

The North Somerset Villages Alliance response to the Joint Spatial Plan

North Somerset Villages Alliance (NSVA) was formed in May 2016 and includes representatives from the Residents Action Groups serving the Service and Infill Villages of Churchill and Langford, Claverham, Congresbury, Sandford, Winscombe and Yatton. We also have established links with other groups including Backwell.

The JSP is a large, complex document, covering four unitary authorities. For that reason, we will only comment on the areas that affect us, the service and infill villages of North Somerset. Not including other places should not be taken as approval, however, only that we do not feel sufficiently well informed to pass an opinion.

1. Housing numbers

1.1 The main thrust of the rationale underpinning the JSP is the need to provide a specific number of houses by 2036. This has been calculated to be 105,000 of which it is postulated 66,000 are already in the pipeline leaving a notional shortfall of 39,000 which must be supplied via local plans in allocated HMAs (housing market areas)

NSVA is concerned that if there is indeed a genuine need for an additional 105,000 houses over the next 20 years, these figures are not a true reflection of the real shortfall. NSC's predicted housing numbers have now been found to be unreliable in two recent appeals, with the inspectors agreeing that the buffer should be set at 20% rather than 5%. If the JSP's predictions do not reflect this, the 39,000 shortfall could be much higher.

1.2 The plan at the moment is to have 14,600 on brownfield sites, leaving 25,000 to go on green field land, something the plan admits will be difficult. The solution in North Somerset appears to be 3,600 at Nailsea/Backwell and a new village of 5,400 between Banwell and Churchill to be served by a new M5 / A 38 junction and a bypass. A further 1000 will go around Weston Super Mare. Given that the problems of finding sustainable sites has already been accepted we are very concerned there appears to be no contingency plan for an even worse case scenario.

It seems that the green belt is to remain intact. But given that NSC has recently agreed that a sub-committee should be set up to examine the green belt issue, surely this needs to be taken into account when formulating the JSP. We would like to see a commitment to a proper review of the Green Belt before any final decisions are made.

1.3 We must question the basic assumption made by the JSP: the assumption that there will be a population growth of 185,000 (16.4%) over the next 20 years. This is based on the highly questionable claim that there will be significant economic growth. Given current forecasts of economic challenges facing the UK in light of the BREXIT decision, the driver which requires such massive housing growth within in West of England needs to be validated before the housing numbers proposed by the JSP can be considered realistic and valid.

14. We must also question the disproportionate number of houses to be allocated to NSC. NSC seems to be being required to take 10,000 out of the total of 36,100 new homes proposed for strategic development locations.

2. New village proposal

The proposal to build a development of 5,400 homes around a new Banwell bypass and M5 junction worries NSVA greatly. Even if both these very major, complex roadworks could be begun sooner than the 15 to 20 years some have predicted as likely the delay involved prior to the construction of the housing aspect would still leave our villages at the mercy of random development applications such as we are at present experiencing.

2a Strategic Gaps

NSVA firmly believes that the concept of strategic gaps between villages espoused by NSC needs to be actively promoted by the JSP. Sandford and Churchill are already being swamped by approved developments of over 200 new homes. If the above scheme were to go ahead it would inevitably lead to the loss of all three, Churchill, Sandford and Banwell as separate villages. The JSP needs to address how the separate identities of these villages is to be maintained. There should be a clear definition of what sort of development would be approved outside settlement boundaries.

2b Traffic

While a Banwell bypass is much needed to relieve the present level of congestion through the village an additional 5,400 dwellings, all needing to use private cars, would quickly overwhelm any benefits accruing from a bypass with both the A371 and A38 having to cope with a significantly increased amount of traffic.

2c Sustainability

The JSP is clear that new homes should ideally be close to jobs and services with access to alternate means of travel other than private vehicles. This proposed development is a long way from Bristol, or even Weston Super Mare, the two most likely sources of employment. As there is no nearby rail link or reliable public transport this will lead to many more miles being travelled with increased pollution.

This site is clearly not sustainable on many levels.

3. Green Belt

We note that the Plan again protects the Green Belt (except in exceptional circumstances) at the expense of green fields. NSVA must express its concern that the loss of valuable agricultural land, plus strategic gaps between villages are being put before use of at least one area of Green Belt which is neither of these. We are aware of the Taylor Wimpey proposal for three new villages on land identified as the Vale, West of Long Ashton. This land is already crossed by major roads, including the nearly complete South Bristol link road, and hosts a landfill site and a golf course. It is near Bristol and all the transport links leading into and out of it, as well as the new Metro bus service, at least one Park and Ride and several cycle routes. Development here would not swamp the existing settlements but

would deliver much needed housing numbers to fulfill North Somerset's requirement identified in the JSP. The houses would be in an area people want to live and is a patently sustainable location. We also understand that construction could begin much quicker than the Banwell proposal. It is our belief that the trade - off between this relatively small section of North Somerset's Green Belt for the retention of valuable assets in the rural areas is one worth making. Hopefully the sub-committee to be set up by NSC to review the situation regarding the use of Green Belt land will ensure that common sense prevails. We repeat our request made above for a review of the whole of the Green Belt.

4. Consultation

We do not believe that the consultation process has been sufficiently inclusive. Very few residents have been aware of the consultation events within North Somerset.

I sincerely hope that the responses we have made, as well as those from other community groups and the CPRE are taken into serious consideration for this review. I look forward to seeing the changes proposed reflected in the next draft document.

Mary Short,

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