
Bath & North East
Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

Re-setting the Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan and the District-wide Spatial Strategy



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Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

Planning for the future of
the place where you live



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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We are re-launching conversations with key stakeholders on our Local Plan and the Spatial Strategy approach

1. Introduction

1.1 As a result of changes to national policy and the government's proposed revised housing figure which are aimed at tackling the country's acute housing crisis and stimulating economic growth, we are resetting our Local Plan. This document updates you on why we need to reset the Local Plan, what it means, and outlines some broad approaches to accommodating new housing, employment development and supporting infrastructure across the District. This document also marks the re-launch of conversations and working with key stakeholders, particularly those representing local communities. Alongside publishing this update document, we are running another call for sites to hear your suggestions as to potential sites we should consider for development for housing and economic uses.

2. What is a Local Plan?

2.1 The Local Plan for Bath and North East Somerset is a long-term plan that will shape how the area grows and changes over the next 15 - 20 years. It also seeks to facilitate a shorter term and ongoing supply of new housing and space for economic uses. The Local Plan sets out requirements for new developments, like housing, jobs, and infrastructure, making sure they happen in the right places and in a way that best benefits communities. The goal is to create sustainable, vibrant, and healthy places where people want to live, work, and visit.

2.2 Without a Local Plan, development would still take place but in a speculative and uncoordinated manner, often in less sustainable areas, with inadequate infrastructure support. By having a Local Plan, we can protect what makes Bath and North East Somerset special, while guiding future growth.

2.3 The Local Plan also aligns with and helps to deliver other Council strategies and plans, including the Economic Strategy and our transport strategies and plans.

3. What is a Spatial Strategy?

3.1 A key part of the Local Plan is a Spatial Strategy for B&NES, which is a strategy or plan for how the District will grow and change over time. It helps to establish where best to put development like new homes, businesses, schools, health facilities and green spaces, making sure places continue to work for the people who live there, as well as protecting the environment and lowering carbon emissions.

3.2 In short, the Spatial Strategy sets the **pattern and scale of new development** in the District.

3.3 A set of spatial priorities are also outlined in the Local Plan. These priorities set out what the plan is seeking to achieve and they guide and shape the spatial strategy. The spatial priorities were set out in the spring 2024 [Options document](#) and are **outlined below**. Following consideration of the responses to the consultation they are not proposed to be changed. Our Local Plan will plan for development in response to local needs to create attractive, healthy and sustainable places in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy.

The Plan will:

- Create a **fairer**, more **prosperous** and **sustainable** economy
- Maximise the delivery of housing that is **affordable**

In doing so, our plans for development must:

- Enable Bath and North East Somerset to become **carbon neutral by 2030** and deliver a climate resilient district
- Protect and enhance nature through facilitating **nature recovery**
- Improve **health and well-being** outcomes for all, including through planning health promoting and inclusive places and providing for cultural enrichment
- Reduce the need for and distance of unsustainable travel, and enable **improved connectivity** for all through sustainable modes of transport and facilitating locally available services and facilities
- Respect, conserve and enhance our **heritage assets** and their landscape settings, in particular the World Heritage Site of Bath and National Landscapes
- Align the timely provision of **transport, health, education, social, cultural and green infrastructure** with development

4. Our approach so far

4.1 Whilst the Local Plan is about much more than just planning for new housing we have, until now, been preparing a Local Plan based on housing need figures set by the previous government.

4.2 Earlier this year we held a Local Plan Options Consultation, asking for your views on potential site options for development across the District. This was based on meeting the housing requirement set by the previous government, which at that time was around 14,500 new homes over a twenty year period, and the economic land requirements set out in our Economic Strategy and Economic Needs Assessment.

4.3 The site options we consulted on were based on a **Spatial Strategy** which focused growth at the **most sustainable settlements in the District**. These settlements have a range of employment opportunities, and services and facilities, that enable trip distances to be minimised and can be better accessed through sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling, wheeling and public transport.

4.4 Large or strategic sites located in and around each of the most sustainable settlements were assessed to understand whether they might be suitable for development. Sites which were considered potentially suitable were set out in the Local Plan Options Document for comment.

4.5 A detailed description of this approach is set out in our [Topic Paper - Identifying Strategic Development Location Options](#).

5. National policy changes and Local Plan reset

5.1 In December 2024, the government published changes to national planning policy, aimed at tackling the country's acute housing crisis and stimulating economic growth. This included changes to the way that housing need is calculated in each local authority area. As a result the amount of housing that we are required to plan for through the Local Plan has **increased significantly** – an

uplift of 105%, from 717 new homes per year to 1,471 new homes per year. Over a twenty-year period this would equate to over **29,000 new homes**.

5.2 Given the likely scale of change, we are resetting the Local Plan. This doesn't mean starting again – the work done already is still very relevant, as are the responses we received to our consultation earlier this year, which we have been considering carefully.

5.3 The Local Plan is not simply about planning for new housing - it is about helping to create sustainable and healthy places and supporting job growth. However, given the uplift in new homes required we need to relook at our Spatial Strategy, to understand how best to try to meet the new housing requirement, as well as providing land for businesses, schools, health facilities and green spaces.

5.4 There are various ways that this could be done, so we would like to update you on potential approaches that we may consider.

6. Our thinking

6.1 The significant uplift in the government's proposed housing figures is substantially driven by the unaffordability of housing within B&NES and especially the city of Bath. Therefore, development needs to help address the housing crisis and the acute need for homes that are more affordable, ideally in locations close or with sustainable access to where the need principally arises. Development must also deliver economic land to meet future requirements, moving us towards a more sustainable and greener economy, and must create sustainable and healthy places, well served by infrastructure, with good connections between homes and jobs.

6.2 We still think that a Spatial Strategy based on growth at the most sustainable settlements should be the starting point. These are the areas of the district with the best access to jobs, facilities and services, and the best connected by sustainable transport and active travel. Locating new housing close to areas where there are jobs, facilities and services helps to minimise travel distances, as well as enabling increased travel through public transport, walking, cycling

and wheeling. Together this has the best chance of minimising transport related carbon emissions. Directing growth away from these areas would conflict with the Council's corporate priority of tackling the Climate Emergency.

6.3 There are advantages of providing new homes and jobs in larger developments. By building at scale the necessary supporting infrastructure can be better and more efficiently planned and provided.

6.4 We are undertaking further assessments e.g. of economic growth; types, sizes and tenures of housing; transport impacts and infrastructure requirements. This work is underway and will inform the consideration of place and site options that will be consulted on later in 2025.

6.5 But now we are starting to look for solutions for higher growth levels. At this early stage we are considering different approaches to **focusing additional development across the District**. A broad range of additional site options will need to be considered, but there are various different strategy approaches which could act as a greater focus for locating these options.

7. Settlement sustainability

7.1 A number of different spatial strategy approaches are set out below. However, before we outline them, our work to date has already established some principles in terms of what we think are the more sustainable settlements in the District:

- **City of Bath** – given the particularly acute need for affordable housing within Bath and as the most sustainable settlement in the District with the best range of job opportunities and services and facilities, we are looking at the city as a starting point, to understand any opportunities for development on brownfield sites within the city. We are also considering whether any sites already allocated for development in the adopted Local Plan could be intensified to provide additional development over and above what is already allocated. However, the form and design of development is fundamentally important given that Bath is a double-inscribed World Heritage Site, surrounded by its protected setting, and

mainly by the Cotswold National Landscape. As such, although some growth within or adjacent to the city may be appropriate, evidence collated to date suggests that opportunities for strategic development are very limited.

- **City of Bristol (adjacent land)** – some areas close to the City of Bristol are also comparatively sustainable and well connected, such as Hicks Gate.
- **Towns** – other than Bath, the next most sustainable settlements in the District with a range of job opportunities, facilities and services are the towns – Keynsham, Midsomer Norton, Radstock and Westfield.
- **More sustainable villages** – the rural areas of Bath and North East Somerset are characterised by a relatively dense pattern of villages and hamlets of varying sizes. Some of the villages are more sustainable than others as they have a better range of facilities and services and benefit from good existing connectivity to jobs, facilities and services by public transport and active travel. In addition, there are villages which are considered will benefit from future sustainable transport and active travel schemes, which would improve connectivity. The villages assessed as being the most sustainable in the District comprise Saltford, Whitchurch Village, Batheaston, Bathampton, Bathford, Freshford, Timsbury, Paulton, Peasedown, Temple Cloud, Pensford, Farrington Gurney, Chew Magna, Corston, Clutton, Bishop Sutton, High Littleton, Chew Stoke, Farmborough, and South Stoke.
- **Other villages and hamlets** – villages and hamlets not listed above are often a longer distance from job opportunities and services and facilities and are not particularly well connected by sustainable transport and active travel. They also have little scope for future connectivity improvements. There may be scope for small-scale development at these villages if it is sought by the community and/or it was considered that limited growth could support existing services, such as schools or local retail.

8. Approach to transport

8.1 In considering the sustainability of settlements, the presence of job opportunities services and facilities within them, as well as their connectivity to such provision by sustainable means of transport is of crucial importance. Our approach to transport is closely integrated with the planning for new development through the Local Plan. National policy changes require us to take a Vision-Led approach to transport, which is founded on improving opportunities to travel more sustainably. This transport vision is supported by a number of key transport strategies and plans which we consulted on during summer 2024, including:

- Active Travel Masterplan
- Creating Sustainable Communities in North East Somerset: The Journey to Net Zero

8.2 In addition, transport strategies and plans already adopted by the Council also support the transport vision, including:

- Movement Strategy for Bath
- Joint Local Transport Plan 4, 2020-2036 (led by the West of England Combined Authority working with the four West of England councils)

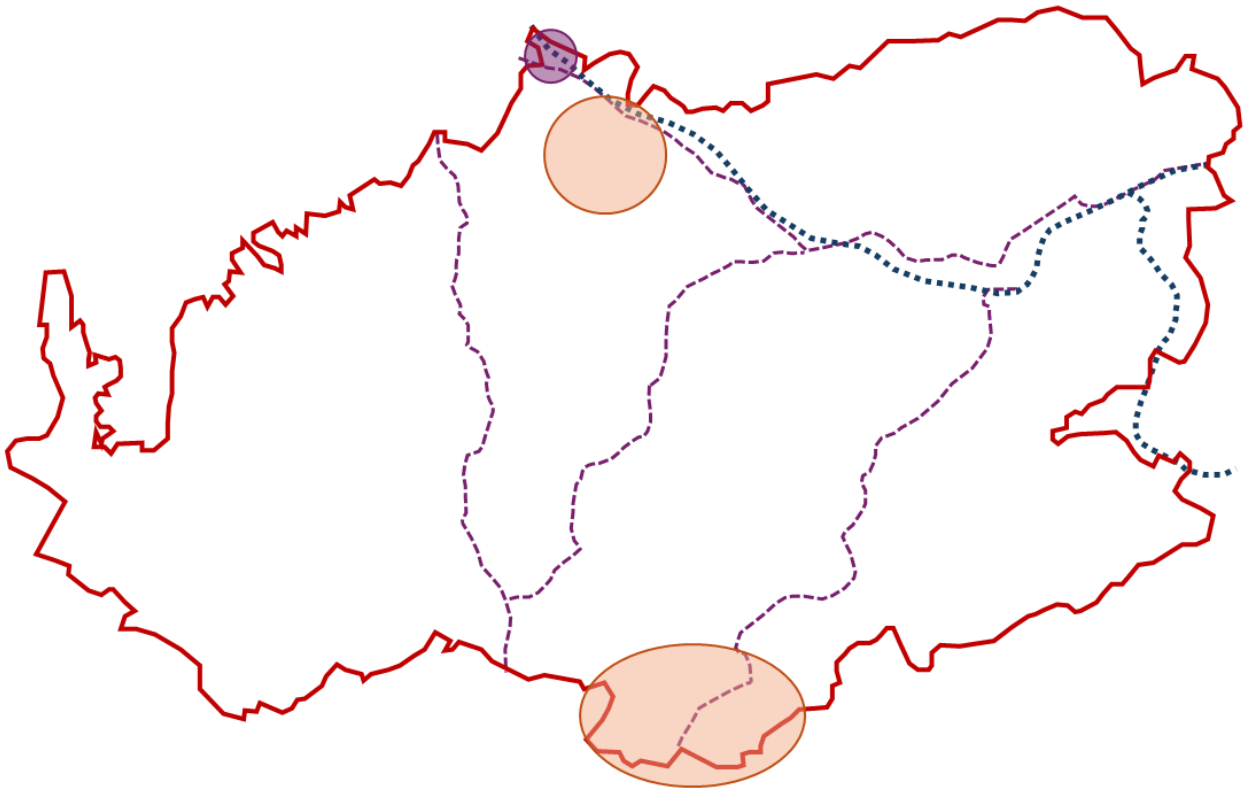
8.3 The Vision-led approach will be used to support the Local Plan in assessing the transport impacts of development and how the impacts can be best mitigated. This work will also be informed by and help further develop the transport strategies referenced above.

9. Spatial Strategy Approaches

9.1 In the Local Plan Options document published in February 2024 we consulted on development locations at the most sustainable settlements, as well as suggesting some relatively modest development in the rural areas focussed on the most sustainable villages.

9.2 In seeking to plan for greater levels of housing and economic land we will need to consider various spatial strategy approaches that could act as a focus for identifying additional sites for development. Given the scale of housing need set out by the government we will need to identify a broad range of sites for development.

Spatial Strategy Approach 1 - Urban expansion: Focussing significant levels of growth at the most sustainable and best-connected towns in the District, as well as land connected by sustainable transport to the City of Bristol.



Opportunities:

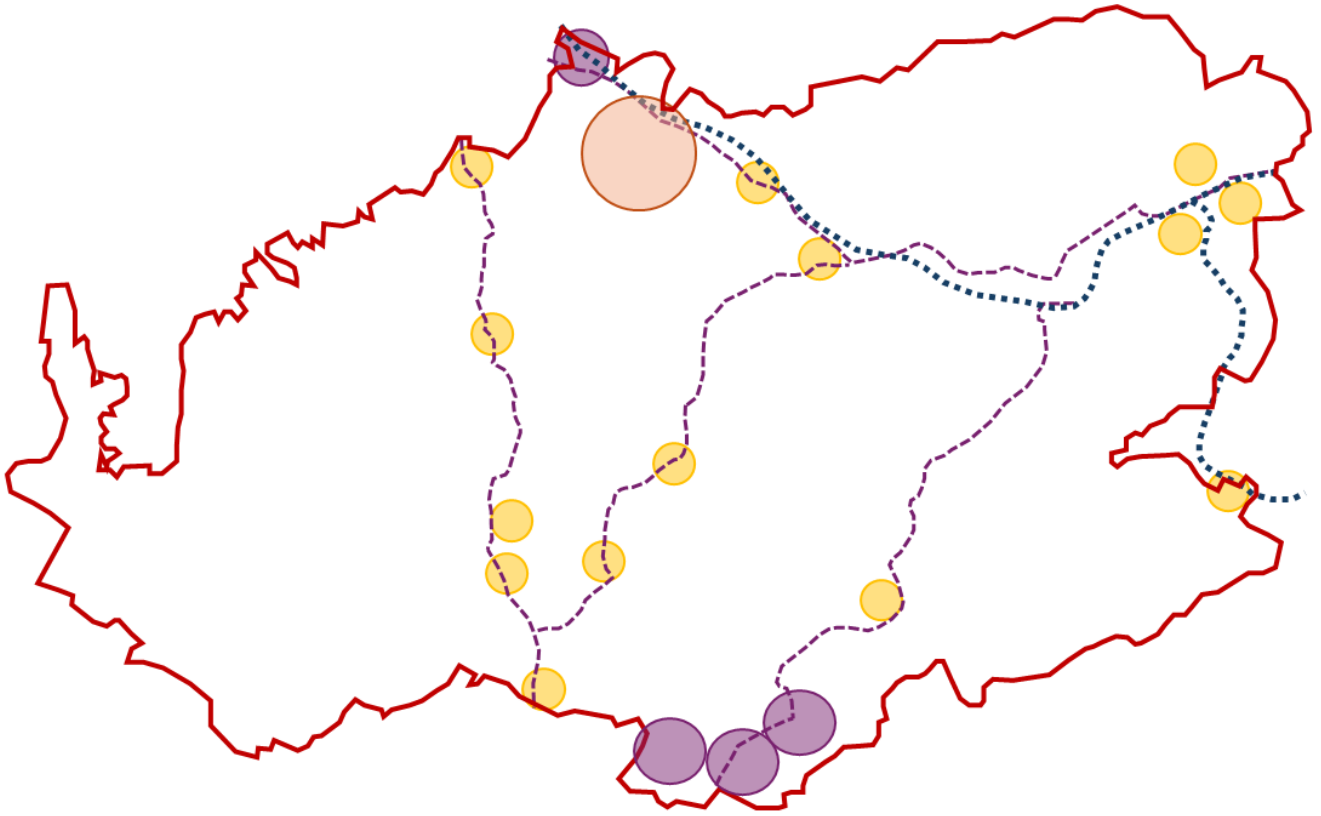
- Opportunity to minimise travel distances as these places accommodate a greater range and number of job opportunities, as well as facilities and services.
- Well-connected by public transport and active travel corridors, reducing the need for private car use, therefore lowering carbon emissions and promoting more sustainable travel patterns.
- Development on established transport networks ensure that ongoing investment in public transport infrastructure is utilised more efficiently and reduces the need for new road construction.
- Better access to existing infrastructure such as, schools, healthcare services, and utilities.

- Access to good existing job markets, and existing services that can attract businesses to the area.
- Potential for higher density developments due to more urban locations.

Constraints:

- Some of the more sustainably located villages may miss out on investment, leading to uneven development and disparities in opportunities and services.
- Strain on existing infrastructure if additional sufficient infrastructure is not provided.
- Potential to create urban sprawl if growth is not carefully managed.
- Impact of growth on character and identity of existing towns.

Spatial Strategy Approach 2 - Sustainable transport corridors: Focussing growth at settlements along already established key public transport routes, some of which have existing programmes of investment and enhancements, and locations with good active travel opportunities into larger and more sustainable settlements.



Opportunities

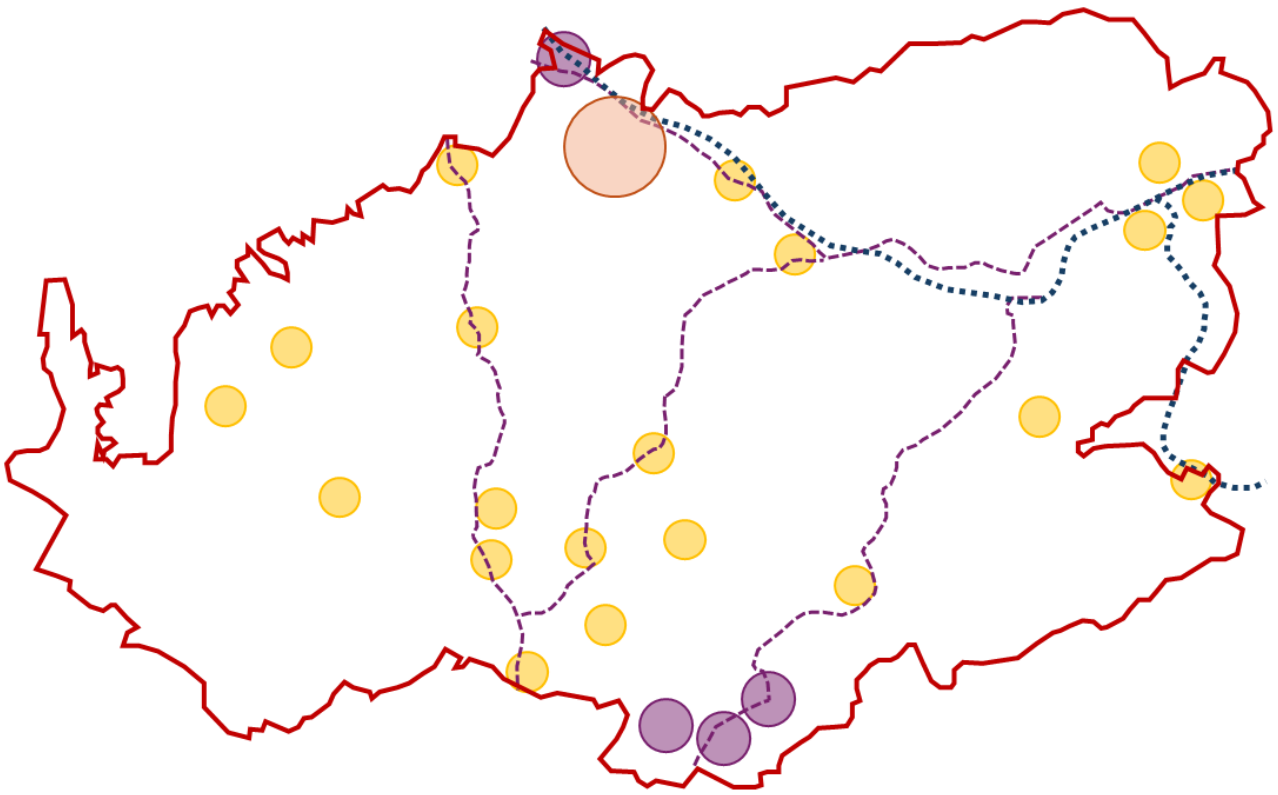
- Well-connected by public transport and active travel corridors, reducing the need for private car use, therefore lowering carbon emissions and promoting more sustainable travel patterns.
- Development on established transport networks ensures that ongoing investment in public transport infrastructure is utilised more efficiently and reduces the need for new road construction.
- Access to existing infrastructure such as, schools, healthcare services, and utilities.
- Potential to invest in infrastructure at more sustainable villages

- If some development is directed to some of the more sustainable villages, there may be less risk of urban sprawl at towns across the District.

Constraints

- Strain on existing infrastructure if additional sufficient infrastructure is not provided.
- Impact of growth on character and identity of existing settlements along the public transport routes.
- Journey distances to jobs and facilities are likely to increase and be greater than focussing growth at the main urban areas.
- Villages located on public transport routes less likely to be suitable for higher density development compared to more urban locations.

Spatial Strategy Approach 3 – Development at a greater range of more sustainable villages: Focusing more significant growth on a greater range of the more sustainable villages.



Opportunities

- Targeting growth at the most sustainable villages can help meet rural housing shortages, particularly for affordable homes. Providing more housing options can help young families, key workers, and lower-income residents to remain in or move to rural areas, addressing demographic challenges like aging populations in some villages.
- Growth can benefit rural economies by bringing new residents who will support local businesses, schools, and services.
- Directing more growth to villages could ease the housing pressure in cities and towns, and reduces the risk of over-concentration in one location, spreading the benefits of development across a wider geographic area.

- Targeting sustainable villages for growth can lead to investments in rural transport, utilities, and other key infrastructure, enhancing connectivity and services for existing and new residents.
- The more sustainable villages may be well-placed to encourage walking, cycling, or local bus use for short commutes or leisure, promoting active travel in rural settings.

Constraints

- Some villages have limited infrastructure, and growth could put an unacceptable strain on these resources, if additional sufficient infrastructure is not provided.
- It may be more expensive to improve rural infrastructure, particularly in more sparsely populated areas.
- Villages not located on key public transport routes are more reliant on private cars for out-commuting and leisure trips. Encouraging growth in these areas without improving transport infrastructure would be likely to lead to increased journey distances, traffic, carbon emissions, and road congestion.
- Impact of growth on character and identity of existing villages.

Spatial Strategy Approach 4 – New or substantially expanded settlement:
Planning for one or more new or substantially expanded settlement(s) at a large scale.



Opportunities

- A new or substantially expanded settlement allows for a comprehensive and strategic approach to provision of housing and economic land, enabling the integration of infrastructure such as transport, energy, education, health and utilities to support the development from the start.
- Dependent on the location and size of a new settlement it could reduce the pressure on infrastructure, including local services and facilities, in existing towns and villages.
- New or substantially expanded settlements could also play a role in meeting housing need beyond the period of this Local Plan, as part of a longer-term strategy.

Constraints

- Requires extensive upfront investment for infrastructure which could impact the viability of the development.
- Given significant infrastructure requirements and complex process of bringing one forward it is likely that a new or substantially expanded settlement would have long lead in times and will not deliver housing or other uses in the short to medium term.

Other potential approaches

- **Green Belt protection** - An option relating to protection of the Green Belt was tested in the Sustainability Appraisal at the previous Options Consultation. However, the revised NPPF sets out a clear requirement that we must demonstrate that we have taken all possible steps, including reviewing Green Belt boundaries, before a lower housing requirement will be considered. An option showing very limited or no development in the Green Belt is therefore not tested at this stage.
- **Mixture of approaches** - It may become apparent that to accommodate the amount of development required, a mixture of the above Spatial Strategy approaches could be required, or certain elements of one of the approaches might need to be considered alongside another.
- **Development dispersed to less sustainable villages** – It may also become apparent that to accommodate the amount of development required by the Government, even a mixture of the approaches tested above may not meet the requirements. Consideration may need to be given to further dispersal of housing and economic land to some of the less sustainable villages in the District, though this would need to be carefully balanced with the clear sustainability impacts that would arise in doing so. This approach has been tested through the Sustainability Appraisal published alongside this document and its potential sustainability impacts are outlined.

10. Call for sites

10.1 In considering potential sites for additional development we are interested to hear from you on your suggestions. A call for sites for housing and economic uses is therefore running alongside this update. We are particularly interested in whether you have any ideas for new settlement locations or areas where we could substantially expand existing settlements within the District. In order to enable new suggested sites to be considered as part of the further Options work they will need to be submitted by 21st March.

11. Next steps

11.1 In light of the proposed revisions to the NPPF and the need to re-set the Local Plan we are undertaking further evidence base work and will be assessing locations for additional development. This process will be informed by the comments we received in response to the Options consultation in spring 2024, and working with communities through representative groups, such as parish and town councils.

11.2 Having undertaken the work outlined above we will then publicly consult on **further site and policy options** for development in the **summer/autumn of 2025**. This will provide another opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the plan preparation before we move towards a Draft Local Plan anticipated to be considered by Council in spring 2026.

11.3 In assessing potential locations and sites for development, we set out in the 2024 Options consultation some principles against which potential sites are systematically assessed. We asked you for feedback on these principles as part of the consultation, and following review of your comments, we have amended them to ensure that they provide clear criteria against which location and sites for development will be assessed. The updated principles are:

- **Climate Change and Nature:**
 - **Sustainable transport connectivity and minimising journey distances:** distance to main centres of employment, services and facilities, existing connectivity and potential to improve connectivity to areas of employment, services and facilities

- **Flood risk**
- **Local food production and agricultural land**
- **Biodiversity and nature recovery:** protect priority habitats and facilitate nature recovery
- **Landscape Character Impact (including designated landscapes)**
- **Historic Environment:** protect and enhance significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets
- **Green Belt:** impact on the Green Belt in terms of openness and national purposes
- **Infrastructure provision:** infrastructure solutions and barriers relating to key infrastructure including health, education, transport and energy/energy storage
- **Ground conditions** including land contamination and stability
- **Existing land use:** protecting other important land uses/community assets e.g. recreational space
- **Local character and community identity:** impact on local character, distinctiveness and identity

12. Relaunching the conversation

12.1 This document updates and re-launches the conversation with stakeholders on the reset Local Plan. We will be in touch with stakeholders over the coming months to continue to discuss the Local Plan and the Spatial Strategy for the District.