



# **North Somerset Core Strategy**

## **Spatial Strategy and Visions**

**April 2009**

**This document sets out a working draft of the Core Strategy spatial strategy and visions for the towns and villages within North Somerset as the basis for further discussion and refinement. Detailed reference to urban extensions is not included.**

## **Spatial Strategy & Visions-**

### **Developing a sustainable settlement hierarchy**

#### **Regional context - Regional Spatial Strategy**

One of the key tasks of the Core Strategy is to provide guidance on the broad distribution of development across North Somerset. The starting point for this is the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and particularly the policies guiding the scale and location of development.

Regional policy has gradually been moving away from a dispersed pattern of development towards an approach in the latest RSS of more concentrated development. The RSS considers that the most effective and sustainable way to deal with future growth pressures is to guide most development to a relatively small number of larger settlements. This is partly because concentrated development is considered more sustainable, especially because it can reduce the need to travel and make the best use of existing and planned infrastructure.

Also in some areas the potential for further dispersed development has been exhausted and past trends could only be continued by breaching important environmental limits.

Regional Spatial Strategy Development Policies A, B and C identify the following settlement hierarchy:

#### Policy A: Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs).

To accommodate and manage growth in the most sustainable way, most new development will be provided for at SSCTs. These are the regional and sub-regional focuses for growth and include Weston-super-Mare.

#### Policy B: Market and coastal towns.

The RSS recognises that certain towns play an important role in ensuring the availability of jobs and services both for their own populations and surrounding settlements. The RSS intends that these places should be the focal points for locally significant development.

#### Policy C: Development at small towns and villages.

Elsewhere the RSS provides for small scale development where this leads to greater self-containment and stronger local communities.

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The Core Strategy must consider the appropriate policy approach for the settlements within North Somerset in terms of housing, employment and other development such as the provision of services and facilities. It does this by setting out a settlement hierarchy and visions for the major towns and villages.

## **(A) Areas of Substantial Growth**

### **Weston-super-Mare**

The overall vision for Weston is one of looking to enhance its sub-regional role and influence through employment-led regeneration. This is focused on two key areas; town centre and seafront renewal and regeneration, and harnessing the opportunities associated with the Weston Regeneration Area.

#### Weston-super-Mare Vision

By 2026 Weston-super-Mare will have an **image** as enjoyable and attractive place to live and visit, with a strong cultural identity and good employment base, and successful and thriving communities.

By 2026 an **employment led development strategy** has achieved a strong and diverse economic profile in Weston-super-Mare with an improved range, quantity and quality of local employment opportunities which redresses the imbalance between employment and homes reducing dependency on out-commuting by car for work and improving self-containment and sustainable living.

By 2026 Weston-super-Mare's strategic **transport, utilities and flood prevention infrastructure** has been developed in tandem with new residential and employment developments to a high standard. The transportation network will provide an integrated, convenient and sustainable service for all parts of the town, with significantly improved public transport services and external linkages to the national motorway network and Bristol International Airport.

By 2026 **Weston Town Centre** will be a good quality, diverse year-round shopping and leisure destination set within a high quality built environment which has retained its historic identity and capitalises on its seafront location and the natural beauty of the area. More people will live and work in the town centre which will add vibrancy during the day and into the evening, resulting in a safe and desirable place for its residents and visitors.

By 2026 Weston town centre will have increased the amount of high quality tourist accommodation, and offer a range of indoor and outdoor attractions and activities catering for a wide range of visitor needs.

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By 2026 the **Town Centre Gateway** area will have transformed itself into a distinctive entrance to the town creating a sense of arrival set within a consolidated, high quality built and landscaped environment, providing good pedestrian connections to the town centre.

*(Urban extension - reference will be needed to be added following RSS approval).*

The Council, with its public and private sector partners will continue to work to achieve this vision focusing in particular on working with the community to ensure shared ownership of the way forward and on the co-ordination and facilitation of infrastructure improvements to enable delivery of new employment opportunities and achieving reduced dependency on out-commuting by car for work.

### **South West Bristol Urban Extension**

*(Proposed in draft RSS).*

South West Bristol Urban Extension  
*(To follow RSS approval)*

### **(B) Market and coastal towns**

The Regional Spatial Strategy (Policy B) states that outside major towns the scope for significant future job growth and related development is likely to be more limited, leading to a scale of provision which supports the role and function of places in their local settings. This may relate not only to ensuring the availability of jobs and services for their own populations, but also for surrounding catchments.

The preferred option is that **Portishead, Clevedon and Nailsea** are identified as Market and Coastal towns.

Due to their close proximity to each other, these three towns have overlapping catchment areas which are perhaps somewhat smaller than would be expected in a rural area and due to their proximity to Bristol and Weston, they are not expected to provide highest order goods and services for their population, but they nevertheless act as local service centres for their populations and adjacent parishes.

With regard to new housing development in the Market and Coastal Towns, this will be restricted to infill, redevelopment and conversion which will

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improve the current mix of house types and sizes, improves affordability and make contributions towards infrastructure and facilities. Development proposals for employment, shopping, public transport and other services will increase the rate of self-containment in the Market and Coastal Towns and will improve their role as service centres.

The vision for each of the Market and Coastal Towns is set out below:

### **Portishead Vision**

By 2026 Portishead will have undertaken an extensive period of consolidation and become an increasingly popular location for new business as well as providing opportunities for existing local businesses to expand and grow. There will be increased opportunities for residents to work locally, instead of commuting to Bristol and its North Fringe.

Access by public transport within Portishead and between and the other market and coastal towns will have been improved. A **passenger rail link** into central Bristol will have been reinstated, providing a real alternative to residents commuting into Bristol for work. **Bus based commuting** will have become increasingly popular, decreasing the amount of traffic using A369 and therefore reducing congestion and improving air quality.

Portishead will continue to be a popular place to live while retaining the **existing distinctive character and village atmosphere** of the High Street. The new and old communities in Portishead will be integrated and share a joint sense of place and pride in the Town. The newly extended High Street will be thriving and popular place to shop and spend time.

**Strong maritime links** will continue to provide important focus. The marina and surrounding coastal area will continue to attract visitors. The unique setting of the **Gordano Valley** will be protected with opportunities to enjoy surrounding countryside and views enhanced around the new development.

### **Clevedon Vision**

By 2026 Clevedon will be a **thriving, prosperous settlement** and local service centre which provides for both its population and that of the rural hinterland, as well as a popular destination for visitors.

The **historic fabric** of the 'old town' will have been retained and reinforced and there will be an evident sense of pride in Clevedon's historic heart and coastal setting.

The **town centre** will have regained its popularity and become a thriving local retail and service centre fulfilling the needs of residents and surrounding area, assisted by suitably sized retail units and welcoming setting. **Hill Road** will remain an attractive area for specialist shops, restaurants and cafés.

The **employment base** will have strengthened allowing more opportunities for residents to work locally. Increasing numbers of those who travel to work outside Clevedon will make the journey by public transport, cycle or shared car journey. Access by public transport within Clevedon and between the other market and coastal towns will have been improved

The area around the **historic sea front** and coastline from Church Hill to the historic pier will be a draw for increasing numbers of visitors and residents enjoying the unique setting , diversity of activities and its culture.

### **Nailsea Vision**

By 2026, Nailsea will be a **thriving, prosperous settlement** and local service centre which provides for both its population and that of the rural hinterland. The quality of life, feeling of safety and community spirit of those who live and work in the town will be highly valued.

Assets such as our **built heritage and open spaces** will be respected. Community services (such as schools, libraries and health centres) will be retained to meet everyday needs and service provision will grow at a commensurate scale to the needs of the population.

**New development** taking place in the town will be focused on addressing local housing need to encourage a more balanced age structure and support economic growth. There will be an emphasis on encouraging further job opportunities by supporting our companies to grow and making provision for space to relocate. Opportunities to improve access to Bristol and Weston-super-Mare by modes of transport other than the private car will be pursued.

Opportunities for redevelopment of the **town centre** will be harnessed where this will improve the leisure and retail offer, ensuring it becomes a focal point for activity within the town. The design of all new places and spaces will be of exceptional quality and evoke pride within the community, together with challenging perceptions of the town.

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### **(C) Small towns and villages (Service Villages)**

The Regional Spatial Strategy (Policy C) acknowledges that the rural areas contain a significant number of small towns and villages exhibiting a range of different characteristics and relationships with other settlements and the surrounding countryside. The scale and nature of development in these rural communities needs to be managed more carefully than has been the case in the past if the more sustainable approach to development is to be delivered.

It is important that that all development taking place in small towns and villages support their roles as local hubs for community facilities, employment and services, including public transport. Targeted small scale development for housing in accessible village communities will be appropriate if it helps to increase self containment, is clearly related to identified local needs, with the emphasis on affordable rather than market housing. In these villages a continuation of Policy H/7 of the North Somerset Replacement Local Plan is proposed and market housing will have to be accompanied by proposals for some employment e.g. live/work units.

Within North Somerset there are service villages which meet these criteria. Service villages have been classified as settlements which have at least a village shop, post office, primary school, GP surgery, community hall and pub accumulating to at least 20 units of town centre uses<sup>1</sup>. They provide a service role function beyond their immediate locality and normally serve the population of 1-3 parishes. They range in size from 2000 to 5000 population per settlement.

Churchill was identified as a possible service village in the Issues and Options report. Whilst it does not have a sufficient amount of retail floorspace, it does have all the other facilities, plus a leisure centre and a secondary school. In addition, consultation comments identified a need for a focal point in Churchill and the Parish Plan found that 50% of the residents were in favour of “some new housing for local people or those in vital services”. Furthermore, the Parish Plan is looking to establish a new village centre/hall and upgrade to the existing leisure centre all of which could be supported by allowing a small amount of new housing development.

In addition, Hutton, Locking, Uphill and Banwell villages are included given their proximity to Weston. There are small settlements close to Bristol, but given their rural character and limited range of facilities and services these would be inappropriate for additional development; the mere fact of their relative proximity to Bristol would not make them sustainable locations.

The Preferred Option list of small towns and villages where the approach as set out in RSS Policy C would apply is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Town Centre uses are defined in PPS6 as retail, leisure, entertainment facilities, restaurants and pubs, offices, arts, culture and tourism.

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**Backwell**  
**Banwell**  
**Congresbury**  
**Churchill**  
**Easton in Gordano/Pill**  
**Hutton**  
**Locking**  
**Long Ashton**  
**Uphill**  
**Winscombe**  
**Wrington**  
**Yatton**

With regard to non-housing uses, allowing a certain level of new service and employment uses in or adjacent to the settlement boundaries of Service Villages is in line with comments received during consultation, which set out a general desire for development to be employment-led and for expanding the employment base of villages. In addition, within the settlement boundary small-scale housing provision will be allowed if it meets local need to balance employment, improve the housing mix in the village or keep facilities/services open and is of a scale commensurate with the size and function of the village. Based on needs assessments, the Service Villages will also be a focal point for affordable housing provision within or adjacent to the settlement boundaries as they display at least a degree of sustainability with regard to local services and facilities.

The settlement boundaries as defined in the NSRLP of the Service Villages will remain.

### **Service Villages Vision**

By 2026 service villages will become thriving communities and a focal point for local housing needs, services and community facilities. They will become more self contained in terms of providing jobs and serving the local and surrounding community for all their day to day needs.

### **Alternative Options:**

#### **a) A more flexible interpretation of Policy C**

At the Issues and Options stage there were suggestions that this policy should distinguish between larger northern dormitory villages and other

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settlements, that affordable housing should be provided in all villages and towns and that all villages should have at least one shop. Given the above aim of achieving a sustainable hierarchy of settlements, settlements below the Service Village category have to be considered as inappropriate locations for housing as they are unsustainable in that they can't cater for the most basic needs of their population and wholly depend on car journeys to access services and facilities. Hence any further housing development should be resisted. This includes affordable housing, as this will only exacerbate out-commuting and increase car journeys, contrary to sustainable principles and should hence only be provided in exceptional circumstances. New village shops need to be viable, so whilst the Council can encourage new shops in all villages, it cannot ensure that each village should have one.

#### **b) Include more settlements**

Taking into account national and regional policy, further dispersal of development to other settlements not exhibiting the requirements set out in RSS Development Policy C is likely to create a more unsustainable pattern of development.

### ***(D) Rural Areas***

#### **Preferred option**

Outside those settlements identified in the RSS as being appropriate for a range of scales of development, national and regional policy is very restrictive.

Demand for housing in the countryside has historically been high, with the result that North Somerset villages and hamlets have become dormitory settlements, and local residents have difficulty accessing the housing market. The current RSS approach seeks to ensure that local needs take priority. In line with the increasing change in emphasis from dispersed to concentrated development, the Core Strategy needs to clearly distinguish between those settlements where development may be appropriate in principle from elsewhere in the district. This will mean the removal of settlement boundaries from non-service villages, acknowledging that they are no longer appropriate for additional development.

Within these areas, new housing is not permitted unless it is for essential rural workers or replacement dwellings. Any remaining Local Plan housing allocations affected by the removal of settlement boundaries will lapse when the policy change takes effect. Affordable housing to meet the needs of these areas would be expected to be met at settlements covered by RSS Development Policies A, B and C. Where it is demonstrated that appropriate sites are not forthcoming in these locations, then provision may be made in accordance with the rural exceptions policy.

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Non-housing development will also be very carefully controlled.

#### **Vision for the Rural Areas**

Rural areas will retain and enhance their countryside character where the quality of the natural environment is the prime objective and any new development will be small scale and strictly controlled. The rural villages will have maintained their individual character, identity and sense of community. Accessibility will be improved to facilities and services not locally available within nearby service villages or towns. The surrounding countryside will have retained its open natural character, protected from inappropriate development and valued for its landscape and biodiversity.

#### **Alternative Options:**

##### **a) Allow for some 'market housing' development in smaller villages**

The principal alternative is to maintain the current approach, permitting infill housing where it does not contribute to out-commuting in a larger number of small settlements or even extending the settlement boundaries and allowing greater flexibility in the use and redevelopment of existing isolated homes. This alternative has been rejected because it would lead to a more dispersed pattern of development, continuing the trend toward suburbanisation of the countryside and increasing travel to work distances, while not necessarily meeting genuine rural needs. This would be inconsistent with the broad thrust of national and regional policy.

##### **b) Distinguish between smaller villages and the open countryside for non-housing development**

As for (a) above, this approach would potentially lead to a more dispersed, unsustainable form of development.