

Local Plan Regulation 19 - Additional Sites Consultation

The Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment upon North Somerset Council's proposals to meet the Government's targets for increased dwellings.

Whilst the Parish Council broadly supports the proposition that the majority of development should take place at the three strategic growth locations of Weston-super-Mare, south west Bristol and Nailsea and Backwell, it has significant concerns regarding other aspects of the proposals.

If the Parish Council has understood the consultation proposals correctly, Bleadon has been categorised as a large village (Category B). The criteria used in relation to this category is that:

- It is relatively sustainable by virtue of their proximity to a higher order settlement which can be accessed by way of sustainable modes of transport.
- It may have some services and facilities, but that it is closely related to a higher order settlement which has a wider range.

The Parish Council would respectfully suggest that there has been a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the level of services within the Parish and the extent to which services within the higher order settlement (Weston-super-Mare) can be accessed by way of sustainable means of transport. It offers the following by way of evidence:

- Bleadon is not a large village. The 2021 census references 540 dwellings within the Parish. Approximately two thirds of these dwellings (350) are within the 'village centre'. This would place Bleadon as one of the smaller villages within North Somerset.
- Unlike other villages identified within Category B, Bleadon does not have a local primary school and the nearest secondary school is not accessible by way of a safe walking route. North Somerset Council's school organisation proposals have consistently failed to address the issue of a lack of local school provision.
- There is a significantly higher proportion of people within the Parish who identify as being disabled under the Equality Act – 20% higher than the North Somerset average. There are no existing services within the Parish to support these needs.
- The road network within the Parish is not capable of supporting an increase in traffic volumes. Getting in and out of the village centre is already recognized as a major issue and there have been multiple fatalities at road intersections. These require addressing now to resolve an existing problem.

- North Somerset Council withdrew public bus services from within the village centre some years ago. The only route which now exists is along Bridgwater Road. These services are infrequent and, in order to access this route, residents are required to walk extensive lengths along roads (not wide enough to have a dividing white line) without footpaths or verges and with no lighting.
- There is less than 20 square metres of green Public Open Space within the village.
- Given the population profile and the absence of alternative sustainable travel arrangements, the proportion of people reliant upon cars and vans to travel is significantly higher - almost 20% higher - than the North Somerset average.

None of the above would suggest that Bleadon is a 'sustainable' large village capable of supporting additional residential growth.

There have been a number of approved developments since the 2021 census. The most significant of these is the quarry development in Bridge Road which is already well underway and will see the provision of a further 42 dwellings. There are other smaller scale developments equating to approximately 15 additional dwellings. These already approved developments within the 'village centre' have already resulted in a 16% increase in the number of dwellings. Proposals for a further 137 dwellings would see a further increase of almost 40% within the 'village centre' based upon the last census.

Planning applications have also been approved for an increase in the number of static caravan pitches at sites to the South of Bridgwater Road. Although these pitches are not classified as permanent dwellings for planning purposes, there are circumstances in which static caravans can be occupied for 11 months out of each year. In such circumstances, there is an inevitable impact upon local services.

Given the absence of existing infrastructure and the growth already underway, the Parish is not in a position to support significant additional development. The level of proposed increase is excessive, unreasonable and would fundamentally change the rural character and nature of the Parish.

A recent Housing Needs Survey has indicated that there is an unmet need for affordable housing for those already resident within the Parish. This partly relates to younger people who are 'priced out' of being able to stay within the Parish but also relates to older people who feel that they have no choice but to move out of the Parish due to the lack of local services. North Somerset Council's current approach to affordable housing and housing allocation policy will do nothing to directly address a pre-existing issue.

The Council's comments apply equally to all sites within and adjacent to the Parish boundary (regardless of categorisation). However, the Council would wish to draw particular attention to the proposals on Bleadon Hill. The sites in question are as follows:

HE201030

HE2035

North Somerset Council has historically treated sites to the West of the Hillcote area as a 'buffer zone' separating the urban area of Weston-super-Mare and the rural area of Bleadon. Allowing development in this location would fundamentally change this position and likely make it extremely difficult for North Somerset Council – as Local Planning Authority – to defend against subsequent applications for development further East along Bleadon Hill and South towards the village centre. Retention of the existing designation of these sites would also ensure that development could only be considered through the prism of rural exception sites. The Council would strongly urge North Somerset Council to maintain its strategic approach.