

North Somerset Council  
**Local Development Framework**

# **Core Strategy**

**Housing Topic paper**

This is part of a series of topic papers summarising the evidence base for the North Somerset Core Strategy document.

Other topic papers available in this series:

- Demography, health, social inclusion and deprivation
- Housing
- Economy
- Retail
- Settlement function and hierarchy
- Resources (including minerals, waste, recycling, energy consumption)
- Natural environment (including climate change, biodiversity, green infrastructure, countryside, natural environment and flooding)
- Transport and communications
- Sustainable construction / design quality including heritage
- Summing up / spatial portrait

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Housing is a key issue for all local authorities. North Somerset aims to ensure that there is sufficient housing available to meet the required provision so that everyone may have the opportunity for a decent home. However, the availability and supply of land or housing must be balanced with other requirements such as the creation of matching employment opportunities, protection of the countryside, the conservation and enhancement of the environment, and the efficient use of land and resources. This topic paper discusses the current housing situation in North Somerset, the future housing needs of the district over the next twenty years, as well as other issues such as balancing housing and employment development, affordable housing need and sustainable housing development.

## 2. Current Situation in North Somerset



- 2.1 The Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimate in 2005 suggests that the population of North Somerset has risen to 195,100 since the census in 2001 which showed the population to be 188,564 – an increase of 3.5%. The age breakdowns from the mid-year estimate are 36,300 people aged between 0-15 years, 114,200 people of working age, and 44,600 older people (65+ for men/60+ for women). Currently older people make up 22.9% of North Somerset's Population compared to 18.7% of the population nationally.
- 2.2 On average there are 2.36 people living in each household in North Somerset. 59.0% of all households are comprised of couples and 27.8% of households are occupied by people with dependant children. Single person households make up 29.2% of households and 7.3% of households are lone parent households<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 2001 Census data in AMR 2006 p.9

- 2.3 In North Somerset in 2006 there were 87,767 dwellings<sup>2</sup> of which 81% are houses and 19% are flats<sup>3</sup>. The most common dwelling types are detached and semi-detached houses. In 2001 34.7% of dwellings were detached, 30.8% were semi-detached, 15.2% were terraced, 18.2% were flats, apartments or maisonettes<sup>4</sup>.
- 2.4 The 2001 census showed that in North Somerset 78.6% of houses are owner occupied and of these 35.4% of homes were owned outright. However, home ownership levels vary across the district with Clevedon Walton ward having 92.5% owner occupation, compared to Weston-super-Mare South ward which has just 43%. Private Rented accommodation accounted for 8.2% of the stock. Property rented from the Local Authority/Housing Association/Registered Social Landlord (including shared ownership schemes) accounted for 13.1% of the stock.
- 2.5 At the time of the 2001 census 3.4% of dwellings in North Somerset were unoccupied. This amounted to 2,366 vacant dwellings and 408 second residences/holiday homes. Although this is lower than the national figure of 3.9% and the South West figure of 4.5%, it is higher than other authorities in the West of England.
- 2.6 There were 110<sup>5</sup> people in temporary accommodation in December 2006. There is an overall lack of temporary accommodation in the district, particularly for families and young people.
- 2.7 The number of rough sleepers in North Somerset is difficult to gauge. The Council conducted a count in 2001 which revealed six people sleeping rough on the streets of North Somerset<sup>6</sup>. However, this maybe an underestimate due to the limited area over which the count took place, and information collected as part of the review process has indicated that these figures may have increased. The North Somerset Homelessness Strategy has identified the need to conduct a rough sleeper's count as an immediate priority.
- 2.8 North Somerset currently has six authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites, three run by North Somerset Council and three privately run sites. This is 16% of the total for the West of England. Provision for Gypsies and Travellers is discussed in greater detail in Section 8.

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<sup>2</sup> Excluding caravans or other mobile or temporary structures

<sup>3</sup> Based on 2001 Census figure plus Residential Land Survey figures 2002 – 2006 for net dwelling completions.

<sup>4</sup> Figures from 2001 Census

<sup>5</sup> North Somerset Councils P1E 200612: Households dealt with under the homelessness provisions of the 1996 Housing Act.

<sup>6</sup> North Somerset Council Homelessness Strategy 2006.

### 3. Recent Trends

- 3.1 In terms of completion rates, in the first phase of the Structure Plan 1996-2001, net dwelling completion rates were below the target figure of 993 dwellings per annum required. However, post 2001 completion rates have increased substantially and have averaged 1,170 dwellings per annum between 2001 and 2005/06.
- 3.2 Over 71.2% of all dwelling completions in 2005/06 in North Somerset were provided on previously developed land. This is an increase of 1.3% on the previous year, but 20% higher than in 2003/04. The national target is that 60% of new housing should be provided on PDL (PPS3) and the RLP target is 55%, so North Somerset is meeting these targets for development on PDL. Furthermore in terms of densities, 91% of all dwellings were built in excess of 30 dwellings per hectare, showing that North Somerset is making efficient use of the residential land available<sup>7</sup>.
- 3.3 In terms of accommodation type the ratio of flats to houses is changing. During 2005/06 there were 1,281 new dwellings completed in North Somerset. Of these 35% were flats and 65% were houses, compared to 2001 figures where, of the 812 new dwellings built, 15% were flats and 85% were houses<sup>8</sup>. This shows a significant increase in the number of flats being built reflecting the change in household composition towards more single person households.

### 4. Future Housing Supply

- 4.1 The Joint Replacement Structure Plan requires North Somerset to build a total of 14,900 dwellings (net) between 1996 and 2011. Net dwelling completions from 1996 to 2006 have totalled 9,898 dwellings leaving 5,002 dwellings to be built from April 2006 to March 2011 to meet the JRSP target of 14,900. This means that 1,000 dwellings need to be built each year over the remaining five years of the Replacement Local Plan period.
- 4.2 Take up of current allocations, commitments and windfalls suggests that completion rates will continue strongly over the next three years, and the target of 14,900 dwellings will be met by 2011.
- 4.3 The Draft RSS for the South West currently allocates 26,000 houses for North Somerset District over the 20 year period from 2006 to 2026. This is set out as:
- An average of about 600 dwellings per annum within and adjoining Weston-super-Mare's urban area over the plan period. This will be in the form of **3,000 dwellings** within the existing urban area plus the provision of an urban extension accommodating up to **9,000 dwellings** to the east of Weston-super-Mare.

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<sup>7</sup> North Somerset AMR 2006 p.26

<sup>8</sup> Figures from Residential Land Survey 2006

- Policy SR4 has identified an urban extension to the south west of Bristol with **9,000 new dwellings** located within North Somerset District.
- **5,000 dwellings** elsewhere in North Somerset.

4.4 Sufficient provision has been made for 5,024 dwellings (net) in North Somerset between April 2006 and March 2011 in the Replacement Local Plan (Policy H/2). On top of these allocated sites is the allowance for 40 dwellings per annum which will come forward from unidentified previously-developed windfall sites<sup>9</sup> and 161 dwellings per annum from the other small sites<sup>10</sup> both of which will result in a significant number of dwellings over the next twenty years.

4.5 As illustrated in the table below, the majority of the 3000 dwellings proposed in the RSS for Weston-super-Mare (excluding the urban extension) and the 5000 dwellings proposed for the rest of North Somerset up to 2026 are already allocated in the Replacement Local Plan and/or have an existing planning permission. Therefore, the only real major areas of growth for housing are the urban extensions to Weston-super-Mare and South West Bristol.

Location	Amount needed up until 2026	Allocated up to 2011 <sup>11</sup>	Small Site permissions (1-9 dwellings)	Windfall permissions <sup>12</sup> (10+ dwellings)	Remaining needed to meet 26,000 target.
Urban Extension to Weston-super-Mare	9,000	-	-	-	<b>9,000</b>
South West Bristol Extension	9,000	-	-	-	<b>9,000</b>
Weston-super-Mare	3,000	1,978	494	77	<b>451</b>
The rest of North Somerset	5,000	3,046 <sup>13</sup>	404	133	<b>1417</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>5024</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>19,868</b>

Base date for figures: April 2007.

<sup>9</sup> The windfall sites allowance has reduced as the Inspector allocated over 504 dwellings in the Local Plan Inquiry 2006, which would otherwise have been banked as windfall allowance.

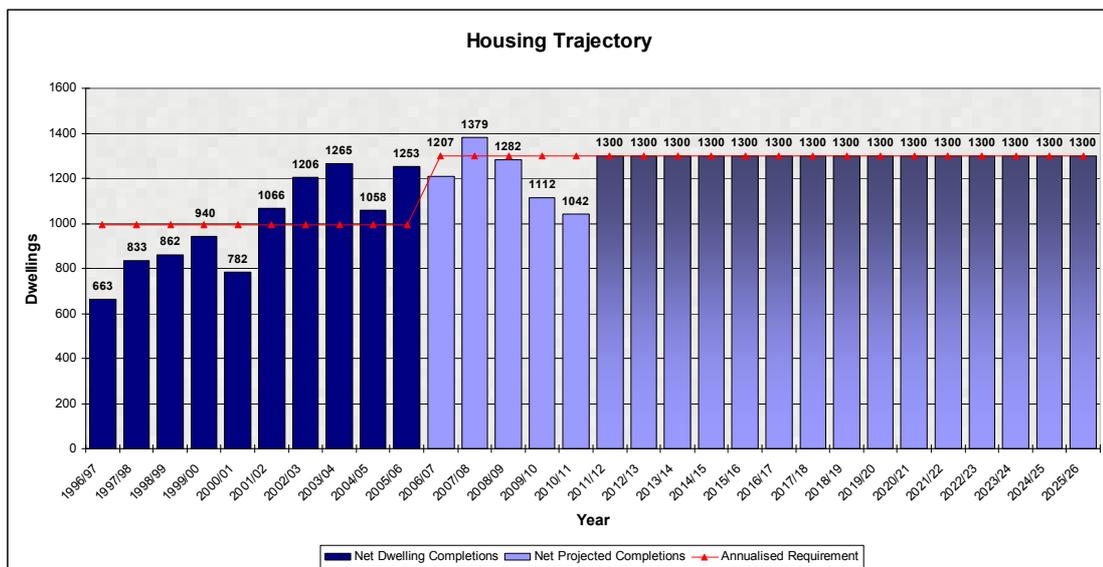
<sup>10</sup> This figure is an average of the last five years small site completions.

<sup>11</sup> Allocated in Schedule to Policy H/2 of RLP March 2007

<sup>12</sup> Figures from Residential Land Survey

<sup>13</sup> Figure obtained by adding up Portishead, Clevedon and other areas totals from Schedule to Policy H/2 of RLP March 2007

4.6 The draft RSS allocation of 26,000 houses for North Somerset District over the 20 year period from 2006 to 2026 will equate to 1,300 dwellings per annum for the next 20 years with 600 per annum in Weston-super-Mare alone. This target is over 300 dwellings per annum higher than the Joint Structure Plan requirement equating to a 30% increase on the current annual dwelling completions required. This rate of completion will need to be sustained over the next 20 years and meeting this target each year may be challenging.



AMR 2006

4.7 The Council has already identified some large areas for housing as part of overall regeneration schemes, in line with regional guidance, at the former RAF Locking and Weston Airfields, for which an Area Action Plan is being prepared. Additionally, an Area Action Plan has been scheduled into the LDS for the urban extension to South West Bristol identified in the draft RSS which could potentially result in 9,000 more houses in this area.

4.8 The Council is currently undertaking a Housing Land Availability Assessment (HLAA) in order to assess future housing capacity in the district. This will identify potential sites and a five year phasing strategy for residential development up to 2026. The assessment will also inform future monitoring reports, housing trajectories, the Core Strategy and other DPD's.

## 5. Housing/Employment Imbalance in Weston-super-Mare

5.1 The draft Regional Spatial Strategy has identified Weston-super-Mare as a Strategically Significant Town within the South West Region. The draft RSS acknowledges Weston-super-Mare's current dormitory relationship with Bristol which has occurred through significant housing development in recent years. This has resulted in increased levels of out-commuting, largely by car and a less sustainable pattern of development in the western part of the sub-region.

- 5.2 Self-containment<sup>14</sup> in Weston is 64% which is very low considering it has been identified as a Strategically Significant Town. 36% of Weston's residents commute out of Weston to work in other towns in the district, Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, the north fringe and further a field. In comparison, Bristol's level of self-containment is 85%, and Bath's is 71% despite being much closer to Bristol. This low level of self-containment is detrimental to Weston's economy (an issue which is covered in the Economy Topic Paper), plus it puts a great strain on the strategic road network due to the high level of car borne out commuting. Of people living in Weston-super-Mare 65% travel to work by car and of these 49% travel 10km or more to work<sup>15</sup>.
- 5.3 In order to reverse Weston's dormitory status relative to Bristol, reduce out commuting, and to create a sustainable self-contained town, the draft RSS states that future development in Weston-super-Mare will be employment led focusing on regenerating the town centre and increasing the provision for job growth in the Weston-super-Mare Travel To Work Area (TTWA) by between 8,500 and 10,000 jobs over the plan period.
- 5.4 This focus on employment creation in Weston-super-Mare means that housing development will be phased and linked directly to economic performance/job creation. In order to redress the balance between housing and employment in Weston, policy SR6 of the draft RSS states that strategic releases of new housing areas should only be provided when it can be demonstrated that an increasing rate of employment provision has brought employment and housing more closely into balance. However, the plan also states that provision should be made for an average of about 600 dwellings per annum within and adjoining Weston-super-Mares urban area over the plan period.
- 5.5 The phasing of employment to housing development, and how this will be implemented/monitored, is an issue that needs careful consideration during the production of the Core Strategy.

## **6. Affordable Housing**

- 6.1 Affordability of housing is determined by the relationship between incomes and household costs (rent or mortgage payments). Any definition of affordable housing must therefore relate to the local housing market and make a direct reference to local earnings and income levels.
- 6.2 Since 1998 average house prices in North Somerset have risen from £79,330 to £201,983 in 2006 – an increase of 154%<sup>16</sup>. House prices are rising at a much higher rate than incomes in the district with house prices which have

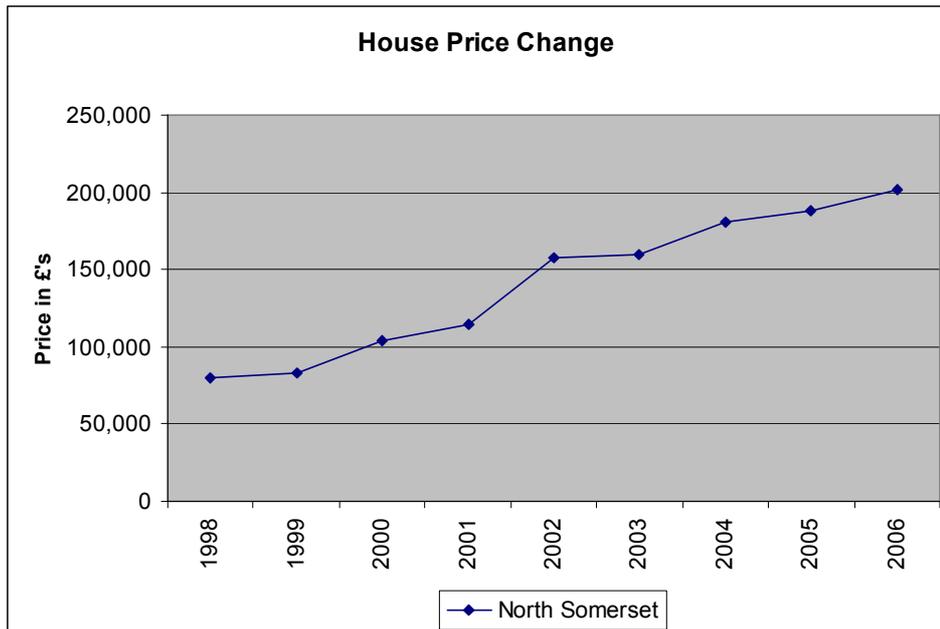
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<sup>14</sup> Self-containment is expressed as a percentage of the working age population in employment who live and work in the same area

<sup>15</sup> 2001 Census Travel to Work Statistics.

<sup>16</sup> North Somerset AMR 2006 p.13

risen by 150% since 1996 compared to incomes which have risen by just 43%<sup>17</sup>.



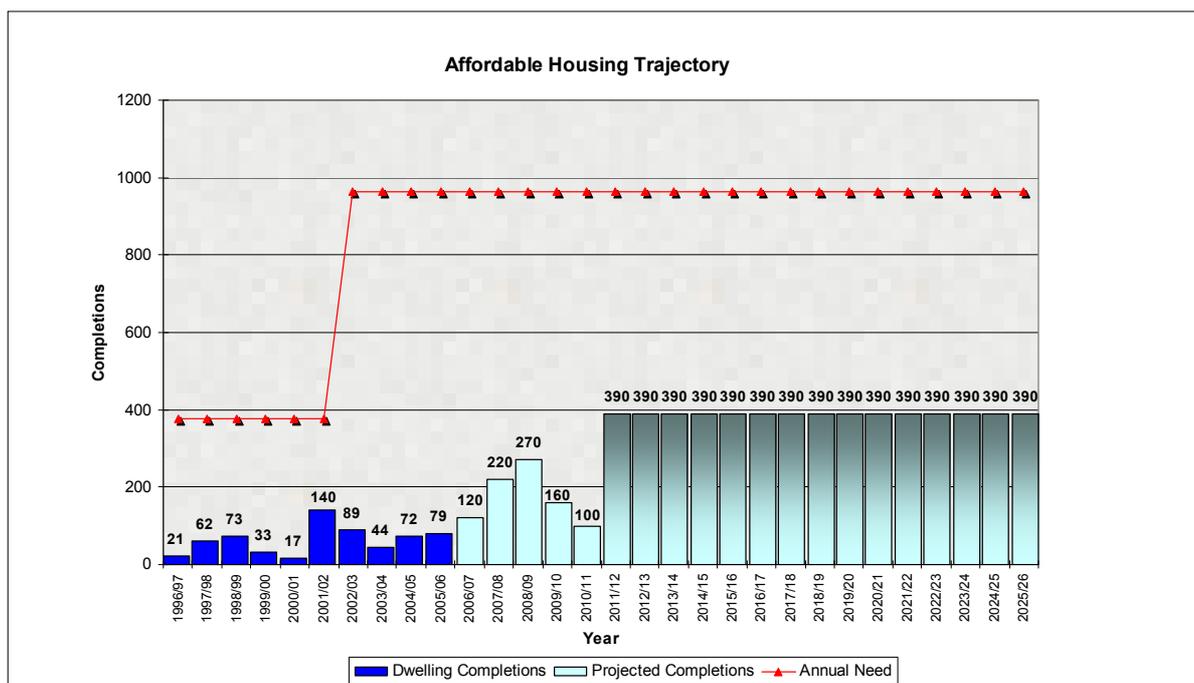
- 6.3 The National Housing Federation's leaflet entitled "The South West's Housing Time Bomb – Affordability and Supply 2006-2011" states that in 2005 the average house price in North Somerset was £191,494 and the average income was £25,287. However, the gross annual income needed to afford to buy a house at this price, with a 95% mortgage at 3.5x income, was £51,977. For households whose income is below this figure access to the property ladder is unobtainable. Within the South West region house prices are now 9.3 times incomes in the region, making the South West the most unaffordable place to buy a home in the UK. By 2011 people will be faced with an average house price of £283,000 – 40% higher than today<sup>18</sup>.
- 6.4 The discrepancy between incomes and house prices has led to the inability of people in the district to buy their own homes.
- 6.5 The 2001 David Couttie Associates Housing Need Study, which previously informed the Council's level of affordable housing need, suggested that North Somerset Council would need to provide 375 affordable housing dwellings per year to meet housing need in the district. More recently the 2005 Glen Bramley Housing Need Assessment Model has identified a much greater need. This model suggests that 965 affordable dwellings per year need to be provided from 2002 to 2011. Past affordable housing completion rates have been nowhere near the 965 dwellings per annum required. Affordable housing completions arising from planning permissions for 2005/06 totalled 79

<sup>17</sup> North Somerset Affordable Delivery Plan 2005/6-2008/9 p.8

<sup>18</sup> National Housing Federation –The South West's Housing Time Bomb: Affordability and supply 2006-2001

dwellings, 8% of total completions on sites in excess of 15 dwellings, those subject to on site affordable housing provision.

- 6.6 Although this is an increase on the previous years figure of 7% this is still well below the 30% target stated in policy H/4 of the Replacement Local Plan and is the result of historic planning permissions granted approval prior to current policies and thresholds being put in place. Currently, affordable housing secured through the planning system is not expected to exceed more than 800 dwellings over the next five years.



AMR 2006

- 6.7 The Glen Bramley Housing Need Assessment Model showed that the largest element of need within North Somerset is from new households which are unable to afford to buy, and under current conditions private renting is more affordable for these households than house purchase. Figures in the Bramely study for 2006 show that an additional 1059 new households forming in North Somerset in 2006 would have incomes too low to afford to buy.
- 6.8 Although net need for affordable housing is spread throughout the district, there are variations between areas. The study identified Weston-super-Mare as having an average net need of 308 affordable houses per year between 2002 and 2009, whereas Clevedon-Yatton has an average net need of 155. In all areas, except Nailsea-Blackwell (where income levels are highest), needs are projected to be greater in 2009 than in 2002<sup>19</sup>.
- 6.9 Policy H1 within the Draft RSS states that at least 7,500 affordable homes will be provided per annum within the South West Region in the period up to 2026. Provision will be made for at least 30% of all housing developments

<sup>19</sup> G., Bramley, West Of England Sub-region Housing Need and Affordability Assessment, May 2005

annually across each local authority area and Housing Market Area to be affordable, with authorities specifying rates up to 60% or higher in areas of greatest need.

- 6.10 Many villages and small settlements in North Somerset face particular difficulties in securing an adequate supply of land for affordable housing needs. Policy H/5 of the Replacement Local Plan acknowledges this problem and allows for exceptions sites where permission for affordable housing may be granted on sites within or adjoining villages, where housing would not otherwise be permitted, providing certain criteria are met. How the rural affordable housing need is met over the next twenty years will need to be addressed through the Core Strategy.
- 6.11 The demand for affordable housing is currently far higher than the supply, and will continue to outstrip supply of all housing for the foreseeable future.

## **7. Climate Change and Sustainable Development**

- 7.1 The energy used to heat, light and run our homes accounts for 27%<sup>20</sup> of all the UK's carbon emissions. The government has recently set a target that all new homes are to be carbon neutral by 2016 i.e. they produce no net carbon emissions from all the energy used over the course of a year.
- 7.2 This can be achieved through sustainable construction techniques and designing houses to conserve their energy and water use, include renewable energy technologies within homes and incorporate features that promote sustainable living i.e. providing full recycling facilities within all homes, provide outside drying space, cycle storage space etc.
- 7.3 The effects of climate change are already evident, and all the predictive models for climate change in the UK agree that summers will become increasingly warmer and drier, and that winters will be warmer and wetter.
- 7.4 A large amount of housing development is expected to take place in North Somerset over the next 20 years. It is crucial that houses are built following sustainable design principles in order to reduce their impact on the environment, adapt to climate change, and to enable the creation of sustainable communities.
- 7.5 For example, there is general agreement that the provision of green infrastructure (e.g. green open spaces within an urban environment) will help maintain more sustainable conditions including the provision of sustainable urban drainage systems and enhanced flood alleviation, urban cooling, improved air quality, providing conditions for urban biodiversity, provision of green space for public uses, and associated health benefits<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> DCLG 2007

<sup>21</sup> Dr David Goode, March 2006

- 7.6 The likelihood of flooding will increase over time due to climate change, including rising sea levels, higher average winter rainfall and more intense rainfall events. Areas currently not at significant risk could become so during the lifetime of developments. This needs to be taken into account in the choice of location, as well as the design of the development.
- 7.7 These are a few examples of issues that will need to be considered in terms of future house building and will be covered in more detail in the Sustainable Construction and Design Topic Paper.

## **8. Gypsies and Travellers**

- 8.1 North Somerset has six authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites, three run by North Somerset Council and three privately run sites. This is 16% of the total for the West of England. The Local Authority sites in North Somerset accommodate 8 pitches (one of which is rented from a private site) and 16 caravans. The private sites accommodate 23 pitches and 44 caravans. This equates to 6 sites, 31 pitches and 60 caravans in total for the whole of the district<sup>22</sup>.
- 8.2 Policy H/12 of the North Somerset Replacement Local Plan sets out the current policy position with regard to proposals for sites for Gypsies, other Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.
- 8.3 North Somerset Council is working in partnership with the other West of England Authorities to undertake a sub-regional Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), as required by the Housing Act 2004. An Officer Working Group is co-ordinating the GTAA work and consultants have been appointed to undertake the Accommodation Needs Assessment. Following completion of the accommodation needs survey the final report will be completed in mid August 2007 and published in the Autumn.
- 8.4 An initial analysis has been undertaken to inform the consultation stage of a partial review of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy Gypsy and Travellers Policy GT1. This shows an indicative need for 45 additional residential pitches and a requirement for capacity for 20 caravans on transit sites in North Somerset for the period 2006-2011. The location of these sites will be an issue for discussion during the production of the Core Strategy.

## **9. Utilities**

- 9.1 In preparing Local Development Documents we will consider the requirements of the utilities for land – both within North Somerset District and in other authority areas – to enable them to meet the demands that will be placed on them. We will also consider the wider environmental effects of increased demand, in terms of both the additional need for basic resources and of the

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<sup>22</sup> January Count 2007

associated emissions to air, soil or water, bearing in mind that those effects may extend to other authorities areas.

- 9.2 Bristol Water is the water supplier for North Somerset, as well as surrounding districts and they supply approximately 450,000 households within their catchment area. Initial discussions suggest that the urban extension to south west Bristol can be accommodated by their existing Barrow tanks facility, but the urban extension to Weston-super-Mare may result in the need for increased capacity at their Banwell facility.
- 9.3 Consultation with the utility companies has begun and will be ongoing throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy and Area Action Plans.

## **10. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION.**

- 10.1 **Two Urban Extensions:** North Somerset is potentially required to provide 26,000 houses in the next 20 years (1,300 dwellings per annum) including two urban extensions – each the equivalent to the size of Clevedon. To a certain extent the location of new housing is pre-determined due to that fact that locations for the urban extensions are set out in draft regional guidance and the Replacement Local Plan is recently adopted and up-to-date. In this respect it is difficult to set out radically different options in terms of the location of major housing growth. However, potential issues for discussion include:
- How will the provision of 26,000 homes in the next 20 years impact on North Somerset, and how can the Core Strategy maximise the benefit of this growth?
  - Do you agree that – besides the urban extensions - housing should be concentrated in the four towns in North Somerset, as currently stated in the Replacement Local Plan or should other potentially sustainable locations be considered?
  - How should the new housing be phased? Should the two urban extensions be built simultaneously or should one commence first? How should each urban extension be phased, in terms of employment, housing and provision of facilities? How can they integrate with the existing communities?
  - What form should the two urban extensions take in terms of layout/design/sustainable development principles.
- 10.2 **Housing/Employment Imbalance:** There is potentially a tension between the employment-led strategy and housing requirements.
- Do you agree that employment uses should take priority over housing in Weston-super-Mare to increase self-containment of Weston, reduce out-commuting, and redress the imbalance between employment and housing?
  - How should the phasing of employment to housing development be managed?

- 10.3 **Affordable Housing:** The need for affordable housing is currently far greater than the current or projected supply and there are significant affordability issues with high house price inflation coupled with comparatively low wages.
- Should the Council require developments to provide a higher percentage of affordable housing to meet these targets and should the current policy be strengthened/reviewed?
  - Policy H/1 of the draft RSS states that where need is not being met Councils should request 60% or higher - Is this too high/unfeasible or should we look to implement higher targets to meet the demand?
  - Are there other methods for achieving increased levels of affordable housing which should be considered?
  - How should the Core Strategy tackle the issue of rural affordable housing?
- 10.4 **Densities and Design:** The RLP currently states densities of 30 -50 dwellings per hectare. PPS 3 states local authorities, whilst ensuring an efficient use of land, can develop a broad range of densities across the authority where necessary.
- Should densities of new residential developments be increased?
  - Are there any areas where higher or lower densities should be applied?
  - Should we keep the existing density ranges, based on accessibility, as set out in the Replacement Local Plan?
- 10.5 **Sustainability Issues:** The creation of sustainable communities, sustainable construction, and sustainable design in housing development is at the heart of national policy.
- Should all housing developments include a mix of housing types and tenures?
  - Should the Council require new housing development to include a proportion of lifetime homes i.e. homes that are designed with built-in flexibility meaning homes adapt as peoples lives change.
  - Should the Council require all new developments to incorporate sustainable design and construction principles?
  - Should the Council require a proportion of energy from all new developments to be sourced from renewable energy?
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Further Evidence Required:

- Numbers of people commuting out of Weston to work, and up-to-date self-containment and TTWA stats.
  - Up-to-date figures in terms of house types, ownership, unoccupied dwellings etc
  - Homelessness figures
  - Updated Housing Markets Needs Assessment
  - Awaiting Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Need Assessment
  - Awaiting Housing Land Availability Assessment
  - Local level house price and income data across the district
  - Rural affordable housing need.
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2001 Census Data

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