

Local Plan Consultation Meeting

Saturday 1st November 2025

Present: Cllrs Peter Hopwood, Bruce Clarke, Helen Burns, Nick Keppel-Palmer, Robert Davies, Jocelyn Nichols (Clerk), B&NES Councillors Matt McCabe and Fiona Gourley, Janine Nash from our MP's office and 30 parishioners

1. Bruce gave an introduction explaining what the options document and local plan is. The 480 page strategy document is a plan for building in our area over the next 15-20 years. The consultation closes on 14 November and identifies space for 27,000 homes – 1500 a year as requested by the new Government, which is double the previous requirement.
2. Matt McCabe explained B&NES Council's position. They have been lobbying the Government about the doubled target being unachievable. However they can only put a case to the Planning Inspector at the end of the process. Where previously the Council had identified land for 5.4 years, this had now been halved to 2.7 years due to the doubling of the requirement, and without a 5 year plan a developer would be more likely to be allowed to build where they wished. Once a draft plan is in place there will be more protection against speculative development.

The Green Belt protection against urban sprawl has recently been removed by the Government, and the Local Plan needs to show that sites are connected by good transport links. Priston is in the worst connected area so more building has not been identified. Matt showed maps of all the identified sites for development – the A4 corridor and Somer Valley are regionally important areas of planned growth.

Matt identified the World Heritage Green Setting boundary, which makes any building within it difficult, and also a rare broadleaved woodland area near Whitchurch. Plans by WECA to upgrade roads to the A367 will enable more development.

Some parishes, such as Timsbury and Bishop Sutton are asking that developments be phased to allow the infrastructure to be improved.

A parishioner suggested if the Odd Down Park and Ride site was developed with underground parking similar to the city centre car park, then housing could be placed on top. This area is full of tunnels from old Fullers Earth mines.

3. Robert explained the ramifications of the plan. As the fertility rate is only 1.1, and it needs to be 2.1 to sustain current population levels, he considers that there will be no need for all these extra houses. B&NES have been building 500 houses a year, so the increase to 1500 homes a year seems unachievable. He is concerned that since the change in Green Belt criteria to protect from urban sprawl, Priston would be redesignated as Grey Belt.

A parishioner asked about the increasing need for student accommodation, Fiona answered that the Universities are planning to provide more accommodation on campus to relieve pressure on HMOs in the city.

A parishioner asked if we had been given a higher increase in targets than other areas, and we have indeed – for example South Gloucestershire have only been increased by 40-50% compared to our 100%.

A parishioner remarked that in 25 years the building plans had never been achieved,

and Fiona responded that B&NES was working with Equip and developers, and applying for Government grants to plan starter and retirement homes. More information would be provided at the Parish Liaison meeting to which all were invited.

4. Bruce outlined proposals for Somer Valley and Rural Areas using maps scanned from the consultation, and reminded all that these were plans, not decisions to build. All the building would take a long time to happen.
5. Nick explained the effects of the plan on our nearby communities (Farmborough and Timsbury). With 25-35 houses in the first development at Farmborough, then another 250 this could be a 25% increase in the population, and would impact transport and facilities for us. Likewise Timsbury could eventually increase in size by 50%. The Council must provide Biodiversity Net Gain to counteract the increased building. A parishioner asked about how our small Doctors Surgery would manage the increase in patients, and was assured that a Section 106 agreement would ensure an increase in provision.
6. Bruce summed up the discussion and reminded parishioners how to respond to the consultation. A parishioner reminded us that we do need more affordable housing and this plan will help us achieve the type of development needed.
7. Fiona introduced the Movement Strategy consultation which is also out now, and important for all to consider as part of the future development of our area.