

**North Somerset Site Allocations Plan Examination
Congresbury Residents Action Group Submission to the Hearing.**

I speak on behalf of the Congresbury Residents Action Group (CRAG)

CRAG was formed in 2014. Over the last 3 years CRAG has undertaken an active role in responding to both planning policy consultations and planning applications which have involved proposed development within the village of Congresbury.

CRAG submitted comments in response to the consultation on the SAP in December 2016. And as you will have ready had sight of these comments, Madam, it is not my intention to repeat them.

However, there has been a **significant** local change made to the content of the SAP since we submitted our comments. This change was made after the close of the public consultation process and we consequently believe that it is important for CRAG to address you and to highlight the inappropriate inclusion of the site now known as "Land off Wrington Lane, Congresbury" as a new allocation site within the SAP, offering capacity for development of 50 houses.

There are 3 closely linked issues to which we need to draw to your attention:

1. Firstly, the process by which this site was identified for inclusion in the SAP.

This site has never been included in draft versions of the SAP published for consultation. Quite the contrary. In North Somerset's **Sustainability** assessment of sites reviewed for inclusion in the draft SAP it was considered, under the rather misleading heading of "Cobthorn Farm, land west of Wrington Road", site reference HE14181, and was given a **negative assessment** under considerations of sections *4.4 Greenfield, 4.5 Agricultural land class - BMV, 5.3 Poor pedestrian and cycle links* and in addition - *Adverse impact on rural setting of village*. The site had otherwise only appeared, with the same site reference (HE14181), on the *list of alternative sites put forward by developers or land owners*.

At the Executive Committee meeting held on 7th February 2017 a paper was tabled suggesting the inclusion of this site. It had not appeared on the announced agenda of the Executive Committee meeting. Consequently there was no opportunity for public consultation or advance consideration by members. The report to the Executive Committee in fact stated that "It is not considered that the proposed changes are significant so further public consultation prior to submission is not required"

The reference to submission was the submission to you, Madam.

The paper recommended inclusion of the site on the SAP, subject to determination by the P&R committee of the pending planning application. If planning permission were to be refused by P&R, the proposed allocation would then not be included on the SAP.

The sudden inclusion of this site as part of the SAP is considered by CRAG to be a significant change.

The timing was also significant. The Executive Committee met one day before the scheduled meeting of the NSC Planning and Regulatory Committee when the P&R Committee was being asked by officers to approve a planning application for development on this site submitted by Gladman Developments Ltd.

The application had been considered at the January meeting of the P&R Committee and the Committee had voted to refuse the application. But in accordance with NSC policy it was to be again considered at the February meeting as Councillors had voted against the Officer's recommendation.

The decision taken by the Executive Committee was therefore, we would suggest, premature and appears to have been engineered to place even further pressure on the P&R Committee to approve the application and also to permit the site to be included as part of the submission for this hearing, thus boosting NSC's 5 year supply position.

We believe this process does raise questions of probity in respect of the decision making process which CRAG is pursuing separately with NSC but feel you should be made aware of our concerns.

2. Secondly - the fact that the application by Gladman Developments Ltd to build houses on this site is currently the subject of a Planning Appeal.

Madam, you may not be aware that this site is the subject an original and a duplicate planning application, both submitted by Gladman Developments Ltd.

In June 2016, Gladman submitted an appeal for non-determination in respect of the first application and at the same time submitted a duplicate application.

The Appeal regarding non-determination of the first application proceeded in March this year even though the P&R Committee had determined in favour of the duplicate application on 8th February. As I have just suggested - the decision by the P&R Committee to overturn the decision made at the January meeting and approve the duplicate application may have been as a result of pressure arising from the decision by the Executive Committee to include the site in the SAP.

Inspector Jordan is currently considering the evidence placed before her in respect of the first application. CRAG was a Rule 6 participant at the Inquiry and we hope that we have presented the Inspector with substantial evidence to show that the site is not sustainable and a strong case for her to find that the Appeal should be dismissed for a number of solid reasons

Obviously this is not directly a matter for you, but we would argue that pending the findings of this Inquiry, the site should be excluded from the SAP.

3. Thirdly, the scale of development proposed on this site in the SAP (50 houses) is contrary to CS32 policies governing development in the Service Villages.

Madam, we know that you will be familiar with CS32.

The latest version approved as the result of a separate hearing regarding the Core Strategy is clear that development outside of settlement boundaries in Service Villages should be limited to "about 25 dwellings" Clearly the use of the word "about" is intended to offer flexibility, but not to the extent that the scale of development should be at twice the guideline level! CS32 indicates that housing numbers above this figure should only be on a plan led basis. This is not the case here.

CRAG has supported NSC's revised approach to CS32 and we commented on this – but to include the Wrington Lane site as part of the SAP, indicating capacity for 50 homes, shows a complete disregard for the planning policies and principles adopted by NSC in January of this year. We believe that it is **imperative** for NSC to uphold their own policies. We know that the 5 year housing supply problems faced by NSC create tensions and difficulties, but there must be principles governing local planning policy to ensure that there is an informed and consistent approach to consideration of planning applications submitted by developers. Both developers and the local residents need to know that NSC will determine applications in accordance with their own planning policies, albeit with reference to the NPPF.

Identification on the SAP of this site, offering capacity for 50 houses, located outside the settlement boundary of Congresbury, is in contravention of the principles of the newly adopted CS32 and CRAG is fearful that this neglectful approach by NSC will open doors to other developers to challenge the principles of CS32 based on the precedent set in respect of the Wrington Lane site. This is a threat to all Service Villages in North Somerset and not just Congresbury.

The submission by NSC of this site as part of the SAP would seem to be wrong for the reasons outlined above and we urge you to exclude it.

Madam, we earnestly hope that you will find that the Core Strategy is sound and that the planning uncertainties that have blighted NSC following the High Court challenge to the CS in 2013 can finally be ended, allowing planning policy within NSC to be put back on a firm footing.

Thank you.