



## North Somerset corporate plan and budget survey

**Closing date for return questionnaires is Monday 16 October 2023**

Every four years the council develops a Corporate Plan. This is the council's overarching strategic document. It sets out our vision and ambitions for the area and for the organisation.

As part of our commitment to consulting and engaging with residents and stakeholders, we want to find out what is important to you and what you would like to see in the plan. We'd also like your views on some questions to help set our budget which supports the plan.

You can give your views by answering the questions below, you can also answer online by visiting our website (<https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/consult.ti>)

Please do not enter any personal information or anything that could identify you in this survey.

Firstly, we would like to ask your views about our visions to be Open, Fair and Green.

### **Q1. Can you please tell us what being an open council means to you:**

The public needs access to information that decisions are based on. **The Seven Principles of Public Life/ the 'Nolan principles'**, are the basis of the ethical standards expected of public office holders. E.g. "***Openness - Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.***" And "***1.6 Honesty - Holders of public office should be truthful***" [1] These should be the starting points and stated in the consultation.

NSC should be clear about specific plans and ensure the public are aware and involved in the process before decisions are made.

The Corporate Plan isn't as open as it could be. For example, p7, Opportunities "***Weston-super-Mare – our largest town is set to become the second biggest settlement in the West of England over the next decade.***" Second to where? (WSM population 82K - Clevedon 21K - Portishead 26K). At the Town Hall on Wed 04 October Mike Bell (Leader of North Somerset Council) confirmed WSM will be second to **Bristol** i.e. greater than Bath (whose current population is 94K!) Why is this not clearly stated in the Corporate Plan? WSM is down the road from Bleadon. Even if Bath doesn't grow WSM population may need to increase by 12K? Is this realistic and it doesn't take into account Bath growing. NSC plans to build 15K houses over next 15 years, approx. 36K people, a third of that growth will be in WSM, how will this scale of development effect rural land and associated communities, culture, farmers, food security?

NSC's new Local Plan has not been published yet, will there be strategic gaps to protect rural communities such as Bleadon (e.g. from Bleadon Hill and Hospital roundabout WSM)? Where is NSC's unpublished Rural Strategy in relation to this plan? Catherine Gibbons (NSC Deputy Leader) confirmed that this would be released to the public in the next couple of weeks, but why after the associated Corporate Plan consultation has ended?

How does the Corporate Plan fit with partnerships with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), seemingly with a similar role to disbanded former JSP group, that aimed to "***... identify the new housing requirement for North Somerset and new strategic growth areas and infrastructure requirements?***"

Corporate Plan p14 "***Quality and affordable new homes will be being built on the council's own land with infrastructure projects underway to unlock further delivery.***" Is NSC selling off farmland? How much has it sold over the last 5-10 years? How does this help future generations of agriculture within North Somerset, and young peoples' career choices? How does this fit with any 'duties' for local food production and delivery nationally? How does this fit with NSC Local Plan re: solar, wind, housing and road network development in general?

**Govt UK Food Security Report 2021** - *"In meat, milk, and eggs, the UK produces a roughly equivalent volume to what it consumes." "The UK produces a significant proportion of the other domestic crops it needs, including 54% of fresh vegetables, 67% of sugar beet, 71% of potatoes, and 79% of oilseeds, though only 16% of fresh fruit"* How will the altering North Somerset rural land affect this? What happens in these economic times if the UK is not food secure locally and nationally? Who in North Somerset Council manages Food Security for North Somerset, why are there solar panels and wind turbines on land throughout North Somerset?

The NSC Corporate Plan indicates a Empowering Communities Strategy that states, *"Develop a Food Resilience Pathway and Food Equality Strategy to tackle food insecurity with North Somerset Food Alliance and strategic partners"*, how is this communicated and discussed with rural and farming communities, and associated parish councils?

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

Q2. Can you please tell us what a fair North Somerset means to you:

**The Seven Principles of Public Life/ the 'Nolan principles'** *"1.3 Objectivity Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias"* This should be the starting point stated in the consultation.

How does fair link with the council's statutory roles, responsibilities and duties?

### Q3. Can you please tell us what does a green North Somerset means to you?

The narrative of a 'green' agenda due to a climate crisis is finally being investigated and challenged in all scientific and legal areas, questioning whether the computer modelling or real world current and historic information that it's based on is correct. [2,3]

**Green should mean maintaining rural environments to continue food production and food security, maintaining current Public Rights of Way, open space access, etc. Only build houses or 'green' energy projects on brownfield or non-agriculture land.** CPRE states, "*Our 2022 state of brownfield report shows that the availability of previously developed land continues to grow across England. In summary, it has found that over 1.2 million homes could be built on 23,000 sites covering more than 27,000 hectares of brownfield.*" [4]

NSC declared 'green' as a vision – **what is its definition of 'green'?** We should **be good custodians** of our environment, avoid greenwashing, reduce plastic use and manage resulting pollution. **This should include, when encouraging 'green' purchases or initiatives, to consider the whole life cycle in its calculations** e.g. solar panel full lifecycle of where and how the raw materials are mined, sourced, decommissioned and disposed. Suggest putting solar on roofs not agricultural fields (ironic that cities are putting turf and grass on roofs! [5, 6]). **Work with farmers** who already need to protect biodiversity, but not all farmers own the land they work. **NSC should not encourage landlords to turn agricultural fields into rewilded meadows, forests, wetlands, solar, wind, etc.** at the expense of natural food growth and production.

P12 "*North Somerset's natural environment playing a more instrumental role in our communities through improved health and wellbeing, helping our response to the climate emergency **through rewilding and additional woodland, and supporting sustainable development and inclusive growth** - We will deliver the in-year (2022/23) actions of the Green Infrastructure Strategy including continued roll out of rewilding and developing the opportunities of biodiversity net gain"*  
**How does NSC 'greening' fit with any unpublished Rural Strategy and agriculture land management?**

**NSC's plan indicates that 70% of North Somerset is already 'green' countryside, how is its plan(s) protecting this and associated agriculture?** NSC state, 1.2 "**Approximately 40% (15,490 hectares) of land in North Somerset is designated as Green Belt.**" (Jan 2022 Green Belt Review Pt1 paper [7]) 2.11 "*The protection and maintenance of the Green Belt is very important to the affected communities, and ensures a clear distinction between urban Bristol and **rural North Somerset***" NSC Sustainable Community Strategy, p8 "*North Somerset is a diverse area, with coastal, urban and market towns and rural villages. **30% of our population live in rural areas** with the remaining population living in the coastal towns of Weston-Super-Mare (40%), Clevedon, Portishead and the market town of Nailsea (30%)<sup>3</sup>.*" Corporate Plan p7, **Opportunities "Work with local, regional and national partners to support sector development** (visitor economy, creative industries, rural, food and drink, **green**)". What is NSC's definition of 'green'? Businesses are mentioned but not specifically farming and food security? National government are encouraging farmers to diversify outside of farming (solar, wind, woodland, housing, roads, HS2, etc), how is NSC supporting existing farmers to continue with farming and food production both locally and links to national requirements and provision?

How do NSC partnerships with UK100 Countryside [8] and Rural Services Network [9] and Solar Together (Resident Letter, Leaflet1, Leaflet2) and others directly affect our communities? **Where are NSC's comments and input at these meetings openly published?** How do Bleadon residents, farmers and businesses that it represents, interact with these types of NSC decision making?

[2] Previous Canadian case of Mann v Ball Supreme Court of British Columbia <https://climatechangedispatch.com/tim-ball-defeats-michael-mann-lawsuit/>

[3] Current USA Case in the Supreme Court Nos. 18-1451 and 18-1477 [https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/18/18-1451/103599/20190620135451787\\_Steyn%20Amicus.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/18/18-1451/103599/20190620135451787_Steyn%20Amicus.pdf)

[4] CPRE state of Brownfield report <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/state-of-brownfield-report-2022/>

[5] <https://botanic-garden.bristol.ac.uk/2014/10/24/raising-the-green-roof/>

[6] <https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/rooftops-can-provide-over-half-our-solar-energy-targets-report-shows/>

[7] <https://n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/16.23%20Green%20Belt%20Review%20Part%201%20Broad%20Locations.pdf>

[8] <https://www.uk100.org/> [9] <https://www.rsonline.org.uk/>

Q4. Do you agree that this vision is right for North Somerset?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q5. Please tell us why you agree or disagree that this vision is right for North Somerset:

The council's vision, particularly for rural communities like Bleadon, is unclear so it is difficult to answer until the Rural Strategy, Local Plan and any other planned related documents have been made available for the public to consult on.

**We have drafted four ambitions designed to help us achieve our vision. We would like your views on each ambition.**

**Q6. Our ambition for our children and young people is: Our children and young people feel cared for, safe, supported, and are given equality of opportunity to thrive.**

Do you agree this is the right ambition for children and young people in North Somerset?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q7. If you have disagreed please tell us why:

*"The number of children with special education needs and disability (SEND) has increased over the last few years across both cohorts in North Somerset, those that receive SEN support and those that have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). Between 2015 and 2021 the overall increase was 39%." What is the budget on special needs children, why so high, why increasing, what is causing this need? How are funds 'fairly' distributed to other needs? "The percentage of pupils with special educational needs support as of 2021 was 12.1% in North Somerset" (2021), i.e. 1 in 8 pupils.*

For every child with a disability and/or special needs child there is a network of family, friends and voluntary and professional support people, how are their views and needs catered in this plan? How much do they cost the council/the public annually via the council tax?

Q8. Please give your thoughts on how you think we could help to achieve this ambition together, what actions should we take?

**More support to develop young peoples agricultural interests, with a view to studying and becoming part of the future rural community, working as or with local farmers.** Sharing and understanding local farmers work and commitment to producing our food. Creating conversations with farmers, relating to soil and land management, hedgerows, wildlife and their continued endeavours for good husbandry, to protect the environment in general for current and future generations.

**Q9. Our ambition for adults and communities is: Our communities are caring, healthy and safe, where people help each other to live well.** Do you agree this is the right ambition for adults and communities in North Somerset?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral

10. you have disagreed please tell us why:

Corporate Budget p3 "17.7% of people in North Somerset are disabled under the equality act". Why is this so high, i.e. 1 in 6 people? What can be done to improve this figure?

Q11. Please give your thoughts on how you think we could help to achieve this ambition together, what actions should we take?

**What are NSC's plans with regards to accommodating the expansion of WSM to the second largest settlement after Bristol, including immigrants (coming from outside North Somerset and abroad)?** With the switch from central to local government funding, how will this affect rural communities, especially with regards job, housing availability/allocation and services? What services will be available to support cultural integration, including urban vs rural?

P24 *"New and emerging technologies are harnessed effectively to deliver efficient and good quality services. The Council is well on the way to 'paperless' and 'cashless' operation and is beginning to make use of robotics and Artificial Intelligence"* **Total cashless society is in itself discrimination and will affect old and young alike.** It must maintain privacy as the current cash system does. (A move to Central Bank Digital Currencies negatively challenges this position, especially if programmable). NB: Some shops already refuse cash and are discriminating between customers. Using technology instead of people, breaks communities and cultural practices and reducing people's skill sets. Why did NSC remove the option to pay council tax with cash from the back of its council tax bills? Other service providers still clearly permit the use of cash on their bills.

**Q12. Our ambition for North Somerset as a place is: Our towns and villages are thriving and sustainable places to live, work and visit.** Do you agree this is the right ambition for North Somerset as a place?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q13. If you have disagreed please tell us why:

At what point will Bleadon no longer be considered a rural community with a village as it comes under increasing development threat from WSM's expansion? *"There is evidence of agricultural use of the land in the medieval period and probably from at least the Bronze Age"* (Wiki) How will Bleadon be able to 'thrive' and its rural community remain 'sustainable' if it changes to an urban environment? Sustainable should not mean 'able to build on to further urban growth'. The countryside should not just become 'a place for people to visit', it should also remain working for the production of natural food for people's health and physical well-being.

Q14. Please give your thoughts on how you think we could help to achieve this ambition together, what actions should we take?

Rural communities, their distinct identities and culture should be protected. Without full information it is hard to see what is actually planned especially as the current Local Plan and Rural Strategy are not available at this time.

**Q15. Our ambition for North Somerset Council is: Our council delivers consistently good services and value for money to support an ambitious community.**

Do you agree this is the right ambition for how we work as a council?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q16. If you have disagreed please tell us why:

*Nolan 1.4 "Accountability - Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this" we believe that is includes value for money and good services. All contracted work should be of consistently good service and value for money.*

Q17. Please give your thoughts on how you think we could help to achieve this ambition together, what actions should we take?

Be more open transparent at all levels of the community

Q18. Do you have any other thoughts on the development of the Corporate Plan, if so please tell us here:

Without full information it is hard to see what is actually planned especially as the current Local Plan and Rural Strategy are not available at this time.

To support delivery of the Corporate Plan we set our budget each year which shows us how much money we have to spend and what we are going to spend it on. We would like your views to help this process.

**Q19. Can you give us your view on which of these issues you think will be most important in North Somerset in the coming year (add an 'x' in the relevant box):**

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not at all important	Don't know
The climate emergency					
The cost of living crisis					
Inequality in our society					
Availability of services for vulnerable adults					
Availability of services for vulnerable children and young people					
Availability of services to support good physical health and wellbeing					
Availability of services to support good mental health and wellbeing					
Availability of leisure services and things to do					
Availability of public transport					
Availability and affordability of housing					
Crime and community safety					
Community development and resilience					
The condition of our highways and roads					
Changing the way we travel					
Access to good jobs					
The environment for businesses to thrive					
The condition of our town centres and availability of shops and services there					
The availability of services in rural areas					
Our environment including flooding risks and biodiversity					
Dealing with local waste and increasing the amount we recycle					
Please add any other important issues here:	Food security and easy access to reasonably priced local food provision.				



Q20. Please add in any comments you might have on these issues:

Before spending more money on the 'green' agenda and climate emergency/crisis, please **pause and review the situation**. The narrative of a 'green' agenda due to a climate crisis is finally being investigated and challenged in all scientific and legal areas, questioning whether the computer modelling or real world current and historic information that it's based on is correct. [2,3]

**Better engagement on consultations, without a pre-determined top down agenda** e.g. climate crisis, out car travel, etc. e.g. NSC *First and Last Mile Active Travel Plan* to "Reduce the need to travel by car wherever possible... increase active travel and e-mobility exponentially... reducing dominance of private cars". This questionnaire opens, "... commitment to consulting and engaging with residents and stakeholders", where is an open list of NSC stakeholders and their interests in public discussions, contracts and affairs in general?

"What is the plan for North Somerset's Rural lanes, limited access? How does it fit with, NSC's Active Travel and its Active Travel Network Action Plan (PDF) "*Our starting point is that all scheme proposals will be considered against our Place and Movement Framework". (Image of map) See also NSC 'Transport Behaviour Change' Action Plan 2023-30. "*The first priority is for the re-allocation or re- purposing of Highway space to meet the needs of active travel.*"*

NB: HS2 funding info re: money and land grab (residents offered land back at a higher price) e.g via Mayoral West of England Combined Authority (WECA) (02OCT23) WECA Mayor opens £70 million research lab to decarbonise transport in West. "*What is a combined authority (CA)? A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take /collective decisions across council boundaries.*" "*The [WECA] Mayoral Combined Authority has also provided over £4 million for the site's trailblazing hydrogen work including over £2.5 million for their '**Hydrogen Sustainable Transport Economy Accelerator**' project, including cash for kit to produce enough green hydrogen to cut their annual emissions by 84%*"

"*The current tidal limit of the Axe is the sluice gates at Bleadon and Brean Cross*" We believe that flood risks could be mitigated by better rhyne and flood gate management. Biodiversity could be protected and enhanced in better working with rural farmers and residents. However, creating new wetland habitats seems counterintuitive, especially as, "*By mass and volume, water vapor is the most prevalent greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. According to both the International Panel on Climate Change and many global climate models, water vapor accounts for somewhere between 60 percent and 70 percent of the greenhouse effect.*"

The Corporate Plan states, "*Engage with and empower our communities*", how can this be used in relation to farming and local food provision.

Before increasing the amount recycled, where does it end up? Where is clear information on what happens to NSC recycling to end point?

Q21. Can you give us your view on which of these issues you are **personally** most concerned about:

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not at all important	Don't know
The climate emergency					
The cost of living crisis					
Availability and affordability of housing					
Affordability of utilities					
Affordability of food					
Inequality in our society					
Access to services for vulnerable adults					
Access to services for vulnerable children and young people					
Access to services to support good physical health and wellbeing					
Access to services to support good mental health and wellbeing					
Access to leisure services and things to do					
Access to public transport					
The impacts of crime and anti-social behaviour on you and your community					
The offer for community activities and support in your area					
The condition of our highways and roads					
Changing the way we travel					
Access to good jobs					
The environment for businesses to thrive					
The condition of our town centres and availability of shops and services there					
Access to services in rural areas					
Our environment including flooding risks and biodiversity					
Dealing with local waste and increasing the amount we recycle					
Add any other important issues here:					

Q22. Please add in any comments you might have on these issues:

See above

Q23. Is there an issue, either North Somerset wide or personally important to you, that you would like to prioritise for investment and improvement?

**Support for easy accessible locally produced food and associated food security.** We believe that this will increase community interactions, improve understanding of the food chain and importance of good custodianship of the land. Help proving why we need to protect our environment for health/food, leisure and wildlife. May help existing and new, interested farmers to diversify into other traditional food production appropriate to our region. Will assist reduced food miles, carbon footprint, etc.

**Q24. The council will need to balance its budget to pay for the rising cost and demand for our services and increasing council tax is an important part of the budget because this money helps to pay for the services we provide. Each year the government sets an upper limit on council tax increases although councils can ask residents to support higher increases if there is a local need to raise more money. The current limit is 4.99%. As of August 2023, inflation is running at 6.8%.**

What level of council tax increase would you support in the coming year?

- Up to 3%
- Between 3% and 5%
- More than 5%
- An increase aligned to inflation
- An increase aligned to the government limit

**Q25. When planning for the future the council wants to ensure that the services we provide are delivered at an affordable cost and in the best way possible.**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with using the following approaches?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Bringing services back in house from commercial companies					
Transferring services to other organisations like commercial companies					
Working in partnership and sharing services with other councils and public sector agencies					
Transferring services to other organisations like community groups, social enterprises and town and parish councils					
Changing working practices to make better use of technology and more efficient ways of working					
Using digital technology more widely to support the delivery of services and making more services available online					
Making more efficient use of council assets such as land and buildings					
Increasing fees and charges for some services					
Targeting resources on the most vulnerable and people most in need					
Stopping provision of some discretionary services to protect services to vulnerable groups					
Reducing the quality of some services provided					
Scaling back or stop providing some services					
Encouraging more people to volunteer their time to become involved in the delivery of services					

Do you have any comments on any of these approaches or would like to suggest any others?

What is NSC's definition of affordable?

Why were services sent out in the first place? Why do NSC believe they would now be better undertaken in-house?

Prioritise people based services, especially at the front service level, over complicated and frustrating AI interfaces that invariably end in user frustration. In reality, users tend to have to fit with off the shelf computer packages, not the other way round, thereby reducing efficiency, or not completing tasks as fully wanted.

Why is transferring services to other independent/private organisations like community groups, social enterprises in the same question as for 'democratic' town and parish councils? Are they considered the same standing by NSC?

Q26. Are there any comments you would like to make about the budget or have any suggestions for where we could make savings or generate income?

North Somerset Council "...is predicting a budget gap of £17.2 million in 2024/25, and in subsequent years of £14 million, £9.5 million and £9.9 million — meaning the council would have to find just over £50 million over the next four years" (08SEP23)

Are there any NSC plans to devolve services to parishes, e.g. like toilets previously, how will these affect the associated precept if the council decides to continue delivering them?

**Before spending money on the 'green' agenda and climate emergency/crisis, pause to look at the emerging real world data on this issues, compared to computer modelling used to date** (see above). Are new systems required or just an upgrade of existing ones? [2, 3]

Sunak just stated **£36billion going to mayors** to control future budgets via the HS2 project closure, how will this affect NSC future budgeting, especially on bus provision? E.g. *"Rest of the country: £6.5bn. Keeping the £2 bus fare until the end of December 2024. The major funding was already in place – the government had already extended this scheme until the end of October as part of its bus recovery funding, and then through until the end of 2024 but at the higher level of £2.50."*  
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/oct/04/hs2-rishi-sunaks-36bn-in-transport-funding-is-it-new-or-just-repackaged>

How does this fit with the C40 Cities 100 Mayors (whose headquarters are based in the United Kingdom) and the World Economic Forum's top down global agenda? How does this fit with the UK's *"New ten-year plan to make the UK a global AI superpower. National AI Strategy to boost business use of AI, attract international investment and develop next generation of tech talent"*

Q27-Q36. Personal information requested by North Somerset

**SURVEY ENDS**