

# **BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET CORE STRATEGY**

## **Draft Launch Document**

**September 2007**

Please note: This is not the final document design and layout – design work to be completed after approval for publication

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## Introduction

This document marks the beginning of a new generation of development plans for our district. These plans are gathered together under the title Local Development Framework (LDF) – best envisaged as a loose-leaf folder containing the plans rather than as a single document.

The previous plan-making system – which governed production of the Local Plan – has been replaced by a new approach that has sustainable development and spatial planning at its core. It has a clear focus on the delivery of objectives. Spatial planning means that the plans brought forward by the Council as part of its Local Development Framework should be integrated with plans and proposals of other bodies, such as those of the Primary Care Trust and utility companies, who have responsibility for delivering public services and infrastructure. Delivering the spatial objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy and emerging Visions for the district will also be a key task. The job of the LDF is to co-ordinate and express how the spatial elements – the things with land-use impacts - of all these plans and strategies are to be taken forward and implemented in a coherent way.

We don't have a blank canvas. There are national planning policies and standards that we must adhere to and, particularly, our plans must be in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS sets out unprecedented levels of growth in housing and other areas over the next 20 years. In Bath and North East Somerset this means, for instance, that we will need to find land for up to 15,500 new homes.

At the same time, the LDF must reflect the local distinctiveness of the area and deal with issues relevant at a local level. In some ways it helps to imagine the LDF as the filling in a sandwich – the top slice of bread

represents the nationally-imposed requirements and the bottom slice represents the local issues: the filling has to bind the two together in a palatable way!

The Core Strategy is the strategic-level plan. Its job is to deal with the big issues rather than the detail. So it won't, for instance, be dealing with the allocation of development sites apart from those with strategic significance. The allocation of development will be done through the Core Strategy's sister document, the Allocations Plan. The Core Strategy is where the tough decisions need to be made, and it will set the context for the other plans in the LDF.

As might be expected, the process by which the new generation of plans will be brought forward has changed too. The Government is keen to speed up the process at the same time as encouraging greater public involvement. To this end the concept of "front-loading" has been introduced. Effectively this means that public involvement should be at its most intense at the beginning of the formulation of a plan, rather than towards the end as often happened under the old system. Alongside this, the way that a plan is tested at the end of the process is different. The "soundness" of a plan will be examined having regard to the evidence the policies and proposals are built on and to the process by which the plan has evolved. The new system is such that it will be difficult for people to introduce new issues at a late stage in the process. So the simple message is: GET INVOLVED NOW! Don't wait until you're notified that a planning application has been made to develop that piece of land near where you live.

## The purpose of this launch document

The Core Strategy will set out the long-term spatial vision and strategy for the district. This document marks the launch of work on the Core Strategy.

The purpose of this launch document to stimulate discussion about how the district should develop over the next 20 years. The document paints a picture of the district, and distinct parts of the district and identifies the major issues which we think the district is facing. A series of questions are raised throughout the document to aid discussion.

This document takes on board the findings of studies, other Council strategies and consultations. It is not the purpose of this Launch Document to suggest firm policy options.

The Council wants to hear your views:

- What do you think about the issues we have been identified in this launch document?
- Do you think these are the main issues?
- What are the best options for tackling these issues?

## How to get involved

We would like you to help us by telling us what you think of the issues set out in this launch document. You can do this by filling in the separate CORE STRATEGY LAUNCH COMMENT FORM which accompanies this document.

You can return your questionnaire by post, email or you can fill in an electronic version of the questionnaire online. Please send your comments to us by:

**17th December 2007:**



**By post:**

Planning Policy Team  
Bath & North East Somerset Council  
Trimbridge House  
Trim Street  
Bath BA1 2DP



**By email:**

planning\_policy@bathnes.gov.uk

**WWW On the web:**

www.consultations.bathnes.gov.uk



**By telephone:**

To discuss any aspects of this document, please contact us on:  
01225 477548

Alongside this document the Council will be holding various consultation activities and organising publicity about the consultation

The **consultation calendar** can be viewed on the Planning Policy Homepage on the Council's website: **www.bathnes.gov.uk**. A hard copy of this calendar is also available on request.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any particular access needs or require further assistance

## The next steps

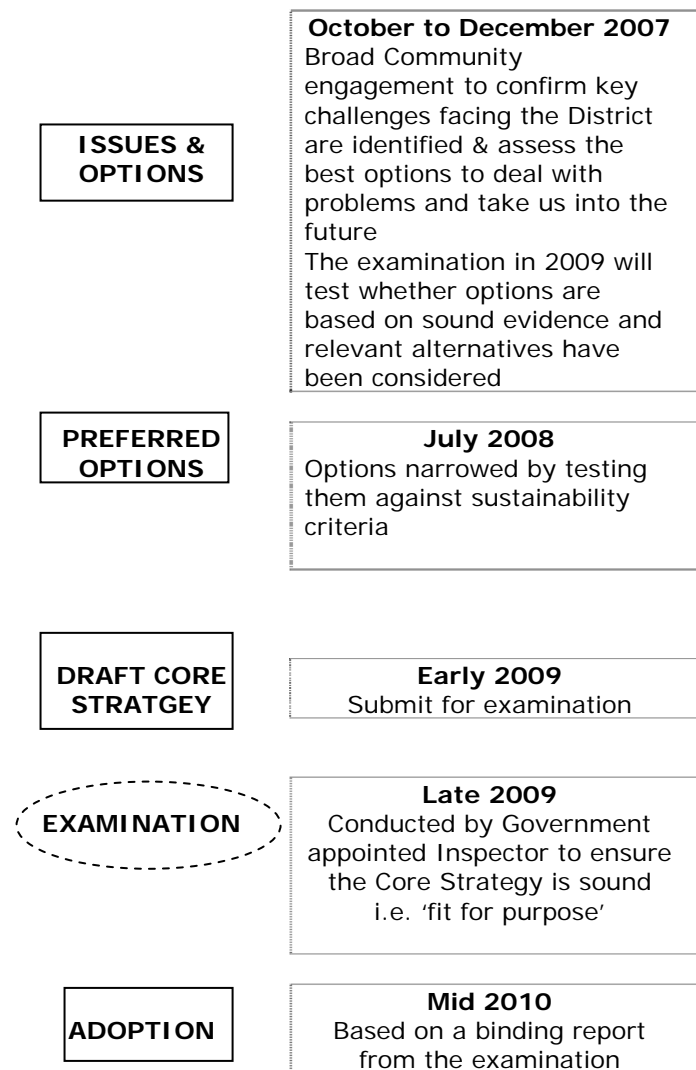
This is the start of the journey. The next step is to come up with some options for a spatial vision for the district that aims to tackle the issues we've identified, to decide where we want our district to be in 20 years' time. We will then set up some objectives aimed at delivering that vision. We will formally consult on our "preferred options". From there we need to come up with a set of strategic policies that will enable the preferred option to be achieved. **Figure 1** illustrates in broad terms the process we've embarked upon.

Your views will be used to the preferred options document which will be published for consultation in June 2008. At this time the following documents will also be produced:

- A schedule of comments made during this consultation; and
- A consultation report outlining how this consultation was carried out.

The Core Strategy will be examined independently in 2009 and will be adopted in 2010.

Figure 1: The Core Strategy Preparation Process



## Context for the Core Strategy

As well as taking account of national policies the Core Strategy must be in general conformity to the **Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS)**. The proposals in the draft RSS were subject to an examination in 2007 and the panels report, expected in spring 2008, will inform the development of the preferred options for the Core Strategy. See **Box 1** for more detail.

The **Sustainable Community Strategy** provides the overarching context within which public services and other partners will work together to improve our area. See **Box 2** for more detail.

The Council has also undertaken some work on a set of 'visions' for the urban areas within the District. These suggest some ideas to address some of the issues facing the District and will be tested through the Core Strategy along with the other options and suggestions put forward via this consultation. For more information on the Visions see **Box 3**.

### **Box 1: Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West**

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy sets out specific development requirements and a broad locational strategy for Bath & North East Somerset. It can be seen at [www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk)

### **Box 2: Bath & North East Somerset's Sustainable Community Strategy**

Bath and North East Somerset's Community Strategy is about making the District an even better place to live, work and visit. It is a 10-year document which provides the context within which public services and other partners will work together to improve our area. It sets the context for identifying the key issues for our Local Development Framework. The Strategy focuses on promoting the overall social, economic and environmental well being of our area by identifying the following key ambitions:

- Being Sustainable: this means addressing climate change and taking responsibility for our environment over the long-term
- Being Inclusive: this means addressing inequalities within our area through regeneration and work with local businesses
- Being Distinctive: this means promoting a 'sense of place', promoting stronger communities where there is strong local pride

The Strategy also sets out some key areas for improvement which are reflected in the issues for the Core Strategy document. Each year these are reviewed and the most recent analysis identifies the following priorities:

- Providing more affordable housing
- Improving our local transport and connectivity
- Ensuring there is the right type of business space to achieve "smart growth" to benefits local people
- Making sure we maintain our quality of life and access to local services

### **Box 3: Future / Visions for Bath & North East Somerset**

A series of long-term development visions for the future prosperity and wellbeing of the key urban centres of Bath and North East Somerset was developed by the Council during 2005 and 2006. The Future for Bath, the Future for Keynsham and the Future for the Somer Valley (Midsomer Norton, Radstock and the surrounding communities) Visions seek to:

- Identify some of the key socio-economic challenges currently facing the city and district up to 2026 and beyond;
- Capture and celebrate the unique history and character – the essence or ‘DNA’ - of each place to help ensure that future growth and development strengthens and enhances local distinctiveness and sense of place;
- Assess some of the regeneration and development sites and suggest possible spatial/land-use proposals for further testing as part of the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework process;
- Provide a focus for place-making and public life within each centre, addressing the importance of public realm and riverside, pedestrian movement and public transport in creating vibrant, healthier and more successful cities and town centres;
- Establish high quality standards for the design and sustainability of future regeneration and renewal projects.

The above work responds to the Bath and North East Somerset Community Strategy (see box 2) and forms the basis of the Economy and Enterprise block of the associated Local Area Agreement for the district.

The Future for Bath, Keynsham and Somer Valley Visions are now being developed further through a range of evidence studies and strategies. This work will inform and be tested by the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework process and will contribute to the regeneration and development strategy for the district.

## Bath & North East Somerset: A Portrait

### Overview

Bath and North East Somerset is a district of great variety and distinctive communities (see **maps 1 & 2**):

- Bath has the largest population (85,000) and is the commercial centre;
- Keynsham (pop. 16,000) lies on the main transport corridor between Bristol and Bath;
- The south of the District is characterised by former mining settlements including Midsomer Norton and Radstock (joint pop. 21,600);
- Within the rest of the district is a diverse range of settlements including the line of villages along the foothills of the Mendips, the Chew Valley and the distinctive Cotswolds villages around Bath;
- The city of Bristol (pop. 400,000) lies north west of the district and exerts a strong influence on Bath & North East Somerset.

The population of the District has grown more slowly than other areas in the Bristol region but is now increasing steadily and the 2006 estimated is about 174,000.

### Environment

The District has a diverse range of landscapes. Some, like the Cotswolds and Mendip Hills, are recognised as nationally important by their status as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Chew Valley Lake lies in the south west of the District and due to its size it is popular for recreation and is internationally important for wildlife. Bath is, of course, a World Heritage Site renowned for its architecture, history and landscape setting.



Chew Valley Lake

### Working

Bath & North East Somerset has a productive and enterprising economy. It is underpinned by a highly skilled workforce and includes a significant share of knowledge-driven employment. The area's high level of economic growth bodes well for the long-term future of the local economy and residents' overall quality of life. However, looking forward there are potential weaknesses within the economy and economic success is not shared equally across district and wage rates in many employment sectors are comparatively low.

The availability of affordable business property will affect the district's capacity to harness continued economic and business growth. It is important that this issue is considered in conjunction with the need for new



residential property when planning for the long-term future of the district.

About 30 per cent of jobs in the district are taken by non-residents. This proportion is below the national and sub-regional averages and suggests that the local skills match the needs of the local economy, rather than acting as a 'dormitory' for areas such as Bristol.

Evidence shows that Bath continues to be a strong shopping centre. The smaller centres such as in Keynsham, Midsomer Norton and Radstock function as service and shopping centres catering primarily for local needs. The number of unoccupied shops within all the centres is well below the national average. The level of demand from small scale leisure operators needing smaller units is good. However, whilst one new cinema complex has recently opened in Bath, major cinema operators, bowling facilities etc have not shown any further interest.

## Living

Whilst it is undoubtedly a beautiful place to live, Bath & North East Somerset is amongst the least affordable five per cent of districts in England. The average house price in Bath and North East Somerset was £253,363 in October-December 2006, much higher than the national average (£172,138). The ratio of house prices to earnings in Bath and North East Somerset stood at 11.4 to 1 in 2006. This is above both the national figure (8.8 to 1) and well above the mortgage lending rule of thumb of four times earnings. In addition, the district has followed national trends of increasing house prices, with a rise of 167% since 1998.

A relatively large proportion of the district's housing market consists of low quality stock, especially the private rented sector. The existence of this poor quality housing stock does little to ease housing affordability, and further restricts housing choice.

There are particular issues facing the varied rural areas with pressures on the rural economy, shortage of affordable housing and loss of services such as post offices and shops. Public transport links are often limited and infrequent.

## Social profile

Social conditions in the district are reasonably good with a generally healthy population. Nevertheless, some parts of the district are amongst the most deprived in the South West – notably parts of Bath and some areas in Norton Radstock.

**Box 4** details some of the fundamental ways in which the population is changing in the district.

### **Box 4: The population is changing in Bath & North East Somerset**

#### *Population growth*

- o *growth*
- o *Immigration*

#### *Ageing population;*

- o *Nationally there will be an increase in over 45's and decrease in under 45s*
- o *Significantly more 50 to 75 year olds*
- o *Living well & for longer*
- o *Working longer to fund increased lifespan*

#### *Change in household composition;*

- o *Fewer traditional families, increased divorce, etc.*
- o *Single person households will outnumber families*
- o *More adult children choosing to live at home*
- o *50-somethings - highest net household income & more disposable income*

#### *Young People*

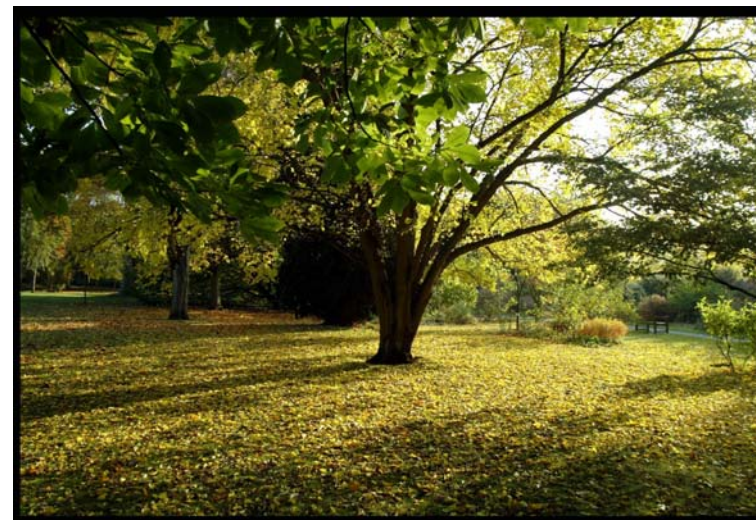
- o *Falling birth rate*
- o *Approximately 23,000 children of compulsory school age*

*(ages 4-16), representing 13% of the total population*

The District has a very strong cultural heritage particularly around the Arts and Sport and Active Leisure. Participation in Physical Recreation is amongst the highest in the Country and Physical Education in Schools is very strong. However, the facility stock for both Arts and Sports is largely outdated (with the exception of Bath University) and no longer 'fit for purpose'.

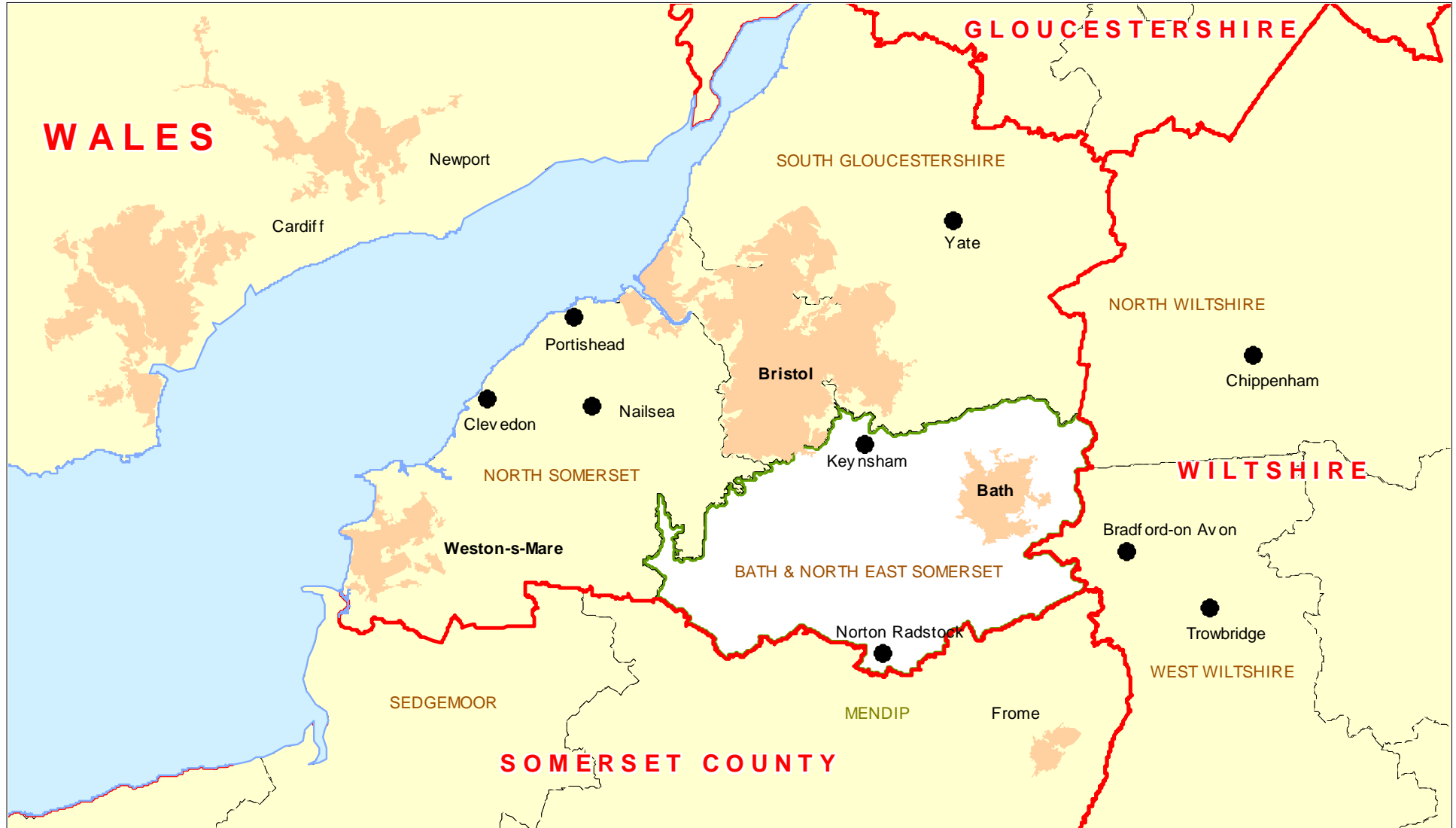
## Travelling

Bath & North East Somerset is the only unitary authority in the West of England without a direct link to the motorway network. Bath suffers particularly from the sub-region's poor internal transport infrastructure, including no direct public transport link to Bristol International Airport. Traffic congestion, through traffic and car-parking are particular problems in Bath. Keynsham is reasonably well connected by road and bus to Bristol and Bath although the infrequency of the rail service frustrates accessibility. The south of the district is poorly connected to the national motorway network and there is significant commuter congestion into Bath.

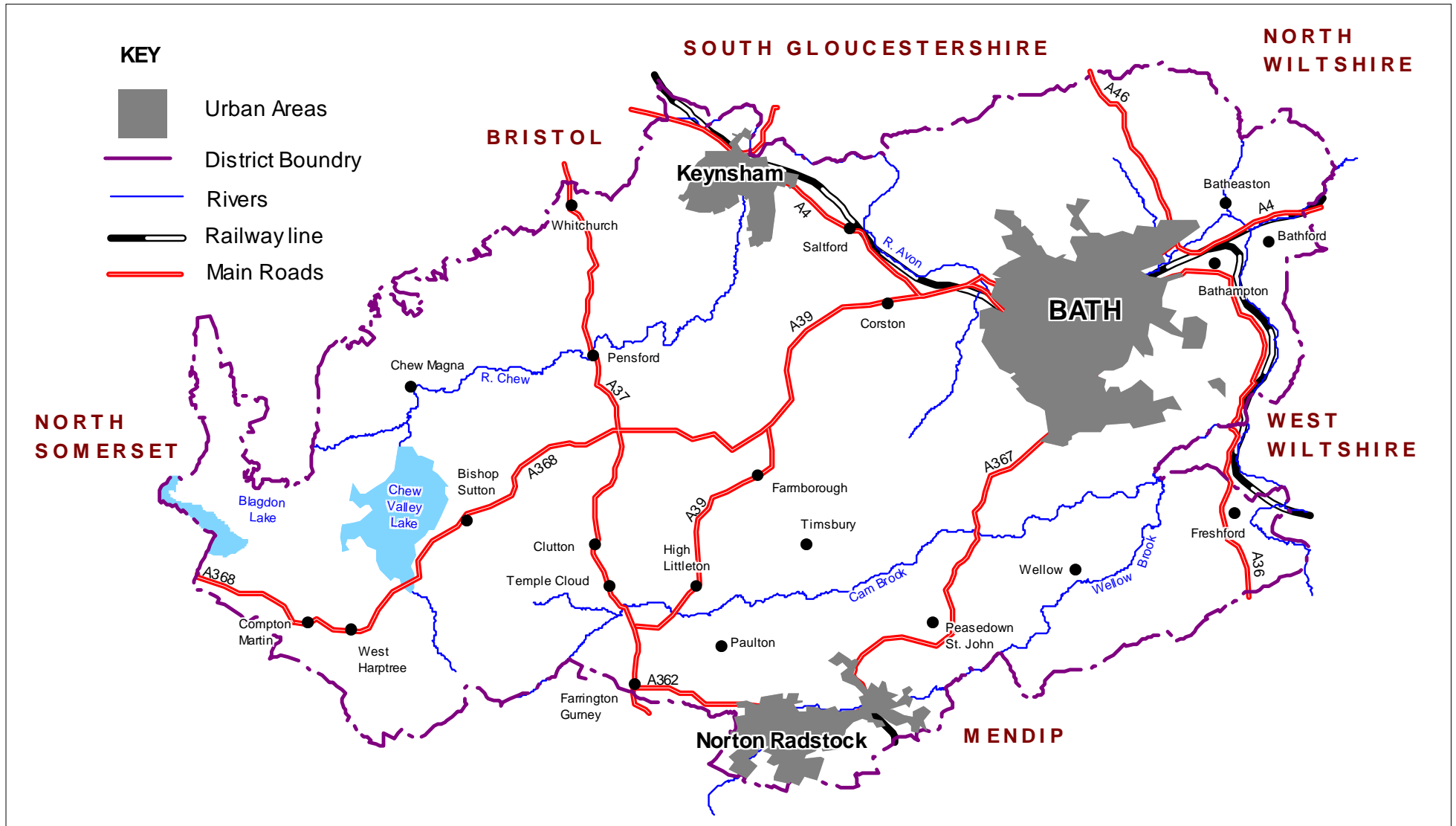


Royal Victoria Park, Bath (Matt Cardy)

Map 1: The Bath & North East Somerset area



Map 2: Bath & North East Somerset Administrative Area



## Issues for Bath & North East Somerset

### **HEADLINE ISSUE: Delivering the growth agenda and addressing the challenge of climate change**

Change and growth in Bath & North East Somerset is inescapable. The West of England Partnership (of which Bath & North East Somerset Council is a part) has a Vision that over the next 20 years the sub-region will be one of the fastest growing and most prosperous in Europe and that growth will be accommodated in a way that minimises our carbon footprint. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) will require us to find land for unprecedented numbers of new homes and jobs. The draft RSS suggests that provision should be made for 15,500 homes in the District and about 16,000 to 20,000 jobs in the Bath Travel to Work area by 2026. These numbers could change. The draft RSS also requires that Bath and Bristol should have urban extensions to help accommodate the needed new homes together with businesses and community and leisure facilities. Make no mistake – this is BIG change.

Evidence indicates that our currently buoyant economy will not stay that way unless we change and develop. Deprivation in the district needs to be tackled alongside provision of affordable homes, improvements to transport links and other key spatial issues.

At the same time we cannot ignore climate change. If we fail to address this issue it will eventually damage economic growth, people's health and the natural environment. It is indefensible and irresponsible to leave problems associated with climate change for our children or our grandchildren to tackle. Whilst we may not be able to solve all the problems now, we can make a start and

set the ground for lasting change in our habits and behaviour. The Core Strategy has an important role to play in this. It can help meet national and regional targets for the reduction of emissions of carbon (see **Box 8**)

**The key challenge for the Core Strategy will be to strike the right balance between accommodating and harnessing unprecedented levels of growth whilst protecting and enhancing our acknowledged environmental and cultural assets.**

Trade-offs between competing issues will need to be made, and tough decisions taken. We need to make sure that we get the most out of the change for local people and communities. We need to ensure that change happens in way that creates places which people value and aspire to live in, and that reflect a distinctly "local" character.

None of the issues discussed exist in isolation from each other. A decision taken, for example, about the location of business development has a knock-on effect on many other areas such as transport infrastructure, housing provision and so on, and likewise a change in any one of those areas can in turn affect the decision about the location of the business development. In reality, spatial planning is a complex balancing act between competing and sometimes conflicting objectives.

The specific challenges and opportunities facing Bath, Keynsham, Norton Radstock and the rural areas are

addressed later in this paper. There are also a number of further strategic spatial issues affecting the district as a whole, which flow from the key issue of delivering growth.

**Q1 What policies or principles should be included in the Core Strategy to meet the challenges of climate change?**

**ISSUE 1 Economic Prosperity**

Bath & North East Somerset is relatively prosperous, although economic challenges and opportunities vary within the district. A key challenge is to maintain, enhance and expand that existing prosperity striving to ensure it is shared by all residents. We also need to prepare the economy for the challenges of the future, for instance the changing national economy, globalisation, climate change and technological advances.

The Core strategy will need to find the most appropriate way to accommodate the 16,000-20,000 jobs required within the Bath Travel to Work Area by 2026 in the draft RSS . This must be done in a way which minimises harmful impacts on the environment and takes opportunities for environmental improvement where possible. The Core Strategy needs to ensure an appropriate, flexible and responsive supply of land and premises to provide a range of opportunities for various types of businesses. This will mean considering how much existing land in business use should be retained because it is in the right place and meets the requirements of modern businesses and how much can be used for other uses; and whether additional new land for businesses should be provided and if so how much and where.

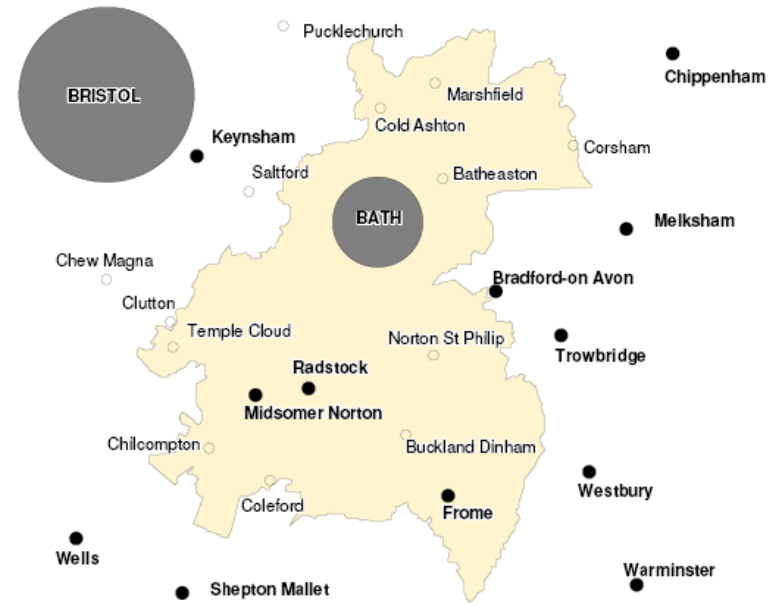


Figure 2: Bath Travel to Work area

**Q2 How do we ensure that there is enough land for business to maintain a prosperous economy and that it's in the right place?**

**Q3 Of the existing land in business use, is it the right type in the right place: how much of it should be retained to ensure needs of business are met?**

**Box 5: Business Growth Land Study**

A Business Growth & Employment Land Study is due to report in the Autumn of 2007 and will provide information on the nature of future employment in Bath & North East Somerset and the need for the creation and retention of employment land in key locations within the area

**ISSUE 2 The changing nature of shopping**

Growth in food and related shopping expenditure to 2026 is anticipated to be steady growth in high street shopping is expected to be faster significant (see Figure 3). We need to consider how we cater for this need and how retail will be affected by changes such as internet shopping. Government policy makes clear our traditional town centres should remain the focus for new provision.

We have hectic family lives, many of us have more disposable income, but a lot of us are working longer and so, have less leisure time. The internet is increasingly used for shopping and this will impact on how many new shops need to be provided. However, shopping is increasingly regarded as part of a wider leisure experience and non-shopping activities are also attracting more consumer attention. "Ambience" – the atmosphere or "feel" of a place - is of increasing importance. Consumers are increasingly demanding socially responsible products e.g. those products that promote the responsible use of the earth's natural resources and are becoming more brand conscious.

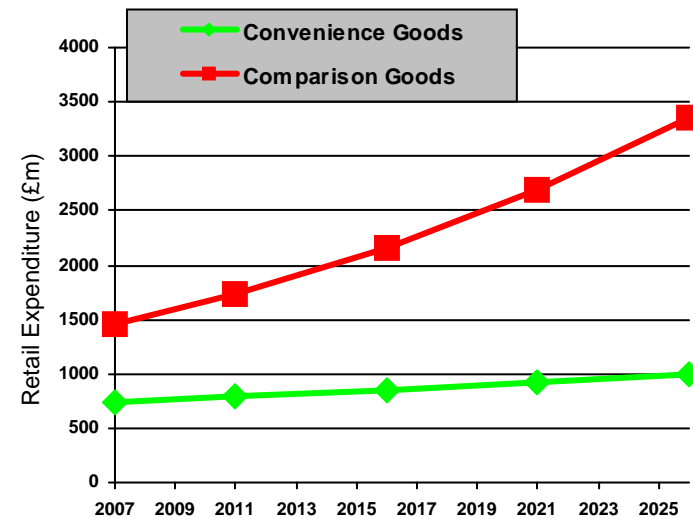
These trends suggest that, in addressing the growth in shopping, there should be a focus on the types of shops provided, quality of experience offered and diversity of leisure uses present. For some there is less of a divide between home and work but more flexibility about when the work is done. One consequence of this is that we may be looking for retail and services that are convenient to centres of work, i.e. nearby, easy to access, available, with opening hours to suit the working day and with delivery options.

**Q4 Where and how should the growth in shopping expenditure be met?**

**Q5 What types of shops and associated leisure uses should be provided and how should our**

**city and town centres change?**

Figure 3: Changing retail space needs



**Box 6: Retail Strategy**

A **Retail Strategy** is due to report in the late 2007 and will provide information on amount, type and potential location of new retail development

**ISSUE 3 Meeting housing needs & demand**

The population of the District is increasing, ageing and becoming more prosperous. The rising population and a trend towards smaller households are further increasing housing demand. The housing and wider needs of the growing number of elderly will also impact on the type of development needed. Furthermore, a growing economy requires new housing. Housing is needed to meet the needs of an expanding workforce, particularly to ensure

key workers are able to find accommodation and for those on low incomes but in regular employment who can afford mortgage repayments.

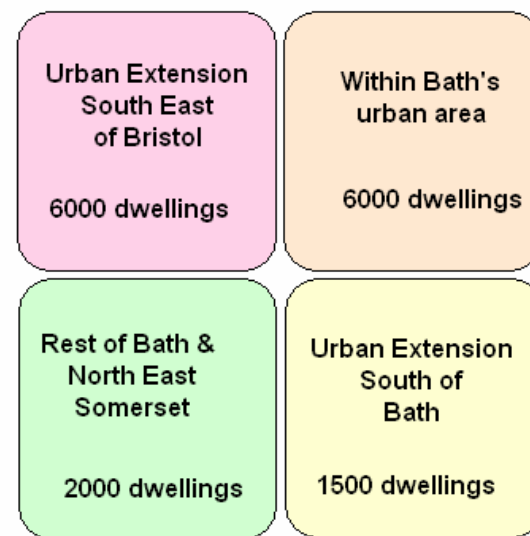
The RSS proposes unprecedented levels of housing development and provides an overall locational strategy. **Figure 4** outlines the draft RSS Housing requirement and broad locational strategy. **The new housing required by 2026 equates to building a new town the size of Keynsham and Radstock combined within the District.** A key issue for the Core Strategy will be to decide where and how this is accommodated. This is explored later in this document.

In planning new housing care needs to be taken to ensure that attractive and vibrant new communities are created and that existing communities benefit wherever possible. This requires high quality, sustainable housing design and development layouts. The needs of existing and future residents for green spaces, community and leisure facilities also need to be taken into account. New homes need to be designed to reduce fuel poverty and avoid an increase in summer deaths from overheating.

The Core strategy will need to take account of the different types of housing need within the District such as student housing, gypsies and travellers/show people and range of affordable housing including housing for people with specific needs. The aging nature of the population will also have implications for the way in which we build new housing and shape our communities.

Addressing affordability problems is a particular challenge and it is hard to see how the current policy of requiring 35% of all new housing on large sites to be affordable will address the problem, even with the levels of growth proposed

Figure 4: Draft RSS Housing requirement and broad locational strategy



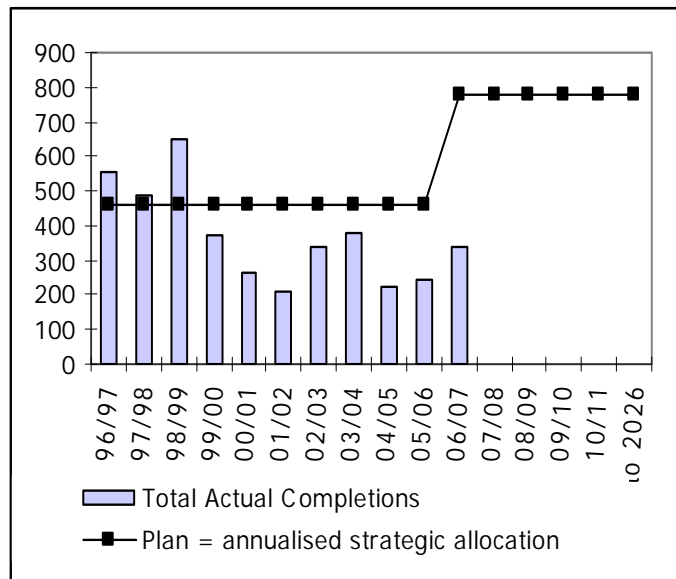
- Q6 How do we meet both affordable housing need and housing need for people with specific needs?**
- Q7 Is there a particular need to meet 'key worker' housing needs?**
- Q8 Is there a role for live-work opportunities?**

**Box 7: Housing Needs Study**

*A strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the District is due to report in late 2007 or early 2008 and will provide information on the current housing stock and demand and need for additional housing by size, type and tenure*



Figure 5: New homes built in Bath & North East Somerset 2001-2006



#### ISSUE 4 Protecting and Enhancing the Environment

Achieving sustained economic growth and the need to build more homes puts pressure on the environment and natural resources. The Community Strategy focuses on what makes the different parts of Bath & North East Somerset distinctive. There is a need to protect and enhance the valued character of the countryside and the towns and villages.

A high level of protection is already given to nationally recognised landscapes (Cotswold and Mendip Hills AONB) and townscapes (Bath World Heritage Site and 37 conservation areas), nationally important wildlife habitats and natural resources and ancient monuments. Environmental quality has a direct impact on overall

quality of life, and the conservation and management of this natural, built environment and our archaeological heritage brings social and economic benefits for local communities.

The Core Strategy will therefore need to include policies which ensures the continued protection of our important national and local environmental assets. As well as establishing patterns of development and securing development design which minimises the causes of climate change, the Core Strategy will need to investigate options coping with adapting to unavoidable impacts of climate change.

#### Box 8: Opportunities for carbon reduction

- o Locating new development to reduce the need to travel;
- o Improving public transport;
- o Ensuring that walking and cycling are encouraged by the design of new development;
- o Promoting the building of low carbon homes and business premises that are less energy thirsty and produce lower carbon emissions;
- o Promoting local food production to reduce "food miles"
- o Tree planting / landscaping to absorb carbon dioxide
- o Provision of sustainable energy infrastructure
- o Making new & existing development resilient to climate change

#### Q9 What is special about Bath & North East Somerset that should be protected and conserved through the Core Strategy?

## **ISSUE 5 Building Balanced Communities**

The growth expected to occur in B&NES will bring with it new demands on infrastructure, public services and leisure facilities. Indeed, improvements are already needed in some areas to cater for the existing population. People need high quality health and leisure facilities, high quality local services and amenities and pleasant green spaces. They should also be able to travel reliably by road and rail, and have supplies of power, water and facilities for waste management. The Core strategy will need to address these can be secure, sustainable and affordable.

If we do not ensure that physical and social infrastructure is in place, the quality of life of residents will diminish.

The proportion of older people in the District is likely to significantly increase over the next 20 years. The increase in the number of people over 80 will present challenges for health and social care.

### ***Box 9: Built Sports Facilities Strategy & Playing Pitch Assessment***

Both pieces of work will be complete by December 2007.

The Sports Built Facilities Strategy, along with the Playing Pitch Assessment will help to identify where sporting facilities across Bath and North East Somerset need to be improved or expanded and where the deficiencies (or surplus) are in current provision.

**Q10 What local facilities does your community lack?**

**Q11 How do we ensure we cater for all sections of the existing and future population?**

**Q12 What type of local facilities are needed to ensure cohesive communities and to sustain and improve our quality of life?**

## **ISSUE 6 Integrated transport**

One factor which helps to support a local economy is convenient and inexpensive transport. For most people, the freedom of private car use has been a liberating feature of the last few decades, but it has come at a cost to the environment – and that cost is increasing. It is evident that we will have to alter our approach to transport significantly during the next 20 years. It is part of the job of the Core Strategy to maintain and enhance the means for access between different places and activities in a sustainable way.

Transport infrastructure provision is considered primarily through regional and sub-regional transport studies e.g. Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study which inform policy and bids for government funding primarily through the Joint Local Transport Plan. Existing problems of congestion, poor air quality and insufficient car parking in parts of the district need to be addressed. The Core Strategy will need to ensure that development takes place in a way that does not make these problems worse and fully integrates transport needs and ensures necessary transport infrastructure is provided at the right time.

**Q13 What major elements of transport infrastructure are needed up to 2026 to address existing problems and support new development?**

**Q14 How can reliance on the private car be reduced?**

**Q15 How can we encourage more people to use n public transport?**

**Q16 What can be done to ensure that the right development is brought forward in the right place at the right time?**

**Q17 What scope is there for the Core Strategy phase the delivery of development?**

## **ISSUE 7 Delivering development**

The Core Strategy and associated policy documents will need to set out mechanisms to ensure that housing, business premises and social facilities are delivered when needed and that places are created which existing and future residents value and in which they aspire to live. Various bodies and organisations are involved in bringing forward development e.g. developers, landowners, utility and service providers and public organisations including the Council. All these groups will need to work together and take into account the needs of all sections of the community in delivering and shaping our towns and villages.

Whilst the mix of uses to be provided is important the phasing development is also a key consideration. New housing development should take place in step with job growth to help ensure that commuting does not increase and opportunities are created to minimise commuting distances. The provision of new transport and social infrastructure e.g. public transport improvements, schools, health facilities etc must also be phased with new development to ensure that residents' needs are met at the right time.

The Core Strategy & related development plan documents will need to incorporate policies to ensure that the delivery of development is carefully phased.

## Bath: A Portrait

### Introduction

Bath, with its foundations in Roman and Georgian heritage benefits from World Heritage Site status and a landscape setting within a bowl predominantly designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The city has an international reputation as a cultural centre and tourist destination, founded upon its architecture, town planning, distinctive shopping offer, cultural activity and high quality surrounding countryside.

The quality and character of Bath's environment, and its intimate relationship with the surrounding natural landscape means the city faces unique challenges in balancing protection and enhancement of its environmental assets against pressure to continue its economic, social and cultural development.



Royal Crescent, Bath (Matt Cardy)

### Historical context & development

At the heart of the Bath Story are the Hot Springs, which have been the driving force behind the creation and growth of the city since the Romans first discovered them in the first century AD. However, the city has developed and expanded over successive centuries to become a more varied and complex place at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than the selective image presented in visitor guidebooks suggests.

Today, surrounding the central area are the Georgian residential districts – Lansdown, Walcot, Grosvenor and crossing the river, Bathwick and Widcombe. To the west lies the main concentration of industrial uses forming a belt along the river corridor out to the City's boundary at Newbridge. Adjacent to this belt, both to the north and south, are the 19<sup>th</sup> century residential suburbs of Lower Weston, and the Oldfield Park area. The residential developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are located towards the city's boundary, high up on the plateau to the south – Odd Down and Combe Down and at Weston and Twerton.

Aside from the central area and industrial belt, the other main concentrations of non-residential uses are found towards the periphery of the City. The MoD occupies sites on the plateau at Foxhill, on Lansdown Hill at Ensleigh, and on the eastern side on the Warminster Road. The Royal United Hospital extends over a large area between Weston and Lower Weston at Coombe Park. Several schools occupy large sites on the upper slopes at Lansdown to the north and at Prior Park and adjoining Alexandra Park to the south

## Geographical context

Bath neither exists nor functions in isolation. It is part of a wider region. The relationship of Bath to some of its neighbouring towns is shown in Map 1. The centre of Bristol lies only 11 miles to the northwest of the centre of Bath. Chippenham lies 12 just miles to the northeast. To the south and east Frome, Trowbridge and Melksham are within a 15 mile radius.

The A4 passes right through the heart of the City. Another long distance north-south route formed by the A46 and A36, passes through Bath linking the south coast ports with the M4. Other radial routes are the A363 to Trowbridge; the A367 to Norton Radstock and the south west); A39 to Wells; and A431 to Bristol. A series of Park and Ride sites on the outskirts serve to reduce the amount of visitor traffic entering the city centre.

Access to the motorway network is via junction 18 of the M4. Bath lies on the main line from London (Paddington) to Bristol and is also linked to Chippenham, Bradford-on Avon, Trowbridge and Keynsham via rail.

## Bath as a World Heritage Site and high quality urban environment

The historic environment in and around Bath contains many features of local, national and international significance. The variety, quality and quantity of these elements reveal the city's rich history and are an integral part of its appeal and importance. The individual significance of these elements (buildings, streets, archaeology) is recognised in designations such as listed buildings and scheduled monuments and their combined value is recognised in conservation area designations and the city's inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Within the city boundary there are many open spaces and landscaped areas of great value. Bath's setting in the Avon

valley and surrounding green hills is one of the finest in England. The rural landscape is intimately connected with the urban area, particularly where it reaches close to the city centre, and there are skylines, vistas and panoramas visible from many locations.

Little is made in the city of the chief geographical feature of the area, the River Avon. It enters the urban scene briefly as it shoots beneath Pulteney Bridge but disappears from view a short while after. The river has been pushed so much into the background that the part it has played and could continue to play in shaping Bath is apt to be overlooked.

## Home

Bath's relatively prosperous economy, its cultural attributes and the aesthetic appeal of its urban environment, paralleled in the landscape setting, combine to make the city a desirable place to live. Bath attracts people through an image and associated quality of life that brings together the most desirable features of 'urban' and 'rural'.



Oldfield Park, Bath (Jessica Parsons)

Consequently, residential property in Bath has become particularly expensive whether to buy or rent. Average house

prices are well in excess of those in the rest of the district and wider sub-region, and this has created problems of affordability.

Whilst the various residential districts of the city may look very different they comprise a series of neighbourhoods each with the various elements necessary to sustain the day-to-day needs of residents. These range from primary and secondary schools, shopping parades and other local services that contribute to the vitality of particular areas. The distribution of these elements across the city is uneven and some areas experience a degree of under provision. Neighbourhood shopping parades are important part of the social fabric as well of the economic fabric of the Bath suburbs.

## A place to work and do business

Bath is a key regional centre and enjoys a generally prosperous, buoyant economy with low unemployment. However, almost half of the employment in Bath is in Public Administration Education Health and Defence and the city also relies heavily on tourism and retail. As a consequence, wage levels are below the West of England sub-regional average.

The city is an important centre for business and professional services, whilst the University of Bath and Bath Spa University offer particular opportunities for developing Bath's knowledge driven economy. Together these areas of activity are likely to underpin future employment growth and assist in creating a more diverse economy

Since 2001 employment growth in Bath has outstripped sub-regional and national averages, but much of this growth has been defence related. Excluding fluctuation in defence activity over the longer term economic growth has been more modest. Since 1991 employment levels in Bath have risen by an average of 3% per annum compared with 6% nationally and 8% in the sub-region.

A high proportion of people (71%) who live in Bath also work here, though there are more jobs in the city than there are resident workers and the level of self-containment has fallen

by 7% since 1991. Bath draws the remainder of its labour force from a number of surrounding smaller towns as well as Bristol. Many people currently commute from lower-cost housing locations. In comparison to similar towns commuting distances are low, walking to work is more common and the use of public transport is high.

## A place to visit

Bath is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Britain attracting people from all around the world. Over 4 million visitors each year arrive by car, coach or train to visit the city's historic townscape and its many sites and attractions, including the Roman Baths and the recently opened thermal spa.



## A shopping destination

Bath City Centre is also a major shopping destination which caters for the needs of its local inhabitants and attracts people from many miles around. Visitors are attracted by the variety of high quality shops and the ambience of the historic city centre. The city's strong independent shopping offer, linked to tourism, differentiates Bath from other centres.

The £350m regeneration of the SouthGate area of the city centre began in 2007. When complete, SouthGate will provide a vibrant mix of shops, restaurants, leisure facilities and homes, all served by a modern public transport interchange and set within a new pattern of streets and public spaces. The regeneration of Southgate will strengthen Bath's position as a sub-regional shopping and support its role as an international tourist destination.

## **A centre of learning**

In addition to a number of successful state and independent sector secondary schools the city hosts two universities and a college of further education.

The University of Bath is in the top 10 in the U.K. and is particularly renowned for its scientific research and increasingly its sporting excellence. It is primarily housed at its Claverton Down campus on the edge of the city, with further halls of residence and other functions located in the city centre.

Bath Spa University specialises in the humanities, creative and performing arts and education training. It is located at two campuses at Newton Park in the Green Belt just to the west of the city and at Sion Hill in Bath.

Map 3: Bath and environs



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## Issues for Bath

### HEADLINE ISSUE: Delivering growth whilst respecting the environment

It is clear from the spatial portrait that Bath is an international cultural asset. It is also a living city with over 85,000 residents and an important economic sub-regional centre. The potential for economic growth as well as the housing and other needs of existing and future residents must be planned for in a way that respects conserves and where possible enhances the city's environmental quality.

The relationship between economic growth and environmental quality is both circular and sensitive. Maintenance of the built heritage is dependent upon the city's continuing economic prosperity and this prosperity is heavily dependent upon the high quality of life offered by the city's attractive environment. Respecting this relationship is the key to securing Bath's long term future. Achieving the delivery of economic and housing growth whilst protecting and enhancing and Bath's environment is the key strategic issue facing the city.

The development pressures arising from anticipated growth are outlined in greater detail below. Making the optimum use of opportunities within the city will help to minimise the amount of development that needs to take place on greenfield land outside the existing built up area.

However, any development must be undertaken in a way that respects and enhances the context provided by the city's outstanding environment. This emphasises the need to ensure that development is of the highest design quality that complements Bath's distinctive built form and requires that the important open spaces within the City are retained.

**Q18 How can anticipated growth and development be accommodated in a way that complements the city's environmental quality?**

#### Issue B1: Protecting and enhancing Bath's unique environment

The World Heritage Site Management Plan seeks to conserve the city's cultural heritage assets, which includes protecting and enhancing all aspects of its environment. Change in the city must be co-ordinated in a way that ensures these objectives are met and as such the Core Strategy must work in tandem with the Management Plan.

Protecting and enhancing the environment of Bath clearly requires respecting and maintaining the Medieval and Georgian built heritage for which the City is famed, but it means much more than this.

Maintaining the built heritage is not just a matter of protecting individual buildings, but one of restoring and enhancing the public realm which provides their setting. The public realm is all space to which the public has ready access and includes streets, squares, footpaths, gardens and parks.

Studies suggest that, whilst Bath has a rich and unique architectural heritage, the quality of the public realm in many

parts of the city is poor. Public realm quality is of much importance to the perception and behaviour of existing and potential residents, visitors and investors. Without improvement to the public realm visitors and investment may focus on competing centres.

The Council is preparing a Public Realm Strategy which will identify key measures needed and how they can be delivered. New development promoted through the Core Strategy will present opportunities to improve the public realm.

The landscape heritage of the city is deserving of protection. Bath has many open spaces, including green hillsides, a series of major parks and formal gardens and smaller but nevertheless important less formal spaces, all of which form fundamental elements of the city's character. Similarly the Kennet and Avon Canal is also worthy of continued enhancement so that it makes a greater contribution to the 'green infrastructure' of the city.

The River Avon presents both a threat and opportunity for the city. There is undoubted potential for the river to make a greater contribution to the glories of the City. Any plans must however; take account of its propensity to flood and safety concerns.

The landscape setting which surrounds and determines the overall form and character of Bath is one of the reasons behind Bath's inscription as a World Heritage Site. Protection of the character of this setting is therefore also vitally important.

**Q19 How can the Core Strategy help improve the public realm?**

**Q20 How can we improve visual and physical access to the river?**

**Q21 What are the most important assets and characteristics of the city that must be protected and conserved?**

**ISSUE B2 : Maintaining Bath as an important economic centre – accommodating growth**

Bath has a successful economy. The draft RSS suggests that within the Bath Travel To Work Area economic growth equivalent to an increase of about 16,000- 20,200 jobs will take place between 2006 and 2026. The West of England Partnership's Vision is for high economic growth in the sub-region. Based on longer term trends but in line with this vision the Partnership suggest that economic growth may be more modest up to a maximum of about 16,000 jobs. Whilst this job growth will not all take place in Bath it is reasonable to expect that much of it will gravitate to the city as a strategic employment location.

Significant economic growth can only be achieved if suitable land and labour availability can be provided. Identifying and maintaining a supply of suitable sites so that growth can be sustained is a key issue facing the city.

Available business land in the city is at a premium and there is a range of other competing uses that also needs to be accommodated. Strategic assessments of urban potential suggest that, in addition to housing requirements, not all of the forecast job growth can be accommodated on sites within the city. Therefore, the potential role of additional employment development on the edge of the city in an urban extension needs to be considered.

**Q22 Where and how should the city's economic growth be accommodated?**

**Q23 What new employment locations should be developed and what key existing employment sites should be protected?**

**ISSUE B3 : Economic diversity and type of growth**

In delivering this economic growth and ensuring the city's economy remains robust and prosperous a number of other issues relating to the structure of the economy must be addressed.

The economy is susceptible both to changes in government funding and the vagaries of visitor number fluctuations. It has been suggested (in the Ernst & Young Business Plan) that the city is over-reliant on public sector employment more private sector employment should be encouraged to promote job growth, increase wealth creation and investment.

The structure of the economy is a key factor affecting wage levels in the District. These are reasonably good, yet slightly below the national average and that in the West of England. Combined with high house prices housing affordability is a major issue in the city (as explained later) which will impact on the economy as it results in difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff.

Addressing these issues may best be achieved through diversification of the local economy. Opportunities exist to build on emerging strengths in sectors such as environmental technologies and creative industries. Importantly national growth in the knowledge based economy should be utilised through developing links with the Universities.

The University of Bath is recognised for its scientific research and harnessing the commercial opportunities this presents is

important e.g. through facilitating greater generation and retention of 'spin out' companies.

Given national economic trends and sectors currently well represented in Bath it is anticipated that much of the economic growth is likely to be within office based businesses, serving mainly local/sub-regional markets, as well as retailing and tourism.

Office growth in Bath has historically been slow and the city's current supply of office floorspace is dominated by small units. Many of them are located in the Georgian properties in the city centre. These premises may not be well suited to meeting the requirements of modern business.

In order to support greater levels of office based economic growth and potentially securing higher value employment providing modern office floorspace is likely to be important. The redevelopment of Western Riverside is planned to play a key role in this provision.

Further consideration will need to be given as to the impact providing significant amounts of modern office floorspace will have on demand for office space in Georgian city centre properties and the impact this could have on their future maintenance and use.

**Q24 Should diversification of the economy be promoted and how can this be facilitated by the Core Strategy?**

**Q25 What new business space should be provided to help diversify the economy and meet future business needs?**

**ISSUE B4 : Accommodating sufficient housing to meet needs & demand**

*Amount of housing*

Another key strategic development issue for Bath is how best to accommodate sufficient housing to help meet future need. The draft RSS proposes that the number of homes in Bath increases by 7,500 between 2006 and 2026 (an increase of 19%). The delivery of this level of housing will be a challenge. However, the final approved RSS may suggest greater levels of development should be directed to Bath based on more recent household projections and the need to support forecast economic growth.

Additional housing is needed in Bath to address the jobs and housing imbalance in the city and the resultant high levels of in-commuting. However, the uniqueness of Bath's environment is also a key factor in determining housing development levels. The overall amount of housing and broad strategy for accommodating it will be set by the RSS.

The Council agrees that there is a need to provide for significant amounts of additional housing at Bath. However, the need to minimise environmental impact means that following assessment it considers the capacity of the city is less than that set out in the draft RSS (see **Box 10**).

**Box 10: Housing Capacity for the district**

Draft RSS	Bath & North East Somerset Council
7,500 homes	6,500 homes
6,000 within Bath	5,500 within Bath
1,500 urban extension	1,000 urban extension
No residual	Residual (1,000) to be redistributed elsewhere in B&NES

*Accommodating new housing*

Bath and its environs is a particularly sensitive environment for new development. Although the city continually accommodated new development throughout the twentieth century the levels of growth proposed currently in the draft RSS and via the Council's assessment represent a significant uplift in delivery rates. Bath's social and physical infrastructure will need to respond so that growth can be delivered in a co-ordinated manner.

National and regional planning policy prioritises the regeneration and redevelopment of suitably located land and buildings in existing urban areas over incursions into the surrounding countryside. Bath is of course no ordinary city. Its ability to absorb new development in a manner that does not detract from its character is a matter that demands rigorous assessment.

The Council has assessed the ability of the existing urban area to accommodate additional housing over the next 20 years. It estimates that some **5,500** new homes could be delivered by 2026. The largest single source of future housing supply in Bath will result from the regeneration of the Bath Western Riverside. This is anticipated to deliver around **2,800** homes. Various other large sites in and around the city centre, highlighted by the Vision for Bath, could present further opportunities for new housing. Some areas of the city currently detract from its World Heritage Site status and could benefit from redevelopment.

The Council has also considered the cumulative contribution that smaller sites might make to the supply of new housing. These include the conversion of buildings, the use of space over shops and other small scale developments. Intensifying the existing urban area does not imply that Bath's valued green spaces that allow city to 'breathe' will become more susceptible to development pressures. At the same time new housing must not use land set aside to meet the needs for

local facilities, especially in light of the increased population arising from urban intensification.

### **ISSUE B5 : An urban extension to Bath**

Should the existing urban area yield this much development there will remain a shortfall, which, for reasons of socio-economic stability and prosperity, and in order to generally conform with the requirements of the RSS, must be put 'somewhere'.

The RSS proposes that this should be met through an urban extension to Bath. Redistributing the entire shortfall to other parts of the district would result in much more commuting into the city as a large proportion of those households will seek jobs that will be generated in Bath.

Planning has a key role to play in reducing the need for travel by car - by locating development close to existing services, facilities and jobs. The aim is to minimise the generation of carbon emissions. This locational strategy is also prudent given that it is likely that oil prices will continue to rise over the next 20 years. The RSS has examined the costs and benefits of an urban extension and is likely to require its development.

Ear-marking the countryside for development is a highly sensitive and emotive issue for any town or city. Bath is tightly surrounded by the Green Belt, and much of the countryside surrounding Bath is designated as Cotswolds AONB and that which is not is an attractive rural landscape. The UNESCO citation for Bath refers to the setting of the WHS as key feature.

Through work on the RSS by the South West Regional Assembly and the Council the 'most sustainable' area is considered to lie to the south and west of the city on land outside the AONB somewhere between Newbridge and the

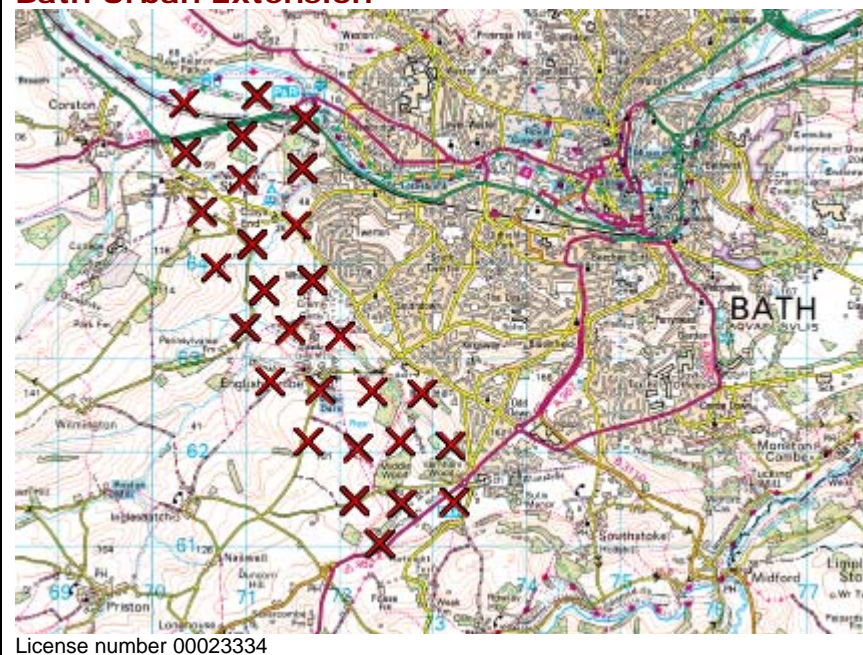
Odd Down area (see **Map 4**). This is a large expanse, not all of it will be developed, but it is the area where the Council will be focusing its attention.

**Q26 How can the urban extension best be integrated with the existing communities in this part of Bath?**

**Q27 How can the setting of the city be best protected and the need for an urban extension met?**

**Q28 What form should an urban extension take – one big one or a few smaller ones – and where in the 'Area of Search' should it/they be located?**

**Figure 6: Illustration of the 'Area of Search' for Bath Urban Extension**



**ISSUE B6 Providing more affordable housing and the right housing mix**

A good proportion of the new housing provided will need to be affordable to households who are least able to access the housing market. The ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings in Bath is very high. A benefit of the large amounts of housing development focussed on Bath is that a significant number of affordable homes can also be delivered.

This is important as those households who are in need of affordable housing are likely to increase if house price inflation continues to exceed increases in wages. First time buyers are likely to be particularly hard hit.

In addition pressure for additional student accommodation has resulted in the loss of family housing in parts of Bath. The growth of the buy-to-let market has reduced the supply of lower cost dwellings in some parts of the city.

The current policy of the Council is that 35% of new homes should be affordable. Consideration will need to be given to the appropriateness of the 35% target and the threshold at which this kicks in for individual sites. This will be informed by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which it is anticipated will be complete Winter 2007/Spring 2008.

Consideration also needs to be given to the size, type, sustainability and adaptability of homes that should be built in the city. This is important to ensure that the types of homes built match those that are needed. The SHMA will provide useful evidence on the existing dwelling stock and the demand and need for different types of housing from different groups such as families, students and single person households. Other housing issues that must also be addressed include the need for supported housing.

**Q29 How can the supply of affordable housing be increased and what proportion of housing should be affordable?**

**Q30 What types of new homes are needed in Bath and how should these be distributed?**

**ISSUE B7: Future of shopping in the city centre**

*City Centre*

The city centre is a regional shopping centre serving local residents, workers and visitors. How it continues to serve all of these groups in the future is a key issue.

The historic buildings provide many small units which are not ideally suited to the requirements of modern multiple retailers. This combined with the strong visitor economy ensures that Bath is characterised by a large and vibrant independent offer. This differentiates Bath from many other city centres and understanding the relationship between shopping, increasingly a leisure experience, and tourism is vital in sustaining the wide mix of shops.

Mainstream multiple retailers, which are needed to ensure that wider needs of residents are met, are also represented in the city centre. However, they frequently occupy small units and are unable to sell their full range of goods. The need for larger, more modern units for multiples will be partly addressed through the redevelopment of Southgate.

The longer term requirements for retail space in the city centre also need to be assessed to ensure that it continues to serve the needs of various groups. This must take account of the likely increases in population in the city and the surrounding area, future expenditure growth and changes in people's shopping behaviour.

The Council has commissioned work on a Retail Strategy (see box 4 to assess these needs and how they will be accommodated. Early indications from this work and previous studies suggest that further shops, in addition to those coming forward in the redevelopment of Southgate, should be provided in the future.

**Q31 Should the city centre be expanded to accommodate new shops and if so how and in what direction?**

**Q32 What type of shopping expansion should be encouraged in the city centre and how can this complement existing shops?**

Compared to similar towns shops currently represent a high proportion of all units in Bath city centre and there is considerable pressure from shops for additional space. However, a diversity of uses is needed to ensure that shoppers are offered a pleasant experience and to maintain Bath's vitality e.g. cafes, restaurants etc. Currently in many streets shop use is protected and this strategy may need to be reviewed in parts of the city centre.

**Q33 Should shop uses continue to be protected or should a greater diversity of uses be allowed?**

**ISSUE B8 : Meeting shopping needs outside the city centre**

*Local suburban centres*

Neighbourhood shopping centres are an important part of the social and economic fabric of Bath's suburbs. Currently more than 20 are identified in the Local Plan, ranging from small parades to the large and vibrant district centre at Moorland Road. They primarily serve local day to day needs for shopping and other services within walking distance for many

residents. The need to protect and enhance these centres is a key strategic issue for the city.

**Q34 How should the Core Strategy help protect and improve neighbourhood shopping centres?**

*Retail sheds*

Unlike many other cities Bath has very few large shops outside the city centre. Some types of goods e.g. DIY goods, furniture and large domestic appliances are often sold from large stores, traditionally retail sheds. Evidence suggests that many residents currently travel to Bristol and/or Trowbridge to access these stores.

Further assessment is needed but even allowing for the rise of internet shopping previous studies suggest there is scope and demand for further large stores in Bath. However, retail sheds often with large areas of car parking take up much land which is in short supply in Bath. They are also of a design that often does not fit well with the city's built heritage. Alternative forms may come forward in the future.

**Q35 Should the need for large stores in Bath be addressed and if so where?**

*Food stores*

Bath is currently served by relatively few large supermarkets. Local food stores exist within many neighbourhood centres. Bath was also the first city to host a Farmers' Market. The need for further food shops is being assessed by the Retail Strategy. Previous studies have suggested steady growth in spending on food and with population growth in the city this points to the need for further provision.

While large supermarkets are currently used by many residents for their main food shopping trips evidence suggests that shopping behaviour is changing. Increasingly important is a focus on local produce and quality food. Therefore, maybe

greater emphasis should be placed on alternative forms of providing for residents food shopping needs.

**Q36 What form should additional food shopping provision take and where should it be accommodated?**

**ISSUE B9: Maintaining the city as an important visitor destination and managing its spatial impacts**

Sustaining tourism and developing the cultural and leisure offer is critical to the city's continuing economic prosperity. The visitor economy is worth £318 million to the wider Bath and North East Somerset area and supports over 8,000 jobs.

The Destination Management and Cultural Development Studies undertaken by the Council indicate that if Bath is to develop a more sustainable visitor economy then there is a need to expand and diversify the hotel capacity in the city and improve facilities for conferencing and cultural events. Furthermore the stock of guesthouse & bed and breakfast accommodation is also under pressure.

There is sometimes conflict between the acknowledged responsibility to conserve the city's outstanding historic townscape and archaeology that is vital for the visitor economy, and the needs of the people who live and work in a thriving city. However, Bath's status as a World Heritage Site can be used to support and add to the vitality of local communities.

The tensions between the needs of visitors and residents need to be addressed. The spatial requirements of both existing and potential new attractions and visitor accommodation should be met in a way that does not conflict with meeting residents needs.

**Q37 What additional visitor accommodation is likely to be required in the future and how should this be met?**

**Q38 Should existing visitor accommodation be protected from changes of use?**

**Q39 What new visitor facilities should be provided and where should they be located?**

**ISSUE B10: Expansion of the Universities and managing the impact on residential communities**

In a climate of increased participation in higher education nationally both Bath based universities are likely to experience further expansion. A key issue is how to plan for this expansion, in particular the increase in student numbers given the pressure accommodating existing students places on the city's housing stock.

With regard to the University of Bath, the Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan has changed the Green Belt boundary at Claverton Down in order to accommodate expansion on-campus. This expansion will be the subject of a Master Plan and is likely to include academic space and many student units. These units are likely to increase the proportion of students accommodated on campus.

Opportunities to accommodate the increased numbers of students which are being sought by the Bath Spa University on campus are limited.

Past increases in the student population have created strong pressure on housing supply in Bath. For example in Oldfield Park, where this pressure is perhaps most visible, 30% of properties are occupied by students. Local residents have



voiced concerns about the presence of large numbers of students.

Therefore, providing more purpose-built accommodation either on University campuses or elsewhere in Bath needs to be considered to help address this issue. However, both expansion on Green Belt land at Claverton Down and specific student accommodation schemes within the city have also been the subject of much objection from local residents.

**Q40 How and where should the increasing numbers of students be accommodated?**

**Q41 Can the Core Strategy facilitate a reduction on the pressure on Bath's stock of family housing?**

**Q42 How far can the Core Strategy assist in meeting the needs of further education facilities over the next 20 years**

**ISSUE B11: Meeting the need for community facilities**

*Primary, Secondary and Further Education*

The growth in housing will generate a need for more school places either through the expansion of existing schools or the construction of new schools. A new primary school will be built as part of the Bath Western Riverside development and the proposed urban extension is likely to generate the need for a new primary school.

*Health and Sport/Recreation*

In a similar fashion a growing population will increase the demand for dental services and the health services provided by the Royal United Hospital and the city's GP surgeries.

Increasing demands will be placed on many different kinds of leisure facilities. This will include recreational open spaces which contribute to the city's green infrastructure that is so important to people's quality of life. The Council's Green Spaces Strategy provides useful evidence in relation to the levels and quality of green spaces across the district. In terms of green spaces a major issue facing the city is how the growing demand for allotments should be met.

The development of additional housing and the provision of new or expanded community facilities will need to be carefully phased so that the right levels of services are available at the right time.

**Q43 How should the Core Strategy facilitate the necessary improvements in health, educational and recreational facilities?**

**ISSUE B12: Improving access around and into the city**

It is essential that movement both into and within Bath is carefully managed to minimise adverse environmental impacts. Nuisance from traffic, noise and fumes exists on all main routes, but they are particularly noticeable on those used by heavy vehicles such as the A4 and the Lower Bristol Road.

Addressing circulation and the congestion in the city will also be critical to supporting the growth and development of the economy.

A bid for funding to the Department of Transport, known as the 'Bath Package' was submitted in July 2006. The Bath Package aims to address the issues identified above by delivering a range of measures designed to improve the transport system of the city. This initiative will support the

economic performance of Bath and help to protect its heritage. The aim is to increase the availability and quality of alternatives to using the car for trips within the city, to reduce congestion and improve road safety, air quality and the urban environment. It is anticipated that implementation will commence in 2009. The key initiatives include the following:

*Showcase Bus Routes*

A number of existing bus routes will be upgraded to improve connectivity between the city centre and its suburbs. The introduction of low emission vehicles, new and extended bus lanes and other bus priority measures will enable greener, quicker and more reliable journeys.

*Bus Rapid Transit*

A busway will be constructed along the former Midland Railway line to provide a segregated route from the park and ride site at Newbridge to the city centre, passing through the Bath Western Riverside regeneration area and Green Park Station. It will continue to the historic core of Bath and extend eastwards along the A4 London road to the proposed new park and ride at Lambridge. Conventional buses will be replaced with hybrid tram-buses.

*New and expanded Park & Ride sites*

A new 800 space park and ride site is proposed for Lambridge to serve traffic arriving from the A46, M4 motorway and the A4 and West Wiltshire towns. The existing park and ride sites at Newbridge, Lansdown and Odd Down will be expanded to provide an additional capacity.

*Need for Further Improvements*

Additional growth planned for Bath will place further demand on the city's transport system. Whilst the implementation of measures proposed in the Bath Package will help a further sub-regional study is being undertaken to determine whether more improvements (funded through the government's Transport Innovations Fund) will be needed to accommodate

future development proposals. This study should be complete by the end of the year.

**Q44 Does anything else need to be done to encourage people in living and working in Bath to use sustainable methods of transport?**

## Keynsham

### Overview

After Bath and Midsomer Norton, Keynsham is the largest urban area in Bath & North East Somerset with a population of almost 16,000. It is in some respects a dormitory settlement with the majority of residents of working age leaving the town to work. **Map 4** shows Keynsham and the surrounding area.



Keynsham Memorial Park

### People

The working age population of Keynsham is the lowest in the district. One in five residents is retired. The town has above average numbers of people in all age categories over 50. Keynsham's ageing population gives rise to increasing care and support needs. For example, the town has one of the highest levels of households with one or more people suffering from long-term illness within the district.

### Home

There are over 8,000 dwellings in Keynsham and 3-4 bedroom family housing predominates. The average price

of a semi-detached house in east Keynsham (July-Sept 2006) was approximately £246,000. This is slightly above average for the district as a whole. Newly forming households unable to afford to buy a home are the main group contributing to housing need in the town.

There are also a growing number of homes for the elderly, both residential and nursing.

### Jobs

Almost 10% of the district's jobs are in Keynsham. Over half of businesses in Keynsham are small and medium sized. Wholesale and retail trade, public services and manufacturing are key employment sectors. Employment in manufacturing, wholesale retail and trade in Keynsham is slightly above average for the district. Employment in education, health and social work and real estate, renting and business activities employ a lower proportion of residents than is the case for the district as a whole.

Since 1991 there has been an increase in distribution-based employment, a very large increase in public administration and defence employment, and a decline in manufacturing employment. A significant proportion of jobs in Keynsham are provided by a few key employers.

Keynsham has strong links with Bristol's job market with many people commuting to work in Bristol.

#### **Box 11: Keynsham Town Plan Vision Statement (2004)**

Keynsham is a great place to live and work, with its attractive setting, good transport links, traditional High Street and numerous active community, church, sports and arts groups. It is also a place of great potential. We want to build on the good things and embrace the future. Our vision is for Keynsham to develop into a thriving, sustainable and



Somerdale Factory from the River Avon

## Local Services and facilities

Keynsham has a large amount of green space, including a good mix of formal and natural spaces. The Memorial Park receives many visitors, especially during the summer months, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  come from outside the town.

People in Keynsham expressed the highest levels of satisfaction in the district in relation to the quantity of green space. Although a shortage of allotments to cater for the town's needs has been identified.

Most of Keynsham's shops and services are located within the town centre. The town centre has many historic buildings and original features which give it local character. However, many of the old shops along the high street were replaced with modern units in the 1960s and 1970s and the high street now lacks vibrancy and coherence. The high-rise Council Offices and the surrounding precinct located between Temple Street and Bath Hill West are incongruous with the character of the town and have a dated appearance.

Keynsham serves a local area in shopping terms. The high street in Keynsham has a short average user stay and a low average spend on non-food items. One in five daytime

shoppers in Keynsham town centre visit the high street every day.

There is a mix of national 'chain' stores and independent shops in Keynsham. The town has a higher than average proportion of convenience retailers providing every-day purchases (such as food, drink, newspapers etc).

Despite the high level of convenience stores in Keynsham, most Keynsham residents (60%) shop for food in south Bristol. Only a quarter of Keynsham residents (23%) regularly shop for food in the town. By contrast, in the 1970s only 30% of spending on convenience goods was outside of the town.

There are few empty shops in Keynsham, but concern has been expressed about the proportion of charity shops on the high street.

Secondary schools in Keynsham and Chew Valley perform well. There is a large amount of in-commuting to secondary schools in Keynsham from south-east Bristol, with pupils living in Bristol making up over 60% of pupil numbers in Broadlands School in Keynsham. There are currently limited higher and further education provision located in Keynsham.

The indoor sporting needs of Keynsham are largely served by Keynsham Leisure Centre. The anticipated Sports Facilities Strategy will provide evidence of sporting deficiencies within Keynsham. However, it is already acknowledged that there is an identified deficiency in the overall supply in sports pitch provision in Keynsham, this takes into account recreational land which is prone to flooding. A large number of sport and recreation facilities are provided just outside of the district boundary in South Gloucestershire and Bristol.

## Setting and Character

Keynsham is located where the Rivers Chew and Avon meet. The setting of Keynsham is enriched by the rolling landscape that surrounds the town and its position in the river valley. The river Chew runs through the centre of the town providing its distinctive linear parkland, while at the same time fragmenting the town.

Although, Keynsham has existed since Roman times, the town has been most influenced by twentieth century development. The building of Fry's Chocolate Factory in 1922 (still operational as Cadbury's Schweppes) and the provision of post-war "overspill" housing for Bristol transformed the town, hugely increasing its size and population.



Keynsham Abbey remains

The Bristol/Bath Green Belt was designated in 1966 and this has influenced the growth of the town, keeping the separation of Keynsham from both Bristol and Saltford. Former Green Belt land in South West Keynsham has already been committed for up to 700 new homes and additional community facilities in the Local Plan, this is due to be built before 2010. Prior to this there had been no real

changes to the Green Belt around Keynsham since it was designated.

Keynsham has two Conservation Areas and there are over 70 listed buildings and structures including the Keynsham Abbey remains. The potential of the Memorial Park and Abbey Ruins to contribute to promoting the town as a tourist destination is mentioned in Council strategies and the Town Plan, although there is currently no evidence which shows that Keynsham is a tourist location.

## Transport

Compared to many areas in the district, Keynsham has good public transport provision. The town has good bus links and a main line rail service to both Bath and Bristol. Despite this, only 2% of employed residents travel to work by train. The location of the train station on the edge of the town is a disadvantage. Furthermore, Keynsham has a high level of car ownership considering the fact that it is an urban area with good public transport.



Travelling to Keynsham

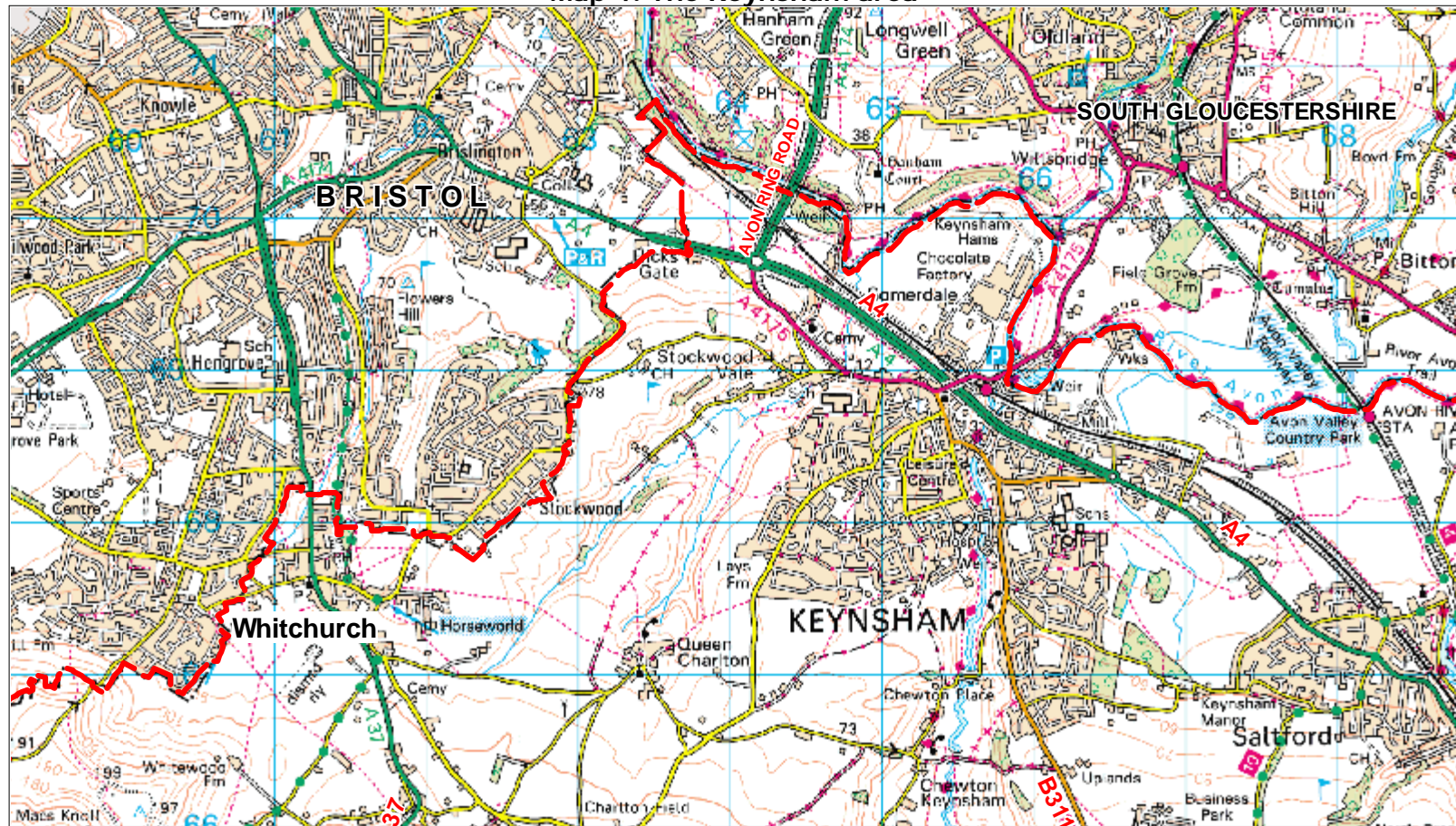
The Keynsham bypass links to the Bristol ring road giving easy access to Bristol. Whilst it was built to alleviate traffic in the centre of the town, traffic has since greatly increased

and there are now a large number of traffic calming measures in the town centre which dominate the streetscape.

The number of people commuting to work from Keynsham has been high since the 1950s. However, between 1991 and 2001 the numbers of

residents out-commuting to work fell by 6%. Currently, more than 60% of employed residents travel elsewhere to work. The majority of trips to work from Keynsham are medium to long journeys rather than short trips (i.e. 5-10 km or more).

Map 4: The Keynsham area



## Issues for Keynsham

### Headline Issue: An Urban Extension south east of Bristol

As part of the planned expansion of the city of Bristol, an urban extension has been proposed by the South West Regional Assembly (*Draft RSS Policy SR4*). In planning for the growth of Bristol, land that has previously been developed will be used wherever possible. However, the green belt will be revised to allow for the planned growth of Bristol over the longer-term (before 2026). This development on the edge of Bristol will bring the outer edge of the city closer to Keynsham and will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the town.

The spatial portrait of Keynsham highlights an increasing functional relationship between Keynsham and Bristol shown by the increasing integration in service use between the two areas. This is illustrated by convenience shopping patterns, school attendance and in sports facility provision. There is an opportunity for Keynsham to benefit from its close proximity to the proposed urban extension by providing for many of the service, shopping and job needs of the new community. This could help revitalise the town and enhance the offer of the town centre. Alternatively, Keynsham could find itself increasingly dependent on Bristol to meet basic needs, the urban extension acting to accelerate increasing dependence on Bristol.

The Bristol urban extension will require well-planned infrastructure (roads, sewerage, electricity provision etc),

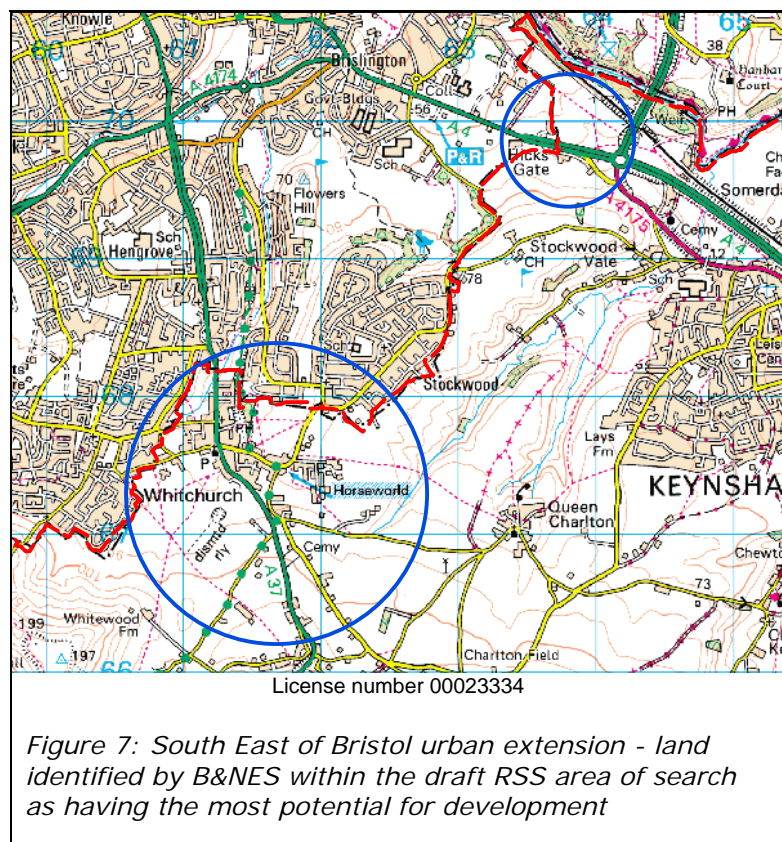
including access to a range of facilities and development at a level that will support these services.

Bath & North East Somerset Council together with Bristol City Council will need to cooperate in planning and phasing development to accommodate a mix of uses (e.g. housing, employment, shopping, leisure etc) for the 6,000 homes that the draft RSS states should be provided in the urban extension

This urban extension will need to be sustainable and deliver a high quality of life by including:

- o high standards of design;
- o green space and landscaping;
- o the protection and care of valued wildlife sites, landscape features and landscape settings.

Although this is an urban extension to Bristol the development will be on land in Bath & North East Somerset. The location will be decided locally through Bath & North East Somerset's Core Strategy, working closely with Bristol City Council.



*Figure 7: South East of Bristol urban extension - land identified by B&NES within the draft RSS area of search as having the most potential for development*

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy identifies an 'Area of Search' that extends from the Whitchurch area close to the A37 to Hicks Gate on the A4. Having undertaken some initial assessments Bath & North East Somerset Council consider that land in the Whitchurch and Hicks Gate areas offers the greatest potential for development (see **figure 7**) and that development should not take place in Stockwood Vale.

The Regional Spatial Strategy is currently in draft and will not be adopted until 2008. It is, however, necessary to consider the implications of this development now.

- Q45** Is the land identified by Bath & North East Somerset within the 'area of search' the best option for urban extension development?
- Q46** What type of place should be created and what will be the identity of this area?
- Q47** How should Keynsham relate to the urban extension to Bristol?
- Q48** How can we ensure that Whitchurch, Queen Charlton, Stockwood Vale and Hicks Gate retain their identities in light of this development?
- Q49** How can this development contribute to and not detract from the regeneration of south Bristol?

We suggest that the key issue facing Keynsham is the potential impact of the urban extension to Bristol. However, there are several other important issues that must be addressed in the Core Strategy. What we do about these issues to a greater or lesser extent will be influenced by how the town engages with the urban extension.



### Issue K1: Future of Keynsham Town Centre

There is substantial 'leakage' of convenience retail spending out of Keynsham. Strong competition particularly from out-of-town retailers is leading to Keynsham residents increasingly looking to south Bristol and Longwell Green for their food shopping needs.

Furthermore, there is concern about the mix of shops and vitality of the town centre. The appearance of the town centre and the cluttered streetscape also detracts from its appeal. The high-rise Council Offices and the surrounding developments do little to enhance the image of the town.

The urban extension to Bristol could offer opportunities for the regeneration of Keynsham town centre. Equally increasing competition from shops and services provided both as part of the urban extension to Bristol and elsewhere in Bristol could lead to the decline of the centre if no action is taken.

**Q50 How should the town centre be improved to address the competition from retail & leisure developments on the edge of Bristol?**

**Q51 The dated appearance of the High Street in particular area around the Riverside offices and the surrounding area together with the cluttered streetscape has a detrimental impact on the impression created by the town; how can this be improved?**

### Issue K2: Employment in Keynsham

Evidence suggests that there is a high level of out-commuting from Keynsham. There is also a fairly narrow employment base, with a few key employers providing a significant proportion of the

town's employment. Keynsham's favourable location between Bath & Bristol with access to the M32, together with lower commercial rentals than many areas of Bath and Bristol could provide employers with an attractive location and provide more local job opportunities.

National and regional Government policy is to direct growth towards existing service centres in well placed locations to achieve a higher level of self-containment by supporting local services and facilities as well as reducing the need to travel.

The Government considers that settlements which serve as a dormitory town to so-called Strategically Significant Cities or Towns, such as Bath and Bristol, should not attract further development which reinforces this role.

Towns identified under Development Policy B in the Regional Spatial Strategy as 'Market Towns' are expected to attract '*locally significant development*'. Development in these settlements should be targeted to meeting local objectives and regeneration needs.

**Q52 Does the town have potential for employment growth?**

**Q53 How should Keynsham's narrow employment base be addressed?**

**Q54 Should Keynsham be classified as a 'Market Town', as defined by the Regional Spatial Strategy?**

### Issue K3: Providing sufficient housing

The average price of housing in Keynsham is beyond the reach for many first time buyers which may prevent younger people from remaining in or moving to the town.

The land committed for development at South West Keynsham allows for up to 700 new homes, and the Council's policy is that 35% should be at the affordable or rental end of the housing market. The scheme also includes a modest element for business uses. We suggest any further housing developments will also need to be supported by an increase in employment opportunities to limit the need for further out-commuting.

Evidence also indicates that the ageing population will increase over the next twenty years. The accommodation requirements for this group will need addressing to take account of this trend.

**Q55 How should the housing needs of the ageing population be addressed?**

**Q56 Are there any other particular groups who have a local need for housing in Keynsham and surrounding settlements?**

**Q57 Should there be a better balance between residential development and employment opportunities in Keynsham?**

### Issue K4: Improving access and reducing the need to travel

Keynsham has some of the best public transport provision in the District. Despite this there is still evidence of high car use and limited use of the rail for travelling to work. The location of the

station on the north edge of the town and the infrequency of the service is also a disadvantage.

The shape of the town and the way in which the river fragments it contributes to poor access by foot. The tributaries of the River Avon, in particularly the valley of the River Chew, have served to split housing either side of its valley. As development has spread the residential neighbourhoods have become increasingly disconnected from each other and the High Street. The residential areas on the periphery are consequently poorly served by local services and the lack of east-west connections exacerbates the problem.

**Q58 In what ways could other forms of transport other than private car be promoted?**

**Q59 How should the poor connectivity between neighbourhoods be addressed?**

**Q60 Should the local shopping centres continue to be protected and even expanded?**

### Issue K5: Addressing Community Needs

There is considerable change afoot in relation to the provision of community facilities in Keynsham. The changing demographic of Keynsham is having an impact on community needs and the needs of the new community who will be residing in the urban extension to Bristol also need to be considered.

Bath & North East Somerset Primary Care Trust are currently working on a proposal for a Health Park, including a clinic and GP surgery. The former Keynsham Hospital site has been identified for this redevelopment. It is unclear whether additional health

facilities will be needed in future in Keynsham, particularly in light of the urban extension to Bristol.

Keynsham secondary schools play a continuing role in providing education for young people living in Bristol. The future Bristol urban extension could also impact on this position. Bath & North East Somerset Council will continue to work with Bristol City Council on this important issue. At primary level, following a review of the Keynsham area, two primary schools have closed and a new primary school is being built and will open in 2008.

There are shortages of sports pitch provision and also allotment provision in Keynsham. More evidence is needed to support the need for other community facilities.

**Q61 Are there any particular groups who have local need for community facilities in Keynsham, and what is the evidence for this need?**

**Q62 What additional facilities, if any, should be provided in Keynsham, particularly in light of the urban extension to Bristol?**

## Midsomer Norton, Radstock and Environs: A Portrait

### Context

Midsomer Norton and Radstock are located approximately 12 miles South West of Bath and 16 miles South East of Bristol. Both towns are connected to Bath by the A367 and to Bristol via the A362 and A37, the latter also extending south to the A303. Midsomer Norton and Radstock lie only 8 miles from Frome and Shepton Mallet.

Both Midsomer Norton and Radstock provide a range of services and facilities for local people living in surrounding Parishes including Paulton and Peasedown St John as well as Parishes in Mendip District Council.

The population of Midsomer Norton and Radstock totals around 21,600 making it the second largest urban area in Bath & North East Somerset.

### Industrial Heritage

Midsomer Norton and Radstock were originally market and rural service centres which became mining towns and the focus of the North Somerset Coalfield. The historic core of Midsomer Norton runs along the River Somer which remains an attractive feature in the High Street. Together with much of Radstock it is now designated as a conservation area.

Following the decline in coal mining, there was a steady expansion of new manufacturing and related service industries in the Somer Valley. Industry in the

area is now dominated by printing and packaging and the haulage and transport industry.

Although the coalfield extended southwards the majority of collieries were to the north of Norton Radstock. Paulton, Clutton, High Littleton, Timsbury, Camerton and Peasedown St John have all retained their individual identities despite varying amounts of development. Only Peasedown St John has experienced extensive expansion recently - its population doubled in the 1990s.



Radstock

## Public Transport

The urban area of Midsomer Norton and Radstock does not have the same level of accessibility to major settlements enjoyed by Keynsham. There is no rail link but there are good bus services to Bath. The bus service from Norton-Radstock to Bristol will be improved as part of the Greater Bristol Bus Network Major Bid.

## Jobs

In the Midsomer Norton and Radstock area, manufacturing jobs account for around a quarter of local employment, twice the proportion for B&NES. Local employment is dependent on a small number of large employers especially in the printing and packaging sector. This sector is vulnerable to global restructuring, potentially leading to significant loss of jobs in the future.

Employment opportunities have not kept pace with residential development. 57% of the residents in Norton Radstock travel elsewhere to work.

The working age population makes up 71.6% of the total. This proportion is considerably higher than for the whole of Bath & North East Somerset (61.4%). The Midsomer Norton and Radstock area accounts for around 15% of employment in B&NES.

In December 2005 the unemployment rate for the Midsomer Norton and Radstock area was 0.5% of the working age population (B&NES 0.9%) which is significantly lower than the national average at 2.4%.

Additionally, none of the claimants are considered long term claimants, all claiming for less than 6 months.

It is widely accepted that people with lower than an NVQ Level 2 qualification are more likely to lack the skills required to access and progress in employment. Midsomer Norton Redfield, Radstock and Westfield all have more than 50% of their populations without a Level 2 qualification.



Midsomer Norton High Street

## Shopping

Midsomer Norton town centre serves the daily shopping needs of its own residents and those of Radstock and the surrounding settlements. The town has a good range of convenience shopping facilities, both within the town centre and out-of-centre at Thicket Mead. The town centre also

provides a range of durable goods shopping, but residents tend to travel to Bath, Bristol or the Somerset market towns to meet their other shopping needs.

Midsomer Norton High Street has fewer empty shops than the national average. The availability of free car parking attracts frequent shoppers from the local catchment area. Nearly 800 people are employed in the Town Centre, 380 in retail.

Radstock is a very small shopping centre dominated by the Radco superstore. The parade of shops/services acts as a local/neighbourhood shopping centre for local residents within Radstock but the Radco store has a wider catchment area for food and groceries and for durable goods shopping. The Museum, pubs and restaurants attract leisure visitors.

## Community Facilities

Both Midsomer Norton and Radstock provide a range of community facilities for local people and those in adjoining areas.

Unlike Bath and Keynsham, the Midsomer Norton and Radstock area is deficient in formal green space. An area between Midsomer Norton and Radstock is allocated as a Town Park in the Local Plan.

Midsomer Norton and Radstock's sport and recreational needs are largely serviced through South Wansdyke Leisure Centre and Writhlington Sports Centre. The former has a long standing aspiration for a sports hall and improved health and fitness (gym) facilities.

The Sports Built Facilities Strategy will identify any further deficiencies in sporting provision in the area.

## Home

Due to the close proximity to Bath and Bristol, Midsomer Norton and Radstock are often viewed as commuter towns, a perception enforced by the rapid growth in the town's housing supply. There are a number of mixed-use sites, such as Paulton Printing Works and Radstock Railway Land, allocated in existing policy documents which are programmed to deliver further housing in the area over the next few years

House prices in Norton Radstock have been generally lower than other parts of the District. This has assisted people entering the housing market within the District, although these opportunities are being affected by increasing house prices.

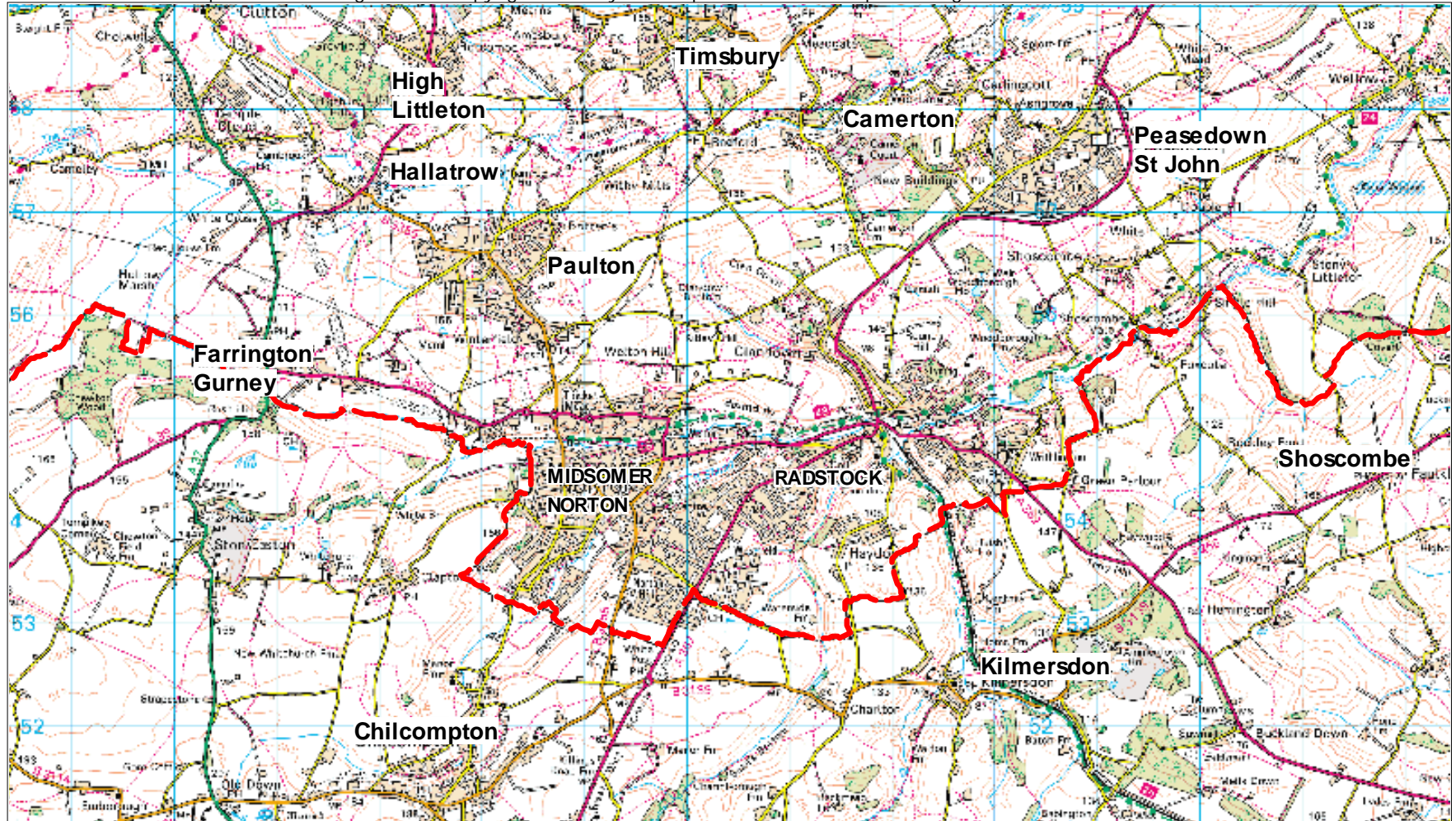
### Box 12: Brighter Futures Community Plan

The Somer Valley Partnership adopted its Community Plan in 2005. Its ambition is to create a thriving and vibrant area which has a sense of well-being and identity and to revitalise the economy of the Midsomer Norton, Radstock and the surrounding villages. It addresses the key challenges arising from the decline of manufacturing and the need to diversify and expand the local economy. It is the start of a long-term programme which seeks to address the following issues:

- A Strong Sense of Place - improve the town centres and ensure their functions are complementary
- Decline and Change - diversify and expand the economy for the area
- Opportunities - increase the aspirations and skills of the workforce
- Challenges - provide a role for Midsomer Norton and Radstock as the focus of a wider economic area

**MAP 5: SHOWING NORTON RADSTOCK & ENVIRONS**

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## Issues for Midsomer Norton, Radstock & Environs

### **Headline Issue: The vulnerable local economy and the need for diversification and expansion**

The recent closure of the Polestar and Alcan printing works, two of the major employer in the area, demonstrates how vulnerable the local economy is to global restructuring and its dependency on a few large employers. This helps to explain why employment in this part of Bath & North East Somerset is falling.

When a business closes, there is usually pressure to release the land for housing because this is a more lucrative option. In the interests of the economy, existing policies seek to retain business land or insist on a mixed-use scheme but the employment element of these is often small. Currently local policies look to retain existing employment sites. Evidence shows that there is currently an issue no real 'ladder' of sites available locally for businesses to develop and grow.

There is a widespread view that more jobs should be provided in the Midsomer Norton and Radstock area in order to reduce commuting. Up to now, this has been achieved through the allocation of new greenfield sites such as the Westfield Trading Estate (which is almost complete) and Bath Business Park at Peasedown St John (now under construction). This leaves the allocated business site at Old Mills as the only significant new employment opportunity. We need to consider if it is realistic to make further land available for economic growth or if firms are reluctant to come to the area because of poor infrastructure. There may be economic and technological changes over the next two decades which could be harnessed to benefit the south of the District and attract employers.

**Q63 Are tourism opportunities being overlooked?**

**Q64 How far should existing employment sites be retained? Should more land be allocated for employment use?**

**Q65 Alternatively, should we accept that a growing proportion of residents will commute out of the area and therefore seek to improve public transport to major employment centres such as Bath and Bristol?**

**Q66 How can the economy be diversified and revitalised to create a stronger economic base?**

### **Issue NR1: The role and function of the settlements**

Midsomer Norton and Radstock share a Town Council and the boundary between the two settlements has become blurred. However they have distinctive characteristics and functions. Their respective roles and functions will need to be taken into account in Core Strategy policies. What kind of places do we want Midsomer Norton and Radstock in 20 years time?



Paulton, Timsbury, Peasedown St John and the smaller settlements in the former coalfield area have more in common with Midsomer Norton and Radstock than with villages in the Chew Valley or lower down the Cam Valley nearer Bath. This wider area has a sufficient population to provide a critical mass to compete with other towns in the area and could therefore be promoted and planned for in an integrated way.

The Regional Spatial Strategy states that “market towns” should be the focal points for development to make them more self-contained, enhance their function as service centres and to bring about regeneration. Midsomer Norton’s function as a service centre for a wide area is restricted by the proximity of Bristol and Bath. However if the future of this part of the District is to be considered in a more holistic way it certainly has the necessary concentration of business and employment with potential to expand which would justify classifying Midsomer Norton as a “market town” and new development could be sited in the most appropriate locations.

The 2005 Community Plan “A Brighter Future” recognises the important relationship of villages to the south in Mendip District with Midsomer Norton and Radstock. Whilst the Core Strategy cannot extend across the District boundary, it needs to ensure any policy framework is consistent with that in northern Mendip.

**Q67 Should the relationship between Midsomer Norton, Radstock and the surrounding villages be recognised and the development of the wider area planned for in an integrated way?**

**Q68 Should Midsomer Norton be classified as a market town as defined by the Regional Spatial Strategy?**

**Q69 Should development be concentrated in Midsomer Norton and Radstock or distributed between the settlements in the area?**

**Q70 Alternatively should the Green Belt be extended to this area and only small scale development within the existing built up areas be permitted?**

**Q71 How far can planning of the southern Bath & North East Somerset and northern Mendip be co-ordinated?**

**Issue NR2: New housing - a threat or an opportunity?**

Over the last 10 years nearly 1000 houses have been built in Midsomer Norton and Radstock. Public consultation during the preparation of the Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan indicated strong opposition to further residential development in this part of the District on the grounds that house building had not been matched with new jobs in the area. It has also been suggested that the road network could not cope with more out-commuting, mainly to Bath. One option is therefore to restrict new development to allow consolidation of existing development.

However, the growth proposed in the Regional Spatial Strategy may provide the opportunity for expansion in this part of the district and in doing so foster economic regeneration. If this option is favoured, decisions about how the growth could be accommodated need to be addressed. Options for growth could involve the significant expansion of one of the settlements in this area or dispersed growth between the towns and villages.

Many of the previously used which may be available for development are former industrial land. We need to consider how much of this should be protected for new business. Further housing on old factory sites within the existing urban areas may put pressure on existing services and facilities within the settlements and increase congestion.

Any expansion will need to be supported by transport, social and green infrastructure. It would be possible to create a new circular transport corridor in this area along which new development could be concentrated. This could assist the provision of better public transport but may result in the merging of settlements.

**Q72 How much new housing should be accommodated to assist the economic growth in the south of the District?**

**Q73 If more houses are needed, where should they go? Should one or two of the towns and villages be expanded or should the houses be dispersed – perhaps along a circular transport corridor?**

**Q74 Should the gaps between villages such as between Paulton, Hallatrow and High Littleton be protected?**

**ISSUE NR3: What transport improvements are necessary to assist economic growth and meet social needs**

Some argue that the areas peripheral location and relative isolation make it difficult to attract economic investment. The Norton Radstock Regeneration proposals involve a re-alignment of the main roads in Radstock which are intended to address the problem of the double roundabout in the centre of the town. Two existing road proposals may improve links with Bristol: these are the A362 at Old Mills in conjunction with new development and a bypass for Clutton / Temple Cloud. Radstock is served by regular buses to Bath but fares are expensive so many use the Odd Down Park and Ride. Bath benefits but not Norton Radstock.

A more direct bus services to Bristol (via Whitchurch instead of Keynsham) has recently commenced but is restricted to one bus at the morning and evening peaks. Timsbury has lost its hourly bus to Bristol and its service in that direction is also restricted to one bus a day. The new houses at Peasedown are poorly served by bus and there is only one bus per week between Farrington Gurney and Midsomer Norton. What other anomalies or gaps in

provision need to be tackled if more people are to be persuaded to leave their cars at home?

A feature of the area's coal mining heritage is the number of former railway lines which are still evident. These are safeguarded in the Local Plan for sustainable transport use and considerable lengths of former track have already been added to the National Cycle Network. More such links are planned but this does not rule out the use of these former lines to provide public transport again.

**Q74 How can public transport, in particular links to Bristol and Bath be improved?**

**Q75 Should the route of Clutton/Temple Cloud bypass continue to be safeguarded?**

**Q76 Should the former railway lines continue to be safeguarded for sustainable transport use?**

**ISSUE NR4: How can regeneration improve the centres of Midsomer Norton and Radstock? What should their respective roles and function be?**

Current proposals for the regeneration of Radstock include improvements to the shopping centre, but the town is nevertheless likely to continue to suffer from the divisive effects of the main roads. Midsomer Norton town centre is dilapidated but lends itself to improvement of the range of shops, facilities for pedestrians and the public realm generally.

Should therefore shopping development be restricted in Radstock and the smaller settlements to encourage the expansion and improvement of Midsomer Norton as part of its role as the market

town for the surrounding area and help it to compete with the more attractive shopping centres in neighbouring market towns?

**Q77 Should Radstock continue to compete with Midsomer Norton as a shopping centre or should the latter's key role be protected and enhanced?**

**ISSUE NR5: Improvements to local facilities**

Previous Community consultations have identified dissatisfaction with provision of local facilities. However, two new primary schools have recently been constructed and the re-development of Writhlington School with many community facilities has recently been announced. The 2005 'A Brighter Futures' Plan highlights the investment needed for the Victoria Hall in Radstock and the Somer Centre in Midsomer Norton as well as the lack of facilities for young people.

The area's sport and recreation needs are also poorly catered for. For example the South Wansdyke Leisure Centre has a long standing aspiration for a sports hall and improved gym facilities. There is no cinema and the formal town park proposal has not been implemented despite land being earmarked for one for many years (see **figure 8**). It could be argued that most of the population lives within easy reach of open countryside but a park would be a valuable asset and a venue for community events.

**Q78 What gaps are there in social, health, recreational and cultural facilities?**

**Q79 How can we bring forward the town park and is the extent of the existing proposal still appropriate?**

**ISSUE NR6: How can the distinctive local character be emphasised and enhanced while accommodating economic growth?**

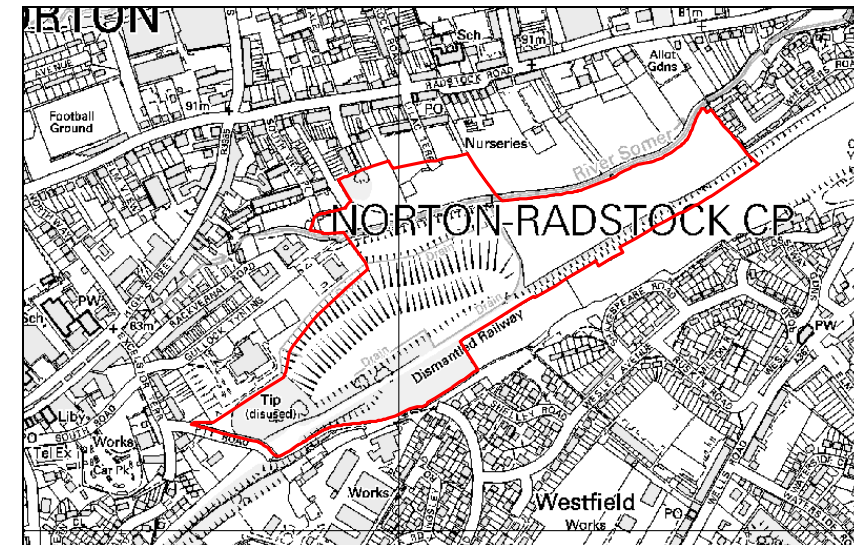
The distinctive character of settlements in this area has been recognised by the designation of Conservation Areas in Paulton, Timsbury, Radstock and Midsomer Norton but not all new development has enhanced this character. The characteristic

miners terraces, long gardens and batches are not protected. Whilst there are two AONBs in the district, the quality of the landscape in the south of the district is currently not recognised.

**Q80 How can the further loss of local character be prevented? What can be done to attract more tourists to discover the distinctive landscapes and townscapes of the area? How can regeneration help to improve the public realm?**

**Q81 A distinctive feature of the area is the penetration of built-up the area by open countryside. Are there parts of the area that should be protected from development?**

*Fig 8: Midsomer Norton Town Park Proposal*



## The Rural Areas: A Portrait

### Context

There are 47 rural parishes which accommodate nearly a third (pop. approx. 48,100) of the population of the District. The rural parts of the District are striking and diverse. Around a quarter of the rural areas lie within designated Areas of Outstanding Beauty. **Figure 11** shows the key settlements in the district.

The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty reaches into the south west of the District. Strung along the foothills of the Mendips are the villages of Ubley, Compton Martin and East and West Harptree. To the north of the Mendips is the undulating valley of the River Chew within which lie Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes and a network of small villages. The largest of these, the historic village of Chew Magna acts as a community focus for local villages and hamlets.

The east of the District is dominated by the southern thrust of the Cotswold Hills where the Oolitic limestone has strongly influenced the topography, the landscape and the built environment. Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty surrounds Bath to the north, east and south largely following the Green Belt boundary

The three villages of Bathampton, Batheaston and Bathford lie to the east of Bath close to the River Avon and the Kennet and Avon Canal. Whilst they lie in close proximity to Bath and each other, they retain their own identity.

Former coal mining in the south of the district has left a network of villages and hamlets within the attractive ridge and valley landscape. The white/blue lias limestone has

been used as a distinctive local building material evident in the coal miner's terraces in villages such as High Littleton,

Paulton and Timsbury. Peasedown St. John has experienced significant growth in the last decade to become the largest village in the district.

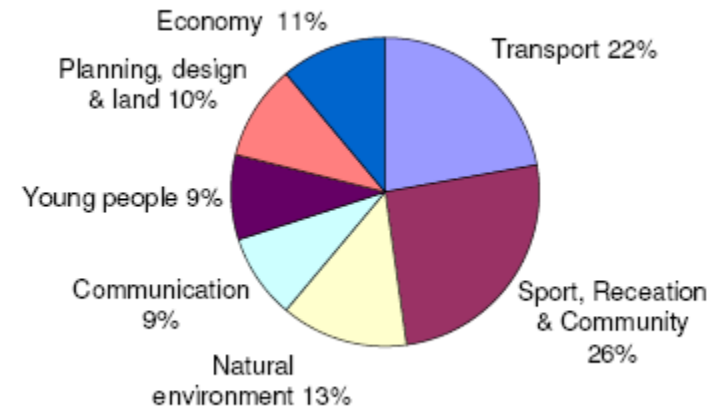


Figure 9: Key areas of concern identified in Bath & North East Somerset through Parish Plans

### Cultural Heritage

The District has been settled since prehistoric times and this has given rise to a diverse cultural heritage. Many villages have retained their individual identities and the attractive character of over 30 villages is recognised by their Conservation Area status. There are over 50 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.



Kennet & Avon Canal

## Natural Environment

A number of sites in the District are designated for their internationally important wildlife and/or habitat. Chew Valley Lake is recognised as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for its international importance for migrating birds and Natural England has identified a 'buffer' area around the Lake.

Combe Down and Bathampton Mines form part of the Bath & Bradford-on-Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and are a vital part of global efforts to conserve the world's biodiversity. Compton Martin Ochre Mine is a component site of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC. Greater Horseshoe Bats are a primary reason for selection of both sites together with Bechsteins bats for the Bath & Bradford-on-Avon SAC and Lesser Horseshoe Bats for the North Somerset and Mendips Bats SAC.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are designated by Natural England and are of national importance for their flora, fauna or geological interest. There are currently 22 SSSIs within the District. There are more regionally and locally important ecological sites.

## Jobs

Rural areas experience the highest levels of employment within small businesses. This is reflected in the relatively high levels of self-employment in the Bath & North East Somerset area at 20% of all people working compared to 14% nationally.

Unemployment rates in the rural areas are generally lower than in urban areas (around 0.5% in 2006 in the rural areas compared with were nearer 1% in towns) and they were significantly lower than the national average at around 2.5%.



Country lane in Compton Dando

Agriculture is important both in terms of the economy and local character. The greatest contribution towards employment provision comes from wholesale, retail and motor vehicle repair, real estate and manufacturing. The area has around 5,000 VAT registered business, the majority employing 50 people or less, highlighting the diversity of employment in rural areas and the importance of small business.

## Living

A detached house in the rural areas of Bath & North East Somerset was estimated to cost only 18% less than a house in the city of Bath in 2002.

The larger villages act as local service centres because they have a good level of provision of local shops, community facilities and reasonable access to major employment areas and other important facilities by public transport. This includes villages such as Batheaston, Bathampton, and Bathford, Paulton, Peasedown St John, Timsbury and Saltford. However, past planning policies have generally been restrictive of new development in rural areas, reflecting national policy of restraint to avoid unsustainable patterns of development and to protect local character.

**Fig 10** shows that deprivation tends to be worse in the towns than in rural areas although this is a broad generalisation and there are marked pockets of deprivation in a few parishes. Difficulties in accessing services can be exacerbated by rural transport problems and many villages look to neighbouring towns for community and leisure facilities.



Wellow Conservation Area

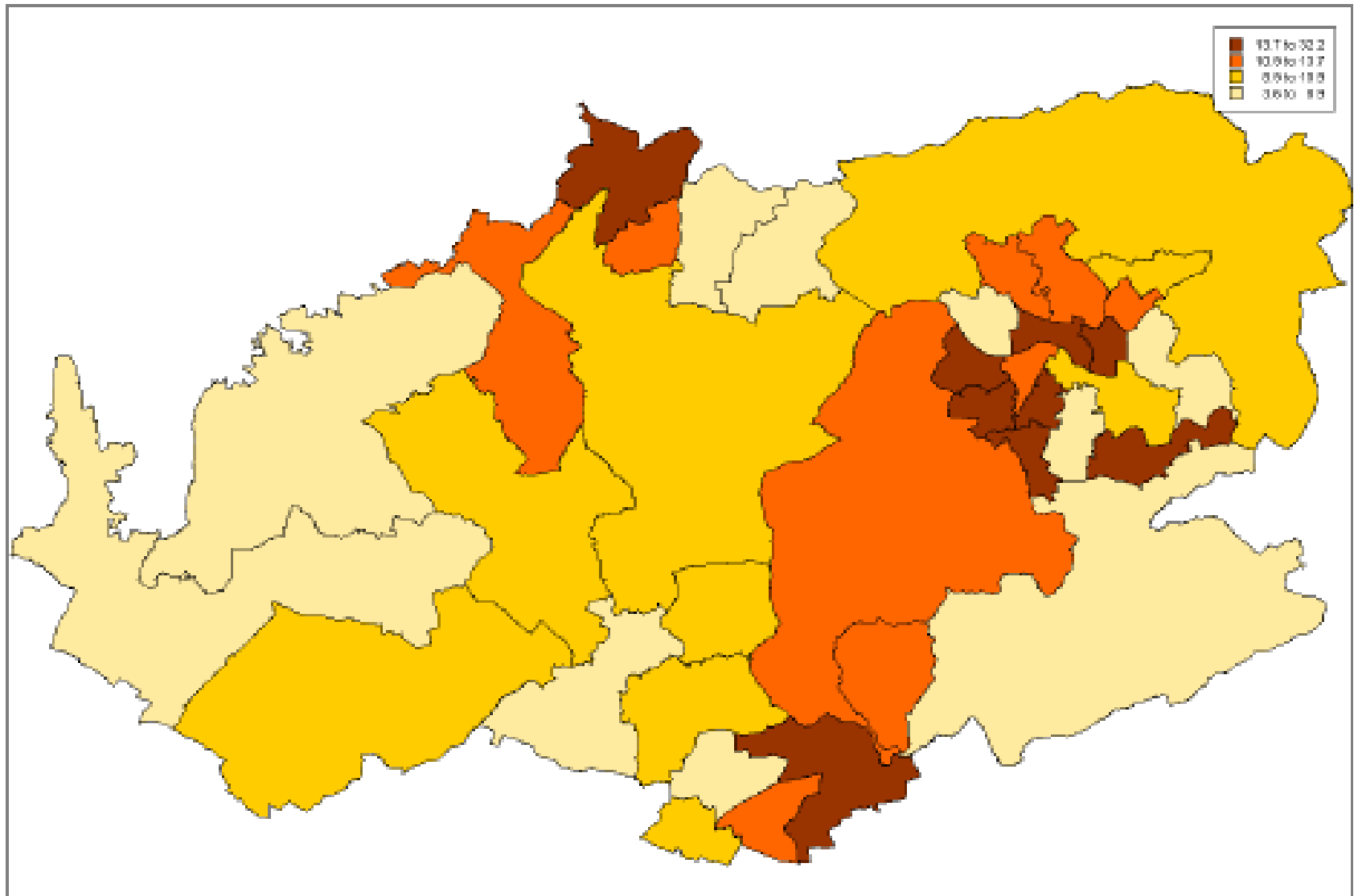
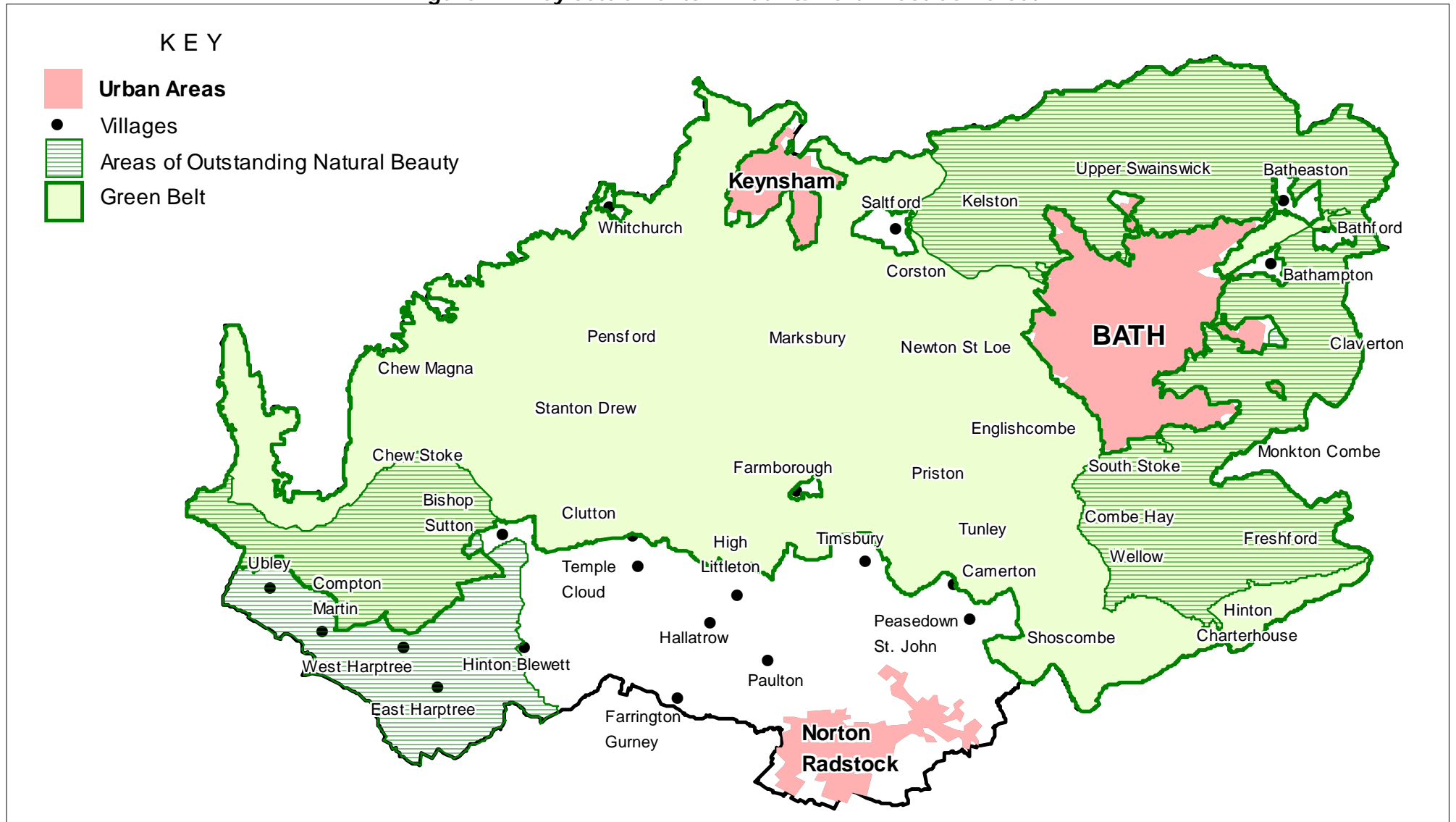


Figure 10: Index of Multiple Deprivation at Ward level (2004)

Figure 11: Key settlements in Bath & North East Somerset





## Key Issues for rural areas

### Headline Issue: How can change be harnessed for the benefit of rural communities?

Many rural communities in Bath & North East Somerset are experiencing social and economic change. In some cases services such as shops and post offices have closed and remain under threat. Traditional industries, such as farming, are declining, incomes are not improving and jobs are disappearing. Migration from the city to the countryside is resulting in increased out-commuting and higher property prices.

#### Issue R1: The future for rural settlements.

The longstanding national planning policy approach in rural areas has been one of development restraint in order to discourage unsustainable travel patterns. Only that development which meets local needs is encouraged such as local employment opportunities, local services, shops, post offices, schools, health centres and meeting places as well as affordable housing. Even this development has been focused on the larger and more accessible service centre villages. **Figure 12** shows the classification of settlements in the existing local plan.

Development Policy C of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy broadly reiterates and strengthens this approach and allows those settlements classified as 'Small Towns and Villages' to attract small amounts of development. The scale and type of development in rural communities should be managed carefully to ensure that it strengthens local communities by promoting greater self containment,

meeting local housing needs and supporting key local services.

Whilst the general policy context at a national and regional level remains relatively unchanged the Core Strategy provides the opportunity to review how policies affect particular settlements in the district and their role and function. This will help us decide what types of policies should apply to different settlements to secure their long term sustainability.

**Q82 Should settlements outside the urban areas of Bath, Keynsham, Midsomer Norton and Radstock which should be classified as a 'small town or village' under RSS Development Policy C?**

**Q83 Should any settlements be removed from the Green Belt to facilitate a greater level of development?**

Over the years, there has been a migration from urban areas to rural areas. There may be a danger of villages becoming unsustainable dormitory settlements.

The 2001 census shows the high level of self-employment in the rural area of Bath & North East Somerset. The internet has facilitated home-working and reduced the need to travel daily for work.

There are concerns that rural houses occupied by out-commuters would result in sterile communities and the lack of a weekday population to support necessary services. However, whilst it remains important to provide houses for local people, there may be some benefits in providing for people to move into the rural areas to help re-invigorate communities. As well as addressing needs for affordable housing, the limited development of larger houses could facilitate home working and a small-business friendly environment. With improvements in communications e.g. the wider availability of broadband providing home/work opportunities may have a role in revitalising some parts of the rural area.

**Q84 What type of houses and how many should be built in the rural areas to support evolving social, economic and environmental changes?**

**Q85 Should Home/Work units be encouraged in the rural areas?**

**Q86 With communication improvements, should more innovative ways of working be encouraged?**

**Issue R2: How can the need for affordable housing in rural areas be addressed?**

The Housing Needs and Affordability Study (May 2005) indicates that there is severe shortage of affordable housing in the rural areas. The population supported by the rural economy cannot always compete for housing and as a result struggles to find accommodation close to places of work or where they grow up. The Local Plan allows for affordable houses to be built as an exception to the policies of restraint where there is a clear need. These policies can be reviewed under the Core Strategy

although any new approaches will need to take account of national policies and regional policies

**Q87 Should policies allow for more affordable housing for local people in villages?**

**Q88 Should affordable housing provision in rural areas be closely linked with employment?**

**Issue R3: Maintaining and providing new local facilities and services?**

Closures of local services such as village shops cannot be prevented solely by planning measures. Is restricting development in the rural areas helping or hindering sustainability and vitality of rural communities?

Many people living in rural communities work in urban areas and look to the urban areas for leisure, retail and health/welfare services. It has the effect of drawing expenditure away from rural areas, making it more difficult to safeguard rural services.

**Q89 What facilities are needed to ensure cohesive and balanced communities? In which villages should these facilities be accommodated?**

**Issue R4: Rural isolation and dependency on private car usage.**

In recent years the Council has been able to maintain a basic network of bus services in rural areas by granting subsidies to the operators and some limited improvements have been achieved so that commuters are now provided for in areas where previously only shoppers were served. Despite this rural living relies heavily on

private car usage resulting in unsustainable travel patterns. In general, public transport is not usually frequent enough or is too expensive, and specific groups in rural areas, particularly young people and the elderly face transport difficulties.

In the rural areas to the north and south of Bath a very restricted bus service has been replaced by a "Fare Car" taxi scheme similar to the "Dial a Ride" facilities in Keynsham and Midsomer Norton/Radstock. Is this the way forward for all rural public transport or is it practical to plan for an improved network, perhaps using the routes of former railways which are at present safeguarded from development.

New routes which are advocated to improve the accessibility and prosperity of urban areas are very often resisted by rural residents even though they sometimes bring welcome relief to villages. In Bath & North East Somerset the only new road routes in the countryside currently safeguarded are those of the Clutton / Temple Cloud and Whitchurch bypasses on the A37. In the future detailed proposals for a South Bristol link road and an A36/A46 link road to the east of Bath may be put forward. Should all rural road building be resisted or does it have a part to play in improving the overall environment of the area?

- Q90 How can more people be encouraged to use public transport in rural areas?**
- Q91 How can accessibility be improved?**
- Q92 Should land continue to be safeguarded for the proposed bypasses for Clutton / Temple Cloud and Whitchurch?**
- Q93 Should former railway lines continue to be safeguarded for sustainable transport use?**

### Issue R5: Fostering a buoyant rural economy

The decline in traditional rural based economic activities, particularly agriculture, is a serious issue. Farm incomes are falling and the profitability of farm businesses are declining. The green belt has limited large scale commercial developments and the existing rural businesses provide valuable employment to their communities.

There is the opportunity to contribute to economic growth through activities such as farm diversification (including grocery shops), garden suppliers, and the provision of leisure based activities.

There are various opportunities to diversify the rural economy by attracting more visitors. Many urban residents look to rural areas for recreational and leisure activities. This opens up opportunities for rural diversification (e.g. horse related activities, leisure activities, catering etc) not normally present in more remote rural areas. These activities do encourage economic activity in rural areas although do generate extra trips by private car.

is the resultant flow of town dwellers visiting rural areas in private cars for leisure and services any more sustainable than rural residents visiting towns for services?

Reconnecting farming with its markets, the food chain and consumers is a challenge. The high costs of travelling to increasingly centralised facilities such as abattoirs and stock markets is having a detrimental effect on local meat outlets and small producers and leads to increased "food miles".

**Q94 How can greater diversification of the rural economy be encouraged? What types of activity are appropriate?**

**Q95 How can the connection between producers and consumers be improved?**

**Issue R6: Protecting and enhancing the Natural Environment**

Bath and North East Somerset is a district rich in biodiversity with a range of sites designated internationally as well as locally for their ecological value. These require protection and enhancement. It is important to recognise that the areas which are not designated specifically also contribute to our rich natural environment. Conserving our biodiversity, stopping further losses and aiding the re-establishment of lost wildlife are major challenges.

The variety, attractiveness and interest of the landscape is important in defining local character and distinctiveness. It also helps to shape the environments in which local authorities operate, affecting the quality of life of local residents. The diverse landscapes can encourage outdoor recreation.

Green Infrastructure is the network of protected sites, nature reserves, green spaces, woodlands, greenway linkages in urban areas, the countryside in and around towns, and the wider countryside. As well as being features of the landscape, these are often important as wildlife corridors and migration routes, all increasingly important in adapting to climate change.

The creation and improvement of Green Infrastructure in urban and rural areas and the countryside in and around

towns can help to deliver multiple benefits for biodiversity, landscape, and health and recreation.

**Q96 How can the benefit of rich biodiversity be realised to improve tourism, economic development, health promotion and sustainable communities?**

**Q97 Should the Core Strategy identify the protection and enhancement of Green Infrastructure?**

**Issue R7: Renewable energy**

Renewable energy production provides an important way of minimising carbon production and addressing climate change concerns. National and regional policy encourages the production of renewable energy and the draft RSS includes a sub-regional renewable electricity target. Opportunities for some forms of renewable energy production e.g. wind turbines and energy crops are most likely to arise in the rural areas. Therefore, their environmental and social impacts will also affect the rural areas most strongly.

Whilst wind turbines can make a significant contribution towards generating renewable electricity their installation has a number of potentially significant impacts particularly on the landscape. There are also opportunities to increase farm income and contribute to renewable energy objectives by expanding energy crop production and/or supplying other biomass (e.g. woodfuel) to renewable energy installations. Energy crops and other biomass must be grown within a reasonable radius of an end user installation in order to have a positive effect on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to attract grant aid. There is still some uncertainty, particularly regarding future rules on growth of non food crops on set aside land,

leading to reluctance amongst farmers to commit to energy cropping. Such changes could also significantly impact on the landscape, and on the availability of land for local food production and on food costs.

**Q98 Should renewable energy such as wind turbines and production of biomass be promoted in the district and if so how and where?**

Fig 12: Classification of rural settlements in the Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan

