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Dear Sirs,

**Re: NORTH SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN 2036: REPRESENTATIONS TO ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER**

Backwell Parish Council wish to submit the following representations in respect of the Issues and Options Paper 2036, responding to the questions put as relevant to the Parish Council's interests. These representations should be read in conjunction with both the letter already submitted to this consultation by Backwell Parish Council (BPC) on 9 October 2018 and also our representations to the West of England Joint Spatial Plan (Submission Version) November 2017.

Notwithstanding BPC's concerns regarding the release of this Issues and Options paper ahead of the Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) examination, it is recognised that this paper is based on the JSP as submitted to the Secretary of State. The submitted JSP remains draft and subject to scrutiny at examination, which will certainly result in modifications to the plan. So, the Local Plan will need to evolve to reflect the adopted version of the JSP rather than the Submission version. For that reason, BPC welcomes the reassurance at page 4 that the Issues and Options document is not a draft plan and so cannot be relied upon by developers or promoters. It should therefore be regarded as an exploration of the issues that could inform the future Local Plan's spatial strategy, the allocation of land and the delivery of infrastructure, in the event that the JSP is adopted in a form comparable to the Submission version. BPC's comments on the Issues and Options Paper should be read in that context and without prejudice to the in-principle objection to the Backwell and Nailsea Strategic Development Locations and associated planned infrastructure.

## **SECTION 2: NORTH SOMERSET WIDE ISSUES**

**Question 3: Nailsea and Backwell (pages 12 - 13). Do you agree with these or are there other challenges or issues which we have not included and how might the Local Plan address these?**

The Issues and Options paper outlines the key issues North Somerset Council (NSC) intends to address in respect of developments at both Nailsea and Backwell, if the strategic growth identified by the JSP at these locations goes ahead. BPC is concerned that matters which affect the suitability of sites for residential development are deferred to the Local Plan stage, and therefore after the broad location has been identified for development through the JSP. NSC proposes that the Local Plan will ***“need to test the scale of development proposed”***. The purpose of the Local Plan should be to deliver the allocation of land to meet the strategic requirements of the JSP. The capacity of Strategic Development Locations must be fully tested **through the JSP** to provide assurances that the capacity exists for the planned scale of development.

Similarly, the ***“environmental implications of development on internationally-protected habitats and floodplain areas”*** should be a matter for detailed consideration through the JSP, particularly in respect of the impact on the integrity of the Special Area of Conservation of the removal of substantial bat foraging areas through greenfield development.

**Key issue 4:** In the event that the SDLs at both Nailsea and Backwell are confirmed through the JSP examination, this needs to be based on a robust evidence base justifying the new transport infrastructure, including new roads, necessary to achieve sustainable planned development. Whilst the detailed alignment and phasing of the new road infrastructure is a matter for the Local Plan, the need for such infrastructure must be confirmed at the strategic policy level. The role of the railway station including increased services and capacity, and opportunities for public transport to increase the number of journeys by sustainable modes, are also a matter for the West of England not just North Somerset. These need to be explored through the JSP process.

**Key issue 7:** Here you seek to explore whether some of the development proposed at the SW Nailsea SDL could be better located in relation to existing services and facilities. BPC welcomes the recognition by NSC that the location is remote from the existing town centre and may therefore not offer the most accessible location available at Nailsea to accommodate strategic scale growth. BPC welcomes the Council’s recognition of the Nailsea Town Vision and willingness to revise proposals in light of its findings. BPC welcomes consideration of alternative development locations which could reduce or remove the need for housing to the south west of Nailsea and potentially negate the need for a new road corridor through the strategic gap between Nailsea and Backwell. Development to the north of Nailsea is more logical.

**Key issue 10** relates specifically to Backwell. It proposes to retain the village character, support and enhance the village centre and address traffic issues on the A370. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report recognises that NSC faces considerable challenges to tackle congestion problems on main routes through villages. The capacity of the traffic lights and road corridor on the A370 through Backwell poses a significant concern to BPC. Given the considerable physical constraints to the crossroads, BPC fear that any “improvements” would be negligible and overwhelmed by the forecast increase in traffic flows. The delivery of new road infrastructure from Farleigh to Nailsea would not mitigate the impact of new development at Backwell upon the A370 corridor. Its benefits would be limited to accommodating some traffic travelling between Bristol and Nailsea; it

would serve no purpose for new residents of the Backwell SDL who would still need to use the A370 crossroads and Station Road to access the new road. The increased traffic on the A370 will further sever the village both physically and psychologically, which would not meet the social objectives of NPPF and the Local Plan.

For these reasons, BPC is highly sceptical of the ability of the Local Plan to “*address traffic issues on the A370*” if the village is expected to accommodate a further 700 new homes. We will resist proposed developments without an integral and enforceable traffic scheme that either by-passes the village or delivers a public transport scheme that obviates the usage of private vehicles.

**Question 5 (pages 14 - 15): Do you agree with these or are there other challenges or issues which we have not included and how might the Local Plan address these?**

BPC welcomes the key issues identified by NSC in respect of Green Belt ensuring its boundaries are fit for purpose and capable of meeting the long-term development needs of the District, beyond the plan period to 2036. BPC supports consultation with town and parish councils in respect of reviewing Green Belt boundaries and allocating sites. Where land makes a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, its removal and the designation of other land (such as the Backwell Lake area) as Green Belt should be considered, where appropriate.

**SECTION 3.1 SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY (page 24 – 27)**

**Question 8 (page 23): What are your views on the options for a revised settlement hierarchy?**

BPC broadly supports Options 1 and 2 for a revised settlement hierarchy. This would retain the current hierarchy but with a review of all settlements and inclusion of an additional tier for larger infill settlements and smaller service villages giving capacity for small scale growth, where appropriate.

BPC would object to a growth-based strategy as outlined in option 3. The grouping of all settlements with capacity for housing into a single category, with criteria-based policies to guide development, would inevitably result in an increase in speculative planning applications for housing. Such a policy approach would be akin to the presumption in favour of sustainable development established by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which allows speculative planning applications to be considered favourably where the Local Plan is out-of-date. In the interests of achieving an effective plan-led system, the growth-based strategy is opposed.

Although it is noted that “tightly-worded” criteria would be introduced, these would invariably be subjective and open to interpretation. Moreover, the use of criteria in lieu of housing allocations within the Local Plan would offer no certainty to local communities in respect of the location or scale of new housing planned for their area. This approach would also obviate the planned provision of strategic infrastructure to support new development, where the locations for new growth are unknown until the planning application stage.

A further concern regarding Option 3 would be the potential to skew the distribution of housing growth across the District, with the potential for high levels of housing to be delivered in the more rural areas, compounding the problems associated with the JSP spatial strategy.

### **SECTION 3.2 SETTLEMENT BOUNDARIES (page 24-27)**

#### **Question 9 (page 27): What are your views on the options for revised settlement boundaries?**

In the interests of achieving a robust plan-led system within North Somerset, BPC supports Option 2 for adjustments to the settlement boundaries. Option 2 proposes the inclusion of new allocations within the settlement boundaries but removes the current policy which allows sites to come forward adjacent to the boundary. This approach would provide local communities with a full understanding of the scale and location of growth planned for the local area and locations, where the principle of housing development is likely to be acceptable (i.e. within the settlement boundaries). BPC agrees with the advantages of this option, as expressed within the Issues and Options paper.

The policy provision was previously introduced by the examining Inspector to achieve greater flexibility in housing supply. Providing the Local Plan makes adequate provision for new housing to meet the strategic housing requirement established by the adopted JSP, it will be unnecessary to retain the current flexibility in the policy to allow additional housing beyond the settlement boundaries. Should a shortfall in housing occur, sufficient to engage paragraph 11d) of the NPPF, this would provide a policy tool for developers and landowners to bring forward sustainable housing proposals.

### **SECTION 4. GARDEN VILLAGES AND NEW COMMUNITIES (pages 28-61)**

In response to the explanatory text within Section 4, BPC makes the following observations in respect of the proposed allocation of new communities:

At page 29 it states that *“at this stage the specific boundaries of the development are not confirmed...the potential capacity of the locations will vary in relation to the extent of developable land identified and assumptions about densities.”*

With reference to our comments in response to Question 3 above, BPC questions the role of the Local Plan to test the capacity of the new communities to accommodate the housing allocation for the Strategic Development Locations (SDL). Whilst it is fully recognised that the Local Plan will be tasked with identifying the extent of land required for allocation, the capacity of the SDLs should be fully tested through the JSP to ensure an allocation can deliver the housing numbers and fund necessary infrastructure in a timely manner.

#### **Nailsea and Backwell Transport Schemes (pages 30 – 31):**

Notwithstanding BPC’s objections in principle to strategic growth at Backwell and SW Nailsea and the associated transport infrastructure, BPC supports a phased delivery of infrastructure in parallel with the build-out of the housing schemes. The enhancement of the railway station and provision of cycle and pedestrian links from the SDLs is welcomed, although BPC questions how improvements to the railway station would in practice increase capacity of rail services which are already under stress. This needs to be clarified through the JSP process.

The delivery of a new highway link from the railway station to the A370 near Farleigh is proposed as part of Phase 1 works, presumably alongside the proposed MetroBus route to Long Ashton Park and Ride. The early delivery of the MetroBus would be vital to encourage sustainable travel habits among new residents and achieve a shift to public

transport and any housing allocations at Backwell and Nailsea should be **predicated** upon its early delivery.

The delivery of a road link through the Nailsea SDL would not be achieved until the fourth phase, following improvements to the highway network around Nailsea. BPC question the purpose of the road link in the context of the strategic infrastructure. A distributor road around the outside of the Nailsea SDL would be capable of accommodating heavy goods vehicles, whereas an internal route would presumably be designed to serve the new housing development and therefore accommodating lower traffic flows. Although BPC would welcome any planned infrastructure capable of relieving congestion on the A370, a proposed road link via the SW Nailsea SDL to the A370, with the potential to connect to the M5 at junction 20, would simply encourage higher volumes of traffic onto the local roads and ultimately onto the A370, thereby exacerbating traffic volumes into Bristol. This will have a significant impact on the villages of Farleigh and Flax Bourton, not just Nailsea and Backwell. BPC has raised serious concerns regarding the impact of the proposed road link south of Station Road, upon the local landscape, strategic gap, areas at risk of flooding and biodiversity.

### **SECTION 4.3: BACKWELL (pages 50 - 53)**

The future of Backwell is understandably at the heart of BPC's representations. We welcome recognition that any strategic scale development would need to be sensitively designed to integrate into the village and be appropriate to its rural setting. BPC has fundamental concerns regarding the suitability of land west of Backwell to accommodate the scale of development envisaged by the JSP. If after examination of the JSP, the SDL is committed the provision of effective and timely transport improvements which are capable of mitigating the adverse impacts of the proposals upon the A370 and local road network will be vital. The Issues and Options paper also recognises the ecologically sensitive nature of the site, as a critical foraging ground with numerous flight paths for the greater and lesser horseshoe bats. If the land is found to be suitable for allocation, robust mitigation will be necessary to safeguard the integrity of the SAC and the integral SSSI at Brockley Hall Stables.

### **Proposed Vision for Development (Pages 50-52):**

**Question 20 (page 52): Do you agree with the principles set out for Backwell and would you suggest any changes to these? We consider that establishing the principles is a fundamental step towards developing the detail for development in these areas.**

As outlined above, BPC is sceptical of the potential for planned road improvements to "relieve pressure on Backwell Crossroads and Station Road". In the absence of feasible options for vehicular access from the SDL to the Station or the new roads, all residents of the new SDL would need to travel along the A370 and Station Road to access Bristol, Nailsea and the new road infrastructure. The new road infrastructure benefits Nailsea residents by providing a more direct link to the A370 towards Bristol but it does not mitigate the significant adverse impact of increased vehicular movements on the A370 generated by the Backwell SDL. In the absence of a suitable infrastructure solution to achieve sustainable development at Backwell, the proposed SDL is unsustainable.

Notwithstanding the above, should the SDL be allocated, BPC supports the principles for development outlined at page 51. The early delivery of the New Station Road in advance of the development commencing, coupled with modifications to Station Road should be a

**prerequisite** to development of both Nailsea and Backwell SDLs, although we are not convinced this would mitigate the traffic from the Backwell SDL.

The proposed layout of the development should respect the West Town Conservation Area and the setting of Grove Farm and also prevent the incursion of development further west towards Chelvey. The retention of historic hedgerows is welcomed to preserve the character of the area and should be promoted to benefit biodiversity. Reference is made to “wider strategic mitigation” for ecology but it is unclear how this would be delivered in practice if this would involve land outside the applicant’s control.

Finally, reference is made to the provision of a new primary school to form a “focal point” to the development offering safe and convenient walking routes to surrounding development. BPC supports the provision of additional school places to ensure adequate school places are available within the village. However, with a secondary school, juniors, infants and independent school already within the village, the provision of a fifth school could exacerbate traffic congestion at peak times without careful consideration to its siting in relation to existing residents and safe routes to school. Expansion of existing schools could be more sensible.

In addition to the principles set out, two additional points much be considered in the development of the Local Plan – Flooding and Air-pollution.

**Flooding:** As shown in the national flood risk maps and records (<https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/long-term-flood-risk/map>) there is regular surface water flooding in this area, especially in the Backwell Common and along the A370 (leading to road-closure) but also in the Grove Farm area. The North Somerset Levels Internal Drainage Board has recently stated that a major breach of the backs of the Land Yeo at Backwell could result in the diversion of the extensive upstream catchment into the vestigial River Kenn, to follow what is believed to be its historic route to the south of Nailsea. This area has been extensively drained over centuries and the natural rivers diverted. Climate change and increased flooding is likely to over-whelm those historic earthworks and, without substantial investment, problems can be expected for example in the areas between Nailsea and Backwell close to the location of the MetroBus service and roads. Very significant funds will need to be allocated to avoid those risks if for example a road it to be located between Backwell and Nailsea.

**Air-pollution:** Air pollution is already a concern when the traffic through our village is stationary or slow-moving. Nitrogen dioxide levels have already been monitored by North Somerset and reported in the North Somerset Air Quality Annual Status Report 2018 shows (for example January 2018 in Table B:1 Appendix B) that at times NO<sub>2</sub> levels are above 40 micrograms/m<sup>3</sup>. Obviously, the proposed SDL to the West of Backwell would risk making traffic and air-pollution worse.

### **Alternative Scenarios (page 52):**

**Question 21: Do you have any comments on the concept diagrams and alternative scenarios set out?**

**Question 22: Are there any other options you would add for accommodating strategic growth within Backwell?**

Should development be required to the west of Backwell, any proposals should be closely related to the existing built area and avoid significant incursions into the open countryside

which would be harmful to the setting of Backwell and the intrinsic character of the landscape surrounding the village. BPC would resist the extension of development further towards Chelvey Lane which has the potential to adversely affect the setting of the village and the West Town Conservation Area and could prejudice a particularly critical foraging area for the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats. Furthermore, the extension of development to the west would result in longer journeys from new homes to existing village facilities, therefore encouraging short trips by car.

BPC remains of the opinion that Backwell village is not a suitable location for strategic growth, for the reasons set out within this response and its representations to the JSP. The proposed SDL to the west of Backwell has been selected due to its location beyond the Green Belt which envelopes most of the village to the north, east and south. However, the SDL's capacity to accommodate strategic scale growth without significant harm to valued assets is highly questionable, as outlined within the BPC's representations to the JSP.

The Backwell Neighbourhood Plan supports new housing development of a scale which is appropriate to the character of the village. The Parish Council would support the development of non-strategic scale development which complies with the Neighbourhood Plan and NSC's Local Plan settlement hierarchy and would be capable of delivery without significant adverse impacts upon the local community and environment.

#### **SECTION 4.4: NAILSEA (page 54 – 61)**

##### **Question 23 (page 55): Do you have any comments on the proposed vision for Nailsea?**

BPC supports the vision to retain the gap between Nailsea and Backwell to safeguard their separate identities and accommodate attractive and convenient walking and cycling routes to the station.

##### **Question 24 (page 56): Do you agree with the principles set out for Nailsea and would you suggest any changes to these?**

BPC supports Nailsea Town Council in its efforts to prepare a Town Vision to shape the future growth of the town. BPC is concerned by the south-western expansion of Nailsea to accommodate strategic growth and impact of new transport infrastructure to serve the new development upon the strategic gap and the Backwell community. Development to the north of Nailsea seems a better solution.

BPC's comments on the development principles reflect those set out above in respect of the Nailsea and Backwell Transport Schemes.

##### **Alternative Scenarios (pages 57 – 61):**

##### **Question 25 (page 57): Do you have any comments on the concept diagrams and alternative scenarios set out?**

##### **Question 26 (page 57): Are there any other options you would add for accommodating strategic growth within Nailsea?**

BPC would resist the further western expansion of the urban extension to include or potential extend beyond Netherton Wood Lane due to the environmental implications highlighted by the Issues and Options Paper. Furthermore, the Council already recognises

the remote nature of some of the housing relative to the town centre and outward expansion would further undermine the sustainability of the location.

The provision of a distributor route around the SW Nailsea urban extension would be resisted for similar environmental reasons.

The strategic gap between Nailsea and Backwell is limited in scale and protects an already narrow gap between the two settlements which is particularly vulnerable to further encroachment. BPC would therefore resist any proposals which would erode the existing strategic gap and would support this land being allocated Green Belt status. Development to the north of Nailsea seems a better solution.

These representations are intended to be constructive (to assist NSC in the preparation of the Local Plan 2036) but without prejudice to BPC's objections in principle to strategic development at Backwell and the delivery of significant transport infrastructure within the gap between Nailsea and Backwell. BPC would welcome further dialogue with NSC to inform its proposals during the preparation of the Local Plan.

Yours sincerely,

**Peter Soothill**  
**Chair and on behalf of Backwell Parish Council**