale renewable energy, particularly large scale solar and wind, will take up land and be unsightly. Concerns were raised about what 'large scale' actually means, for example what the threshold is. Small scale was perceived to refer to rooftop solar or measures on a house-by-house basis. Large scale could relate to district heating and electric systems that serve small settlements rather than house by house basis.
- 3.52 It was queried if coal mines or rivers could be used for ground source heat pumps for a heating district.
- 3.53 It was queried if smaller wind turbines could be used, for example ones that are more localised.
- 3.54 Anaerobic digestion and recycled products generating methane for generators/gas was mentioned, and whether heat could be produced for heat networks for smaller residential networks and district heating.
- 3.55 It was queried if there are there any carbon capture opportunities.
- 3.56 The role of coal mines in the area was discussed and whether they are purely heritage or a future opportunity.
- 3.57 It was suggested that grey water should be captured and used rather than just being run-off, and whether it c be used for power (whether on the 'large scale' or 'small scale').

Delivering for our children and young people

- 3.58 Whilst not a placemaking principle, significant discussion was held around provision for young people and children. There should be opportunities for young adults to have an outlet that isn't antisocial.
- 3.59 Providing for children is crucial, ensuring there are green spaces for people to play. This is an issue in rural areas where there aren't pavements routing to the play areas, so people need to drive. They are often far from where people live and not accessible.
- 3.60 The funding is from the parish and sometimes there isn't the land or funding to provide facilities for children. Spaces that are available are at risk of flooding aren't usable. Difficult to provide for different age groups when you have limited spaces.
- 3.61 Outside gyms as well as playgrounds. In villages there is a focus on under 10 but then a lot of people miss out on potential facilities.
- 3.62 Housing developments need to be big enough and properly designed such that people can actively travel into the associated village, there are provisions for children etc., the place isn't used as a rat run and that the development is big enough such that there is enough funding and space for a full children's playground and field. This is preferable to lots of small pockets of housing that are added to existing areas, and the appropriate infrastructure is not properly delivered. A more comprehensive approach can sometimes be taken for larger developments (transport and schools).
- 3.63 Focussing on prevention with good links on education and training and things for young people to do, for example youth clubs. Better education, particularly around diet and nutrition may help with obesity.
- 3.64 New development should provide facilities for young people (teenagers). There is a concern that with the lack of things to do, such as youth clubs, there could be an increase in anti-social behaviour. A solution on what should be done was to conduct discussion and line of communication with local sixth form students to get a better understanding of what residents want and what they demand from their community.

Identification of possible HELAA Locations

- 3.65 There was discussion about capacity within existing villages and could the development be proportional to the size of the village and the appropriate amount of infrastructure be provided to support as well.

Peasedown Saint John (PSJ)

- There was concern that this area shouldn't be increased much further across the link road as this could cause severance issues but there is an increased requirement for employment in this area. Possible opportunity for solar farms south of PSJ as well as more residential buildings
- The scale of any development south of bypass would essentially create a new bypass. The site to the north could enable some better access to the centres of town.

- A 'Hub and Spoke' model could be introduced into some areas providing for services across a wider area.
- Old Bath Road is a busy rat run.
- South - the HELAA sites located south of Peasedown along the A367 provides a suitable location for development due to the existing transport infrastructure. The A367 provides good access to Bath. However, representatives feel development here would feel like a new settlement and not be an extension of PSJ.
- South west (HELAA site near woodland) - Development at this site would blend into the existing settlement, in keeping with the town. Residents would benefit from existing transport infrastructure with bus service along the A367.
- Church Road - new housing development at this site would blend into existing settlement.
- To accommodate housing developments the doctors' surgery and pedestrian access will need to be improved.
- A popular development idea amongst the representatives was the provision of a transport hub. Located west of Peasedown (near junction A367-Bath Road), the transport hub would connect Peasedown and nearby settlements to accessible by active modes of travel but also a car park to accommodate for the older residents acting as a P&R. The hub could offer a fast and a local bus - the fast bus routes along the A367, operating like a train with fewer stops connecting Peasedown to Bath. The local bus would instead operate within Peasedown with frequent stops.
- To access this transport hub, the level of safety needs to be addressed on the A367. West of Peasedown requires better integrated traffic. Due to the speed of traffic, it is not safe for drivers and pedestrian. In 2021, there was a fatal incident and so the group recognised the need for better safer pedestrian crossings. Road improvements are required as well as stopping the active rat run along the Old Bristol road from Radstock.
- Needs to be improved footpaths/ pavements connecting neighbouring settlements: Turnley, Timsbury to Peasedown.

Radstock

- It was noted that the primary school is difficult to access, particularly from Clandown. It was suggested that a new access route be explored, potentially as part of a new development.
- Stakeholders asked if there is the potential for a country park, noting the opportunity for an existing green space .
- Farming land to the south of Radstock is also a social/meeting point area. Preserving access to the river valley is important but also providing a gateway to employment.
- The HELAA site located south east of Radstock along the A362 has demand for allotment and would be inappropriate for development due to the badger habitats.

- A Roman burial site is located north Radstock which may limit the possibility to develop – this will need to be looked into.
- North Radstock Ridge line would be a suitable location of wind turbines. While representatives spoke of the expected disapproval of the view, they were more favourable for this HELAA site to be used for renewable generation than for housing.
- West Radstock is contentious location for housing. Representatives highlight that it is a greenspace enjoyed by residents and dog walkers with good views. Secondly, there is a 'traffic pinch point' with existing congestion at an A367 junction. Further housing located West Radstock would worsen this existing problem. Due to green social benefit and existing congestion, representatives say it should not be considered for development.
- Representatives are concerned about losing farming land west of Radstock to renewable generation. They want to keep their local food supply. A focus was to development brownfield sites, not farmland.
- A location suggested for development was near the industrial estate. Representatives want to enhance the area, improve site access and promote employment for the local economy. As part of the placemaking principles, there is interest to provide a greenspace and improve the environment around this site.
- One site which was discussed as the most feasible location for housing development was located behind the library. It has active travel connections through the greenway and is located along the bus route.
- Representatives had a desire to improve bus connectivity between settlements. A Townbus was suggested to improve the connection between Midsomer Norton and Radstock to improve the overall economic economy within Somer Valley.
- It was suggested to build a bypass between Peasedown St John and Midsomer Norton along the Fosseyway. This would avoid the pinch point and congestion going through Radstock with the road going around Radstock joining the A367 along a HELAA site. This road adjustment could also address the rat run along the Old Bristol Road.

Haydon

- Has the potential for a small development but noted high land value.

Westfield

- Areas not appropriate other than for employment or open areas.

Midsomer Norton

- It was noted that some surrounding areas are not accessible, either due to the greenway, watercourse or topography.

- Providing better access from the A362 could enable some additional residential development.
- There is better walking and wheeling access from Radstock.
- Development sites should be located between Midsomer Norton and Radstock with additional transport infrastructure benefit current and future residents as well as connecting the towns together. This was more desirable than adding houses on the outskirts of settlements.
- It was suggested to expand the greenway to create an orbital cycle route increasing active transport between settlements. A 'land train' would run parallel to the greenway further improve sustainable modes of transport and connecting the towns.
- Provide a town bus service connecting the four towns together. This should be a local service to improve economic growth within the Somer Valley area: Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Westfield. The local bus service would make use of the transport hub discussed earlier in this note.

Farrington Gurney

- Felt to be less constrained compared to other areas.
- A362 could be improved to encourage pedestrian and cycle facilities, and would enable Farrington Gurney to expand and have more residential areas.

Temple Cloud

- More residential areas could be unlocked if provided with better public transport connections.

Clutton

- Areas to the west of the A37 identified as needing better employment.

Poulton

- The centre is already struggling with congestion.
- Investment in current infrastructure would need to be considered for any possible development in Poulton. South Poulton sewage system was a concern raised, as it currently operates at maximum capacity.

Littleton and Hallatrow

- Bottlenecks occur on the A39, felt that a better bus service that connected all the villages would be greatly beneficial and encourage people to mode shift and mitigate congestion.

Fosseway

- There might be a new road that could be provided or a viaduct. Desire expressed for a railway in the area.

