

Bristol City Council

North Somerset Council

**Planning for strategic cross boundary matters**

Statement of Common Ground at April 2024

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## Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This statement of common ground is prepared by the authorities of Bristol City Council and North Somerset Council in relation to areas of liaison and co-operation between them on strategic matters that cross the boundary between the authorities as relates to the preparation of their respective local plans.

### **Statement at April 2024**

- 1.2 This statement of common ground sets out the strategic matters on which co-operation has taken place, the key outputs from this co-operation, and any areas where agreement has been reached, or has not been reached, in addressing these matters. The statement is updated at future stages of local plan preparation.

### **Content of the statement of common ground**

- 1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF) paragraphs 24-27 provide guidance on maintaining effective collaboration between Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). It states:

*24. Local planning authorities and county councils (in two-tier areas) are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries.*

*25. Strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which they need to address in their plans. They should also engage with their local communities and relevant bodies including Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships, the Marine Management Organisation, county councils, infrastructure providers, elected Mayors and combined authorities (in cases where Mayors or combined authorities do not have plan-making powers).*

*26. Effective and on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities and relevant bodies is integral to the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy. In particular, joint working should help to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary, and whether development needs that cannot be met wholly within a particular plan area could be met elsewhere.*

*27. In order to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working, strategic policymaking authorities should prepare and maintain one or more statements of common ground, documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these. These should be produced using the approach set out in national planning guidance, and be made publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency.*

- 1.4 The National Planning Practice Guidance (the NPPG) on plan-making (paragraph 010) describes a statement of common ground as:

*Written record of the progress made by strategic policy-making authorities during the process of planning for strategic cross-boundary matters. It documents where effective co-operation is and is not happening throughout the plan-making process, and is a way of demonstrating at examination that plans are deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working across local authority boundaries. In the case of local planning authorities, it also forms part of the evidence required to demonstrate that they have complied with the duty to cooperate.*

- 1.5 The planning practice guidance<sup>1</sup> explains that a statement is expected to contain the following:

- a. a short written description and map showing the location and administrative areas covered by the statement, and a brief justification for these area(s);*
- b. the key strategic matters being addressed by the statement, for example meeting the housing need for the area, air quality etc.;*
- c. the plan-making authorities responsible for joint working detailed in the statement, and list of any additional signatories (including cross-referencing the matters to which each is a signatory);*
- d. governance arrangements for the cooperation process, including how the statement will be maintained and kept up to date;*
- e. if applicable, the housing requirements in any adopted and (if known) emerging strategic policies relevant to housing within the area covered by the statement;*
- f. distribution of needs in the area as agreed through the plan-making process, or the process for agreeing the distribution of need (including unmet need) across the area;*
- g. a record of where agreements have (or have not) been reached on key strategic matters, including the process for reaching agreements on these; and*
- h. any additional strategic matters to be addressed by the statement which have not already been addressed, including a brief description how the statement relates to any other statement of common ground covering all or part of the same area.*

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<sup>1</sup> Plan-making Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 61-011-20190315

- 1.6 The purpose of the statement of common ground is not to provide a comprehensive record of every instance of cooperation and consultation undertaken both jointly between the authorities during the preparation of each authority's new local plan. It is rather a means of providing key information as to how cooperation has been approached, regarding what issues, and how effectively.

### **History of strategic cooperation**

- 1.7 Bristol and North Somerset Councils have been cooperating for many years within the context of the West of England, with the ambition of setting a strategic framework upon which their new local plans will be based.
- 1.8 In November 2017 the four West of England authorities published a joint strategy (West of England Joint Spatial Plan) which represented our agreement to address development needs across our areas. The Joint Spatial Plan was withdrawn in 2020 following examination hearings.
- 1.9 Revised strategic planning arrangements were then set in place. The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and its constituent authorities (Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire Councils) agreed to commence work on a spatial development strategy for the region, along with a supporting strategic evidence base. North Somerset Council is not part of WECA but worked with the WECA authorities in the preparation of planning evidence and cooperated in the related process of development plan preparation.
- 1.10 In May 2022 work on the spatial development strategy was halted. Since the halting of work on that strategy the three WECA local authorities have continued to cooperate on the preparation of their local plans. Bristol City Council has continued to engage directly with North Somerset Council as an adjoining authority outside the combined authority area.

### **Discussions between North Somerset and Bristol**

- 1.11 During the course of preparation of their local plans Bristol and North Somerset have continued to engage on strategic cross boundary matters. In addition to on-going liaison and informal discussions between the authorities, this has included the following formal communications:
- December 2018 - comments of Bristol City Council on North Somerset Issues and Options considered strategic cross boundary matters.
  - May 2019 - comments of North Somerset Council on Bristol City Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation considered strategic cross boundary matters.
  - June 2020 - exchange of letter on matters of strategic topics with cross boundary implications.
  - April 2022 - comments of Bristol City Council on North Somerset Preferred Options consultation considered strategic cross boundary matters.

- January 2023 - comments of North Somerset Council on Bristol City Local Plan Regulation 18 further consultation considered strategic cross boundary matters.
- October/November 2023 – exchange of letters regarding unmet need (see Appendix 1).
- January 2024 - comments of Bristol City Council on North Somerset Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation addressed strategic cross boundary matters.
- January 2024 - comments of North Somerset Council on Bristol City Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation addressed strategic cross boundary matters.

1.12 North Somerset Council has produced a duty to co-operate statement which has been updated as plan - preparation has progressed. This identified the following strategic cross boundary issues for Bristol/WECA:

- housing (quantum of housing, locations adjacent to borders, unmet needs affordable housing,
- Gypsy and Traveller issues),
- Green Belt,
- employment needs (travel to work, commuting flows, strategic locations, implication of Bristol Airport, Bristol Port),
- transport,
- flood risk
- and habitats regulations.

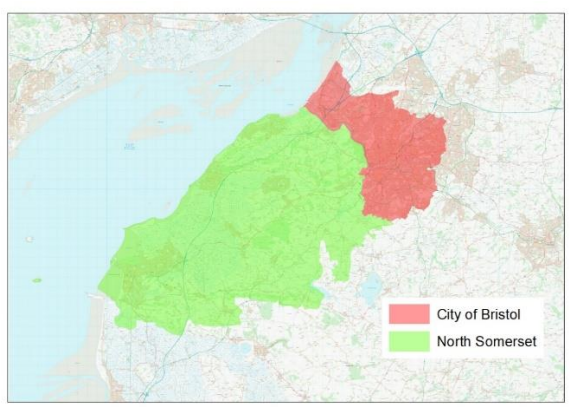
These and other matters of potential cross boundary relevance are discussed below.

1.13 A similar statement prepared by Bristol City Council was available at the time of publication of the new Bristol Local Plan.

## Strategic Geography

2.1 The geographical area to which this statement relates is the area of both Bristol City Council and North Somerset Council.

### Area covered by this statement



- 2.2 North Somerset has a close relationship to the Bristol and wider WECA area being part of the West of England functional economic market area and is also part of the Wider Bristol housing market area.

## Strategic Matters

- 3.1 The SoCG is intended to document the actions taken to resolve strategic cross boundary issues through the duty to cooperate. Strategic matters are defined and set out under Section 3 Strategic Policies Paragraph 20 by the NPPF as including, but not limited to the following:

- (a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;*
- (b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);*
- (c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and*
- (d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.*

- 3.2 Strategic matters are also defined in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Paragraph 4) a) as issues relating to the:

*‘Sustainable development or use of land that has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas, including (in particular) sustainable development or use of land for or in connection with infrastructure that is strategic and has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas.’*

- 3.3 The NPPG paragraph 015 identifies examples of actions that advance the duty to cooperate, and which should be tailored to address local circumstances. Regarding strategic matters such actions can be seen as:

- *working together at the outset of plan-making to identify cross-boundary matters which will need addressing;*
- *producing or commissioning joint research and evidence to address cross-boundary matters;*
- *assessing impacts of emerging policies; and*
- *preparing joint, or agreeing, strategic policies affecting more than one authority area to ensure development is coordinated, (such as the distribution of unmet needs or policies relating to county matters).*

### **Key strategic matters relevant to Bristol and North Somerset**

- 3.4 NPPF paragraph 20 sets out the key strategic matters that development plans must address. The authorities consider the issues set out below relating to the area covered by the two authorities need cross boundary collaboration. Accordingly, the application of these considerations, the relevant geographical areas over which collaboration will, or is already occurring, and any joint evidence base scoping, in response to this, is set out. This also incorporates and takes into account the climate and ecological/nature emergencies that have been declared by both authorities. The identification of matters should not be taken to imply at this stage that there will be an individual policy on them in each authority's local plan; this will be determined in an evidenced led way through the preparation of those plans.

### **Assessment of and responding to housing need**

- 3.5 The area subject of this statement comprises the wider Bristol housing market area focussed on Bristol but with a significant urban centre at Weston-super-Mare. The proximity of North Somerset to the edge of the Bristol urban area and housing needs means that the location and type of new development areas is a strategic cross-boundary issue.
- 3.6 The West of England authorities instructed an expert consultancy (ORS) to undertake Local Housing Needs Assessments (LHNA) for their areas using a common methodology. The overall approach is summarised in the overarching ORS report that brings together the Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) evidence from the four separate reports. This demonstrates that the approach taken for the individual LHNA reports has been consistent, despite them being prepared individually for each authority and also emphasises that the authorities are continuing to work together constructively in preparing the evidence for their respective Local Plans.
- 3.7 The paper prepared for Bristol and published as part of the Regulation 18 Bristol Local Plan consultation (November 2022) explored an alternative approach to estimating housing need and a subsequent LHNA which uses the government's standard method has been produced.
- 3.8 The North Somerset LHNA (October 2023) reviewed the demographic evidence using the standard method (1,347 pa) as the starting point. The conclusion was that for North Somerset, it was most unlikely that the government calculation provided an accurate reflection of current and future demographic trends and market signals. The recommendation was that a robustly evidenced local housing need in North Somerset was 993 dwellings per year or 14,902 over the 15 year plan period. This paper was published as part of the supporting evidence for the November 2023 Pre-submission (Reg 19) version.
- 3.9 In October 2023 Bristol City Council wrote to North Somerset Council and also the WECA authorities setting out its capacity to meet housing need (Letter from Bristol City Council to Bath and North East Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council and North Somerset Council - 31 October 2023). The letter requested that the three authorities explore through their local plan processes whether they could

accommodate a proportion of Bristol's unmet locally derived housing need as set out in detail in the letter. The authorities were requested to consider this approach within the period during which the local plan was made available for representations.

- 3.10 The North Somerset consultation draft plan (Preferred Options) was based on the standard method calculation at that time of 20,085 dwellings over the plan period, but the Council considered that the evidence was indicating that there was insufficient capacity at strategic locations to meet this target. In October 2021 Bristol City, along with other neighbouring authorities and WECA, was formally asked whether it could accommodate some of this requirement within its area. Following consultation on the proposed revisions to national planning guidance and the approach to assessing local housing need and the use of Green Belt, North Somerset commissioned ORS to review its local housing requirement. The Pre-submission plan (Reg 19) which was consulted upon November 2023 to January 2024 reflected the LHNA evidence of a local housing need of 14,902 dwellings and for which sufficient supply had been identified and therefore was unlikely to be unmet need to accommodate within neighbouring areas.

*It is a matter of agreement that:*

- *The locally derived housing need for BCC, based on the government's standard method, is 2,503 homes per annum up to 2040.*
- *Bristol City Council considers that evidence and appraisal undertaken to date suggest that it will not be able to accommodate that level of need within its boundaries.*
- *The locally derived housing need for North Somerset, based on its LHNA evidence, is 993 dwellings per annum or 14,902 dwellings 2024-2039.*
- *North Somerset Council considers that evidence and appraisal undertaken to date suggest that NSC will be able to accommodate that level of need within its boundaries, and that there is very limited capacity for any additional development to meet the needs of adjoining authorities.*

### **Assessment and delivery of economic development requirements**

- 3.11 Bristol and North Somerset are part of the same Functional Economic Market Area. Bristol Port which is located in Bristol (Avonmouth section – north of the River Avon) and North Somerset (Royal Portbury Dock section – south of the Avon) and Bristol Airport located in North Somerset both have a significant role in the national economy as well as the economy of both authorities.
- 3.12 The focus of engagement relates to the strategic issues including forecasting of future economic growth; the protection of employment land and the relationship with housing capacity; the identification of additional supply of employment land to meet quantitative and qualitative needs. In undertaking this work, the authorities also co-commissioned the updating of sub-regional analysis on economic forecasts. As such relevant collaboration has and will take place on evidence-base work; plan-

making and monitoring concerning economic recovery and growth; and distribution of employment-generating development.

- 3.13 The above work may include analysis and understanding of property markets (and to some extent supply chains and consumption patterns) that extend beyond the West of England FEMA. In respect of evidence base work WECA and the four West of England UAs collaborated on an Employment Land Spatial Needs Assessment (ELSNA) in October 2021 that supported preparation of the then emerging SDS and the North Somerset Local Plan. The ELSNA focussed on quantitative and qualitative spatial needs, (relating to employment land, other employment-generating spaces, supporting infrastructure and interrelationships between them) and opportunities and constraints in how they might be responded to through spatial strategy and other development plan policy.
- 3.14 In preparing their respective local plans the authorities have reviewed the ELSNA and the extent to which updated evidence is needed, in part to assess and take account of changes in the economy since the Covid-19 pandemic and to also reflect local economic strategy priorities, for their respective local plans.

*It is a matter of agreement that no unmet needs have been identified for economic development land which require cross boundary consideration. Both authorities agree to continue to work collaboratively on developing their economic development spatial needs evidence base and monitoring development outcomes.*

### **Transport and other infrastructure**

- 3.15 Transport networks of all types – road, rail, cycling and walking routes – extend across the local authority boundary, as do movements of people and vehicles. Key connectivity serving the national and sub-regional economy is also provided for via Bristol Port and Bristol Airport.
- 3.16 Managing the quality, connectivity and capacity of this infrastructure particularly in relation to growth including cumulative and cross boundary impacts, requires joint working, co-operation and liaison. There is cooperation between the authorities regarding these matters, including the use of evidence.

*It is a matter of agreement that the authorities recognise the value in co-ordinating transport and spatial planning across their area. Transport implications of cross boundary development allocations are addressed through relevant policy wording in the emerging local plans and local infrastructure improvements will be addressed through continued processes of cooperation between the authorities.*

### **Flood risk**

- 3.17 Tidal and fluvial flood risk along the Rivers Severn and Avon and their supporting tributaries, is the subject of cross-boundary co-ordination with support from the

Environment Agency. The authorities maintain their own flood risk assessments, working with the Agency to ensure a consistent methodology and appropriate updates in the light of, for example, new catchment modelling and climate change scenarios. This work in recent years has resulted in joint strategic flood risk management projects along the coast and the River Avon. Cross boundary area-based studies will also explore new flood risk management investment options in combination with other infrastructure as required.

- 3.18 The [Bristol Avon Flood Strategy](#) primarily involves the proposed development of defences in Bristol which will have the effect of addressing flood risk within the central part of the city. There may be a need for existing defences along the Avon in North Somerset to be upgraded, at Pill and elsewhere. The emerging local plans for both authorities take account of this strategy within the relevant policies.

*It is a matter of agreement that the authorities have addressed cross boundary matters relating to flood risk within their emerging local plans and will continue to cooperate in the implementation of flood defence strategies and infrastructure.*

### **Social infrastructure provision and management**

- 3.19 Social infrastructure (including health, cultural and educational facilities) is of cross-boundary significance where its users come from an area that extends beyond the authority that the facility is based in, or where one or more areas face constraints to provision that are experienced differently in an adjoining area. Specialist hospitals and higher education facilities are most efficiently provided in central locations. This requires appropriate cross-boundary collaboration to manage the consequences of growth and to ensure that associated transport needs are addressed.

- 3.20 Health infrastructure need and management of capacity is managed through the partnerships referenced in the health and wellbeing section below. Other social infrastructure needs/capacity requiring cross-boundary approaches will be explored as part the two authorities preparing their local plans and supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plans.

*It is a matter of agreement that the two authorities will continue to work together and with other infrastructure providers and commissioners to ensure infrastructure serving cross-boundary needs is able to accommodate growth and best support other cross-cutting priorities for change. This will involve multi-disciplinary working at a variety of scales to investigate opportunities and options and will be detailed and identified through the councils' Infrastructure Delivery Plans.*

### **Climate change mitigation and adaptation**

- 3.21 Bristol and North Somerset Councils have each declared a climate emergency The aim is to take urgent steps to address this situation and prepare for the local impact

of climate change and reducing carbon emissions. Both authorities have set an aim of being carbon neutral by 2030.

- 3.22 Collaboration takes place on evidence gathering, plan-making (to ensure consistency of approach) and monitoring.

*It is a matter of agreement that the two authorities will include within their plan-making process measures to contribute to tackling carbon emissions and air quality due to cross boundary movement, networks and other cross-boundary activity affecting emissions.*

### **Habitat Regulations Assessment**

- 3.23 Potential adverse impacts on international designations (the Avon Gorge and Severn Estuary) arising from proposed new development have been identified. These impacts relate to air quality and recreational pressures at these sites and may require a cross boundary consideration due to the nature of transport and energy networks and movements that may affect carbon emissions and may have air quality implications, and the management of visitor pressures from additional residents using these sites for recreational purposes.

*Any in combination effects of potential atmospheric pollution and increased visitor pressure on internationally important habitats are addressed through the appropriate assessments accompanying the local plans of both authorities. Both authorities will continue to work together in terms of evidence gathering and identifying appropriate mitigation measures in liaison with Natural England.*

### **Biodiversity, nature recovery and green infrastructure**

- 3.24 The area subject of this statement is bounded by natural cross-boundary features of international and national importance – the Mendip Hills to the south, with the Severn Estuary an international wetland habitat at the coast. With the other international and national sites of ecological importance these are recognised to form part of Nature Recovery Networks of ecological connectivity, (or potential connectivity) that extends across the West of England and beyond. Given the proximity of these natural assets to major areas of population growth and other change which may have direct and indirect impacts on them, it is recognised that appropriate management, including an understanding of potential impacts of development and how they may act cumulatively or in-combination, will need to be co-ordinated across boundaries.
- 3.25 By preparing the West of England Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy, (JGIS) co-ordinated by WECA, the authorities, together with key environmental partners, have agreed and established consistent evidence and guidance concerning the wider benefits of green infrastructure to inform policy development and the delivery and implementation of GI across a range of geographic scales. The JGIS evidences the

need and use of natural solutions to address challenges including the climate emergency and declining biodiversity. The West of England UAs have also progressed work on model GI policies that can be used, as appropriate, to inform each authority's local plans.

*It is a matter of agreement that the two authorities recognise the essential role that multifunctional green infrastructure plays in delivering resilient, healthy, well planned places as part of broader cross-boundary infrastructure planning and place-making work. Accordingly, they have agreed to continue to work together on these matters.*

*The two authorities work across boundaries to consistently assess and manage direct and indirect development impacts (including opportunities for enhancement) on natural and historic environmental assets.*

*The appropriate assessments accompanying the local plans of both authorities considering in combination effects on habitats which may arise including from air quality and recreational impacts.*

### **Green Belt**

- 3.26 The Bristol and Bath Green Belt extends across the boundaries of the two authorities. The two authorities have co-operated through the plan making process on Green Belt assessment and the potential implications of development proposals or other boundary changes on its overall extent and function.

*It is a matter of agreement that the two authorities will take a cooperative approach regarding any proposals to amend the extent of the Green Belt where those proposals would have implications across local authority boundaries.*

### **Site specific matters**

- 3.27 Within their emerging local plans both authorities are proposing the removal of land from the Green Belt to the east of the A4174 Colliters Way in the vicinity of Elsbert Drive, Bishopsworth (Bristol Local Plan Publication Version Policy DS11 and North Somerset Local Plan Publication Version Policy LP2 and LP6). The authorities agree that there are exceptional circumstances to warrant removal of this land from the Green Belt in order to contribute to meeting housing need in a sustainable location. Both authorities agree that they will engage to ensure a comprehensive approach to development. This is reflected in emerging policy.

### **Planning for traveller sites**

- 3.28 The approach to addressing the needs for accommodation for traveller is supported by evidence set out in gypsy and traveller and travelling show people accommodation assessments prepared by each authority. Having regard to the

nomadic lifestyle of travellers, provision of accommodation can be a strategic cross boundary matter.

- 3.29 In October 2023, Bristol City Council advised the neighbouring authorities (Appendix 1) that needs for traveller sites are being considered through the emerging Bristol Local Plan based on an assessment undertaken in 2020. The level of need is relatively small in scale and the city council is expecting that to be accommodated within the city boundaries. In North Somerset it is anticipated that future needs will be met within the local authority area.

*It is a matter of agreement that needs for traveller sites will be addressed within each authority and that ongoing co-operation will continue to monitor the position and ensure that any future cross-boundary issues are addressed.*

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