

Objection Part 2

Core Strategy comparison

The Parish Council is aware of the effort that has been expended on creating a sustainable policy for development within the County of North Somerset through the development of North Somerset Council's "Core Strategy".

Bleadon Parish Council believes that a robust and well-considered policy for housing growth in North Somerset has been developed. Unlike the planning proposal with which this objection deals, North Somerset's plan is of an integrated nature embracing housing, employment, transport, and provision for education whilst attempting to protect "sensitive" environmental areas.

Bleadon Parish Council believes that there is sufficient objection to the planning proposal on environmental and ecological grounds to prove the proposal to be unwise in the extreme.

The Parish Council believes that the proposals are seriously flawed when set beside the policies embodied in North Somerset Council's 'CORE STRATEGY'.

The Core Strategy provides a useful framework to critique the planning proposal, and thus the following objections mimic the layout of that document although the arguments made are self-supporting.

(It is accepted that some sections of the Core Strategy may have no direct relevance to the proposal as it stands, and therefore no comment is made on certain aspects).

Bleadon Parish Council believes that a number of its objections are of sufficient strength, individually, to give grounds for the rejection of this proposal. Together they form a formidable argument against development of the inappropriate, unsympathetic, and environmentally damaging nature of this proposal.

NORTH SOMERSET CORE STRATEGY:

The North Somerset Vision is set out in the "Sustainable Community Strategy" (SCS). "Vision 7 Infill Villages and Countryside Vision".

This states: "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 infill villages will have maintained or enhanced their individual character, identity and sense of community", and "The surrounding countryside will have retained its open

natural character, its distinctive landscapes protected from inappropriate development, agricultural use supported and valued for its biodiversity”

Clearly the grafting of 200 homes onto an historic village, whilst at the same time destroying an area rich in wildlife, is totally incompatible with this vision.

SPATIAL POLICIES:

CS1- Addressing Climate Change and Carbon Reduction.

It would appear that the Applicant has not considered, or made apparent, a way in which to offset the long-term loss of the CO₂ absorption which is offered by the land earmarked for development.

The development is at odds with CS1.8 “The re-use of previously developed land and existing buildings is preferred to the loss of greenfield sites”.

CS3- Environmental Impacts and Flood-Risk Assessment.

The Parish Council believes that the proposal’s lack of “Sequential Test” is a major flaw.

It is noted that the proposal has ignored, or failed to address, NSC’s assertion that with increased sea-levels, a likely factor in coming years, Flood Zone 2 areas should be treated as Flood Zone 3a unless there is evidence to the contrary.

It is also noted that the site is close to a river draining into the nearby Severn estuary which has the highest fluvial discharge volume in England and Wales; and the third-highest tidal-range (15.4 meters), globally.

CS4- Nature Conservation.

Despite the developer’s addressing of the issues to some degree, it is difficult to see how such a development in this location can achieve a positive impact upon biodiversity. “Mitigation” can never guarantee that the impact of such a large-scale project will not have a negative impact on the flora and fauna of such an area. The Proposal notes evidence of protected species (Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats) and evidence of previous occupation (and potential return of) Water Vole.

Local residents attest to the presence of kingfisher, heron, egret, mallard, deer, otter, and newts, to name but a few. Clearly the great diversity of wildlife within the fields and watercourses of this site suggests that development is inappropriate on these grounds alone

CS5-Landscape and the Historic Environment.

Bleadon lies within a “Heritage Landscape” which is worthy of protection.

The Mendip Hills AONB is close to the development site, and the Coastal Plains and Moors (Bleadon Moor) are identified as a “Character Landscape” in the North Somerset Landscape Character Assessment (NSLCA).

The AONB is protected by NSC policy DM11 of the Development Management Policies.

The Applicant asserts that with increasing distance the visual impact of the proposed buildings will become less apparent. Development that can be seen from the AONB, or the West Mendip Way must be resisted. The developer also comments that people walking on the hills have only intermittent views of the site, as it is obstructed in places by vegetation; and thus the retention of the open fields is not of great value in this respect. It is to be stressed that these “intermittent views” are part of the very essence of an AONB.

If one were to accept these assertions at face-value then a case could be made for permitting quasi-urban development along the foot of virtually every range of hills in the country. Set against the context of an AONB and “Designated Character Landscapes” with a great ecological diversity, the Applicant’s LVIA stated arguments become indefensible.

The Applicant also entirely misses the point that those “intermittent” views are of pleasant open landscape rather than roads and houses.

CS-9 Green Infrastructure.

This policy states “Priority will be given to protection and enhancement of biodiversity”. Villagers have noted a wide range of mammal and bird species. Indeed, the Applicant’s own Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) identifies a wide range of fauna. Rather than attempting to mitigate the unavoidable, and potentially irreparable, damage the Parish Council believes that development should not be permitted at all.

CS-10 Transportation and Movement. CS-11 Parking.

The Core Strategy asserts “Through the development management process planning applications will need to address how they can deliver a choice of transport modes which could provide a realistic alternative to the car”.

It is the view of the Parish Council that the proposed development will become in essence a dormitory annexe to the village. It is anticipated that, even only allowing for one car per dwelling (an extremely conservative estimate!), there will be upwards of 200 additional vehicles in and around the village.

The Applicant asserts that a Travel Plan will be put in place. Unfortunately this can only be done AFTER the build is complete and occupied and is dependent upon the new residents “buying into it”. The Travel Plan, it would appear, is largely focussed on an information pack with little confidence that its contents would be heeded.

It is noticed that the relatively few cyclists who commute along the A370 frequently use the narrow, inadequate footpath rather than compete for space on the road with the high volume of fast-moving traffic.

The Applicant goes on to give details of bus timetables but fails to note that availability is seasonally affected e.g. 40% of the scheduled No. 20 buses are “Summer-Only”.

In CS11 NSC notes that “while much can be done to encourage travel by other modes, there will still be high car ownership”. In other words Bleadon will experience a vast increase in commuting and school-runs.

CS-12 Achieving High Quality Design and Place Making.

The Core Strategy asserts “The following aspects of North Somerset’s character should be maintained and enhanced.....The historic rural settlements”.

The grafting-on of 200+ dwellings to a village that has grown organically over the years will do nothing to maintain the character of Bleadon and everything to destroy it. The Parish Council again objects strongly to the proposal on these grounds.

CS13- Scale of New Housing.

“The Core –Strategy approach is to ensure that housing growth is better-related to employment growth (employment-led) than in the past”. The proposal would seem to offer only minimal employment prospects over and above the employment already in existence in the village and its environs. There can be no guarantee that the few jobs created will go to residents of the new development and indeed, further traffic may be created by these workers “commuting-in” to Bleadon. Consequently the proposal fails entirely by this criterion.

CS14- Distribution of new housing.

The Core Strategy asserts that “Settlement Boundaries define the area within which residential development is acceptable in principle”.

In the LVIA the Applicant states “The proposed development will fit into the landscape pattern adjacent to the existing village”; thus lying outside the settlement boundary and ignoring the “infill” status of Bleadon.

The LVIA states that houses along Bleadon Road...and Bridge Road limit views toward the proposed development from the houses to the north and east of these roads “although oblique views and views between intervening properties towards the development site are possible”. The Applicant misses the point that it is such views of open countryside rather than a housing estate that adds to the character of small villages like Bleadon.

The Parish Council is aware that “loss of view” *per se* is not in itself grounds for objection but, in this case, it is clearly demonstrable that the views are inextricably entwined with the “Rural Character” of the area.

CS25- Children, Young People and Higher education.

NSC has developed an integrated strategy of matching new schools to planned housing development and population growth; four primary schools and a secondary school are being considered.

Ignoring NSC’s Education Strategy and creating a significant increase in the number of children in Bleadon will both a) Increase the volume of “school-run” vehicles on the roads and b) put undue pressure on local primary schools which are close to capacity. The latter may mean even longer trips to schools, beyond those of Lympsham or Uphill.

CS26- Supporting Healthy living.

Bleadon Road provides a level walk with open vistas which is used during the day by many residents for the exercising of both themselves and their dogs.

Developing the fields will have the effect of removing a recreational amenity from the people of Bleadon.

The fields also provide a “buffer-zone” between the village and the busy A370. They contribute to the creation of a tranquil environment which may be conducive towards the maintenance of positive mental health.

C33- Area Policies. Infill Villages.

“Within the settlement boundaries of the infill villages....residential development of an appropriate scale which supports sustainable development will be supported providing that...

- The form of the development respects the scale and character of the settlement.”

Clearly the proposal fails to observe this requirement.

For all these reasons (stated in terms informed by the NSC Core Strategy) Bleadon Parish Council urges North Somerset Planners to reject the proposed development on the fields adjacent to the village.