

# Whitchurch Village Area 2<sup>nd</sup> Stakeholder Workshop Report

Bath and North East Somerset Council

October 2023

### Quality information

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### Revision History

<b>Revision</b>	<b>Revision date</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Authorized</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Draft	11/08/2023				
Final	12/10/2023				

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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 Whitchurch Village 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 27 July 2023 in Whitchurch Village with various stakeholders including representatives from the Whitchurch Village Council, Whitchurch Village Action Group, and the Whitchurch Ward Councillor.

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 Whitchurch Village are as follows:

- Become climate resilient, carbon neutral and nature positive by 2030;
- Create a Nature Recovery network;
- Protect the green buffer between the village and the city;
- Preserve and enhance the village identity;
- Protect and enhance the heritage assets and their settings;
- Create easier access to open spaces and countryside;
- Enhance health and well-being;
- Promote active modes of transport;
- Maximise the delivery of affordable housing;
- Provide a variety of jobs, services and community facilities;
- Build a network of fully integrated transport exchange hubs; and
- Enable an inclusive transport system.

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 a general initial discussion, feedback on placemaking principles (listed in paragraph 2.6), the Whitchurch survey, lessons learned (from the development between HorseWorld and central Whitchurch Village) alongside an update on South East Bristol Orbital Low Carbon Corridor (SEBOLCC) published by B&NES Council in July 2023.

### Feedback on Placemaking Principles

- 3.2 An overarching comment was that there was no mention of the Green Belt in the synthesized placemaking principles for Whitchurch Village. This included protection of the Green Belt as well as the Green Buffer between Stockwood and Bristol as well as Whitchurch and the surrounding fields.

### Inclusive transport systems

- 3.3 Whitchurch Village is located at the top of a hill, which create challenges to walk and cycle to and from.
- 3.4 There is currently a large population of over 65s who are unlikely to use active travel, improving the bus service should be emphasised. Buses are required to be more regular, more reliable, and easy to get on and go to the right place without having to connect at Bristol bus station. There is currently no direct connection to Keynsham.
- 3.5 A comprehensive approach is needed between the Local Authorities to achieve efficient bus routes. Smaller transport hubs will be beneficial to enable people to better access the bus network.
- 3.6 The pavements are too narrow in some areas within the village and, as such, they don't offer attractive walking routes. The village would benefit from reducing the heavy traffic.
- 3.7 Electric car charging points should be part of the new plans to ensure that charging points are in the correct places. Solar panels are encouraged on new development to support this infrastructure.
- 3.8 The village has recently grown almost by 50%. The village is mainly connected by lanes rather than roads and they are not sufficient to accommodate the existing level of traffic. For instance, Norton Lane, doesn't provide safe environment for pedestrians due to traffic. Slowing the traffic along lanes would encourage residents to walk and cycle more.
- 3.9 The A37 causes severance through Whitchurch.
- 3.10 The attendance questioned whether there is possibility of introducing a railway line along the A37.

### Vibrant neighbourhoods

- 3.11 The community feels split between different authorities i.e., being split between two police stations.



3.12 Many local facilities and services are oversubscribed, and it is difficult to get appointments at some health facilities. More shops, schools and surgeries are required to support the existing residents as well as any future development. Whitchurch is between the catchment of two secondary schools. Stakeholders explained that the Co-op carried out a full survey to determine whether a shop could be located in the village, but the ear marked site was allocated for housing instead.

3.13 Any future development should be supported by the provision of additional community facilities.

### Right homes right places

3.14 Bungalows and three-bedroom houses are the most desired types of housing, but are identified as not being the most affordable. It was highlighted that housing type suitability and development accessibility should be prioritised in future developments.

3.15 The Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) sites surrounding the Whitchurch Village create potential vulnerability for the area to generate speculative development.

3.16 The attendants of the workshop raised their opinion of the village not being suitable for student housing for Bristol Students.

### Affordable Housing

3.17 Affordable housing is viewed as less of a concern in the area. However, more affordable housing for local people would be beneficial. It was commented that young people cannot afford to stay in the village and older people want to downsize to bungalows. This would release housing for families, whilst allowing them to stay in the village. It was noted that the HorseWorld development was intended to have 40% affordable housing allocated to local residents, but that this was not provided locally.

### Support for vulnerable adults and children

3.18 Providing homes for over 65s as well as families with children with additional needs was flagged as important.

## Whitchurch Survey

3.19 The parish councillors conducted a survey to provide some background context on the village. The survey was held in April/May 2023 and it has a 30% response rate. The survey results indicated the following points.

- Many of the respondents were retired residents, having lived in the village for more than 20 years.
- The rate of employment is reasonable, but most people drive to work, particularly as they feel the bus route is disconnected along the A37. Most commute to Bristol, typically north or south.
- Unemployment rates are low, but jobs consist of typically low-grade employment. There are few jobs in the area and dentists are the major employer.

- There is an active community with community facilities used to high capacity. A high proportion of cars per household was identified. Many respondents felt that the bus was not fit for purpose. 98% of survey responders did not want further development of the village and want the Green Belt to remain protected.

## Lessons Learned (from the development between HorseWorld and central Whitchurch Village)

- 3.20 The 'HorseWorld' development refers to a housing development build on land that HorseWorld, a local equestrian charity, sold to a developer in spring 2018. Planning permission was approved in 2016<sup>1</sup>. Many of the homes on this site were sold in summer 2018, autumn 2019 and spring 2020 (Rightmove data).
- 3.21 Over 200 homes were eventually built, increasing the size of the village by 50%. The development did not provide sufficient community infrastructure to accommodate this growth.
- 3.22 The workshop attendants raised their concerns toward potential further growth.
- 3.23 Sleep Lane is used as short cut which causes additional traffic congestion. Closing some of the through routes to enable local traffic only and introducing pedestrian and cycle only lanes would be beneficial.
- 3.24 The many of the schools within the area are full in capacity. Any new development in the area must provide new community facilities such as new schools and childcare services.

## Update on South East Bristol Orbital Low Carbon Corridor (SEBOLCC), July 2023

- 3.25 Proposals for this corridor were originally set out in the West of England Joint Transport Study (JTS) in October 2017. The JTS identified poor infrastructure and public transport around south east Bristol and serving the surrounding area. It concluded that the lack of any orbital connection forces traffic onto local roads, residential streets and the already heavily congested A4, making it more difficult to reallocate road space to sustainable modes such as Mass Transit and other low carbon travel options. This results in high flows and congestion on the Bath Road, A4174 West Town Lane, A37 Wells Road, Whitchurch Village, Queen Charlton, and Keynsham.
- 3.26 B&NES is not actively promoting the SEBOLCC scheme, but will positively engage with WECA and Bristol City Council to ensure that schemes which come forward to address strategic transport issues are aligned with our Climate and Ecological Emergency Declarations, which form key components of the Corporate Strategy. Since the JLTP4's adoption in March 2020 B&NES has not undertaken further analysis or technical work on SEBOLCC.
- 3.27 West of England Combined Authority is starting to develop a new JLTP, with public consultation planned in Spring 2024. B&NES Council affirm that any

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insidermedia.com/news/south-west/sale-of-land-for-97-home-development-finalised>

proposals or carry over of previous proposals by WECA that affect Whitchurch Village and environs will need to thoroughly demonstrate to that:

- they are complimentary to regional strategic transport proposals;
- they do not increase motor vehicle traffic;
- increase pollution;
- represent loss of valuable green space;
- respect the green belt;
- create ecological harm;
- move congestion from one area to another; and
- that they fully accord with our Corporate Strategy to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

