

YATTON PARISH COUNCIL – PLANNING STRATEGY FOR 2014

The Problem

When considering whether or not to approve a Planning Application the Government's advice to Local Planning Authorities, through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) directive, is to "grant permission unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits...". This effectively instructs Councils to assume a development is acceptable unless it can be proved that it is unsuitable. The NPPF will continue to over-ride the recommendations of the Core Strategy until the Core Strategy is agreed and formally adopted. Coupled to this is the reluctance of North Somerset Council (NSC) to challenge a large scale planning application knowing that it will almost certainly go to appeal. Any challenge by the Council will most likely fail and they will then be left with an approved application over which they have limited control and from which they will gain limited financial benefit. This scenario can also apply to smaller developments providing the Developer can afford to take it to appeal. The planning process is further influenced by the provision of a New Homes Bonus paid by the Government to NSC as a reward for granting planning consent (£1.17M in the case of the initial phase of the Bloor Homes development at Arnolds Way).

This has turned established planning procedure on its head and means that looking at an application using traditional measures is to a large extent futile. With a potential total of 926 houses that could be built in the Parish there is a clear need for additional facilities, focused at North End, to support what in effect is becoming a new village.

Until the Core Strategy is adopted NSC is taking the view that all planning applications will be considered separately, no overview will be considered and so no major facilities or infrastructure improvements will be allocated.

By approving the Bloor Homes application NSC have been able to add the condition that the developer provide a pre-school building on a commercial basis, or financial safeguard of £200K if this cannot be delivered commercially. Additionally NSC have been able to add the condition that Phase 2 of the development must include provision of land for a primary school or alternatively a financial contribution to the purchase of land elsewhere.

Background

Yatton is a prime site for housing development due to its strategic position on the M4/M5 corridor and its proximity to Bristol and Bath as well as hourly trains directly to London and the ever expanding Bristol Airport. It is a limited site due to the surrounding flood plain, poor road infrastructure and is further constrained by multiple SSSI sites that surround the village.

NSC has designated Yatton as a Service Village and Claverham an Infill Village but they are attracting the attention of several major Developers. Government planning policy (the NPPF) has overridden established planning rules and this has encouraged Developers to appeal when they fail to gain approval.

Government Inspectors are frequently upholding appeals. Not only is this putting Councils on the defensive but it also stops Planning Officers from attaching conditions to approvals that help to blend developments into the surrounding area. When an application is turned down by NSC and won on appeal, NSC loses its New Homes Bonus from Central Government.

NSC do not have an approved Core Strategy and until this is in place Yatton remains vulnerable to medium or large scale development applications. It should be noted that even with fully adopted Core Strategy, if the 5 year supply of building land is not met then NSC will find it difficult to oppose any development in North Somerset. The current position at this moment in time is that the 5 year supply is currently being met at 5.8% building land availability however NSC are fully expecting this to be critically challenged at appeal in January 2015 (Scot Elm site in Weston application to building residential housing on an employment site). This position is also based on the figure of 20,985 being accepted, if the Inspector considers it is still not high enough then the 5 year supply will once again not be met.

Potential development sites exist within the settlement boundary of the Parish and most are small scale and have inherent problems that until now made them unacceptable to NSC. Due to the pressure from Government to build new homes, in November 2013 NSC published their Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) which identifies land outside of existing settlement boundaries that could be suitable for housing development. In the case of Yatton this includes the Bloor and Hallam sites, the Grange (off Moor Road) and a large area of land between the Strawberry Line and Mendip Road.

Development in Claverham should be contained within the village boundary and must be community led as well as showing strong evidence of sustainable benefits.

Some of these sites have been identified by North Somerset in their previous Core strategy however they were only identified for small scale development ie upwards of 40 houses.

Current designated development sites:

Oxford Instruments Ltd - Northend	51 Houses
Bloor Homes – Northend	150 Houses (Phase 1)

Sites being considered:

Land to NE of Arnolds Way Roundabout (Hallam)	170 Houses proposed
Phase 2 of the Bloor site	Potential for 300 houses
Land to east of the Grange	Potential for 150 houses
Wemberham Brewery Site	18 Flats and houses – Planning refused
Bridge Works Site	10 houses – Planning refused
Wemberham Lane	Potential for 24 houses
Former KPR Site, Claverham Road	5 houses approved
Pulins Bakery Site in High Street	Potential for 6 houses
Land to the south of the Railway Station	Potential for 25 Houses

Land between Mendip Road and the Strawberry Line	Potential for 30 Houses but could be several hundred
Chestnut Drive, Claverham	100 houses proposed

A potential total of 1000 houses that would likely elevate Yatton to town status.

NSC defines a Service Village as:

“Areas with established settlement boundaries where small scale development appropriate to the size and character of the village will be supported. Development should respect the character of the village and support or enhance the village’s role as a local hub for community facilities and services.”
(source NSC - Service Villages What is happening near you?)

Northend predominates as the area for development and has a footprint moving north that is above the flood plain and has easy access to the M5 at Junction 20 and the A370 to the south of the village. This area also has fewer rhynes and SSSI sites.

The SHLAA states clearly: “There are a number of sites that are extensions to Service Villages. In most cases these are relatively large sites that would be likely to come forward in their entirety..... Such sites would only be permissible if supported by the local community and brought forward through the plan making process”. The approval of the Bloor Homes application demonstrates that NSC does not always abide by everything written in the document.

Focusing Parish Council Effort

In order to have a useful say in future planning matters the Parish Council has to be much more focused on what can be achieved.

Saying that an application is unsupportable because it does not fit in with the existing area, is too dense or has the wrong materials used on the exterior is likely to be ignored by NSC.

Potential increase in traffic has been ignored for some time and is no longer seen as detrimental. Traffic has increased generally and congestion is now the accepted norm. NSC has the opinion that it is almost impossible to relate housing developments to increases in traffic flows.

Increased train use has seen dramatic increases in all-day street parking in the vicinity of Yatton Station and this is adding to the congestion. Some parking restrictions have been introduced but this will not reduce the problem unless parking charges at the station car parks can be abolished or significantly reduced.

Efforts to restrict the use of cars within the village such as the Walking School Bus have failed due to the dangerous High Street at peak times. Out-commuting will also increase as the village increases in size especially as North Somerset already has higher than average car ownership per household. The perception by the Developers that most new traffic from Northend developments will go north to Clevedon and the M5 is wrong. Many people commute to Bristol and use the A370.

With all of the above in mind, we are aware that some development will need to happen within or adjacent to Yatton, however this needs to be in proportion to Yatton's current size and facilities and needs to make sure that Yatton remains as the Service Village NSC identified it as. We need to make sure that Planning officers are asked to look at what has already been approved for Yatton when they look at further planning applications.

If further development is approved for Yatton the following issues need to be addressed:

What do we need in Yatton?

A village by-pass

Easier and safer transit through the village

More local employment

Increased car parking facilities

Larger medical facilities

More school places

Better bus transport

Revision of the natural and geographical boundaries of the village

Introduction of safe cycle ways

Traffic free footpaths (new and improved existing)

Expansion of playing fields and youth facilities

Adequate funding for Children's Centre and Citizens' Advice Bureau.

What could be feasible

Transit through the village - Currently this is poor and is mainly due to a narrow High Street and parked cars that create severe 'pinch points'. The Police would say that the parked cars act as a free traffic calming scheme that does not need enforcing, thus making the High Street safer. More Zebra crossings will assist pedestrians but will only add to the congestion. Parents' vehicles travelling to the existing schools are a major source of congestion at the beginning and end of the school day in term time. Large increases in population at Northend will add to the congestion, some will walk but the majority will drive especially during wet and cold weather. Pursuing this topic will cost time and money in studies but will not achieve anything significant. There is already a lot of existing data that can be accessed to dispute the Developers assessments and these are readily accessible. Yatton Partners and Communities Together (PACT) have and continue to collate data on traffic flows which are available to inform the Parish Council. The concerns expressed by PACT are around the volume of traffic at specific times of the day and the combination of HGVs, Plant Force vehicles, school buses, public transport, commuters and at certain times of the years increase in farm machinery traffic.

The B3133 is designated as the primary route for traffic to exit the M5 in the event of a motorway closure. This regularly causes gridlock right through the village and makes emergency vehicle passage impossible. Every workday afternoon the schools pickup causes congestion through the centre of the village. This is quickly followed by heavy traffic flow backing up from the traffic lights at Congresbury to the edge of the village. Based on current surveys, 900

plus households will produce 1200 cars and this will have a significant effect on the already congested roads. There have been calls for a village by-pass over many years. Extending the road at Arnolds Way Roundabout through to the A370 to the west of Congresbury would provide a by-pass that would remove the majority of through traffic and this would be supported by other parishes to help with problems within Congresbury. This would revitalise the village and also help to encourage new businesses to set up here. There are two significant challenges i.e. provision of bridges over the Railway and the River Yeo. These will be expensive to build and will require significant e.g. Central Government funding. Two additional Pelican/Zebra crossings would add to the safety features of the High Street and at North End and could be funded using S106 money.

Following a meeting with NSC Highways, the problems of traffic congestion were raised and NSC have agreed to review the problems at the Congresbury traffic lights together with the problems through Yatton. NSC will not sanction a Yatton by-pass as it will be too costly.

NSC are concentrating their efforts on improving pedestrian and cycle routes through the Bloor Development and have decided to allow a maximum of four access points on Arnolds Way Roundabout.

NSC hope that once the South Bristol Link Road has been built and it's impact fully assessed, there may be scope to put restrictions on other roads. NSC need to assess the impact on traffic of all the developments together rather than approve each one on an individual basis.

NSC will require Parish Council input to identify any potential routes through the village to the station, shops and schools that could be adapted as cycle ways. This is currently being addressed by the Parish Council and NSC.

Even though there is little scope to achieve significant improvements in Yatton the PC needs to keep pressurising NSC to provide evidence of traffic flows and problem areas that need addressing. Social media is being used to try and identify pedestrian near misses along the High Street in order to gather evidence to present to NSC. Yatton PACT in partnership with Avon and Somerset Police are essential in providing traffic data that can be used as evidence to support future Parish Council strategy.

Local employment - This is currently being addressed by the Smart Systems expansion. However this will have little long term effect on the large number of households being introduced by the new developments. North Somerset has one of the lowest rates of unemployment in the country so there is little hope of any of the new households gaining employment locally.

Most of the shops and small businesses in the village are trading successfully and the local area has a diverse range of shops and small businesses that appear to be well supported. However the Precinct is very underused, shabby, without a future vision and the planned upgrade appears to be on hold. Additional shops could be demanded at North End as part of the planning process but it is doubtful if they would be commercially sustainable in the long

term. Additional shops at North End could also place a question mark over the viability of the existing shops in the village.

An additional industrial facility similar to the popular Market Trading Estate would be a practical solution to the expansion of business opportunities in the village. Some local farms have converted some of their outbuildings for commercial use and these appear to be fully utilised.

Car Parking – Parking facilities in Yatton are inadequate. There is little potential to expand the Church Road or Supermarket car parks. The only area with any potential is at the Railway Station. However Network Rail is currently considering reducing the size of the Southside car park to build houses. Additional spaces could be provided if a section to the west of the station could be utilised together with the maintenance storage area at the start of the Strawberry line. In order to lessen the impact the area at the Strawberry line entrance could be enhanced with a small building providing bicycle hire and a Visitor centre and several free car parking spaces.

Network Rail, owners of the existing car park and ex Jewson site want to build 25 houses and reduce the size of the existing car park. This must be resisted as it will encourage even more on-street parking. The owners are considering widening the main access road to permit parking at 45 degrees to the curb to increase the number of parking spaces.

The operators of the car park are also considering offering lower charges to regular users that will be subsidised by increasing the charges to infrequent users.

Larger Medical Facilities - The stretched medical facilities in Yatton and Congresbury is the subject causing much concern to the community. Unfortunately this is not a subject covered by planning regulations and cannot be considered as part of any planning application. However all residents of Yatton, Claverham and the surrounding area should be encouraged to write to NSC and NHS England voicing their concerns. The Medical Practice is concerned that the number of additional houses that could be built in the local area will produce an influx of new patients that will not be covered by the additional core costs provided. Both surgeries at Yatton and Congresbury are at full capacity and various options are currently under consideration to either increase the size of the buildings or look at alternative sites.

More school places – 1000 plus houses have the potential to introduce a further 280 primary school pupils (NSC estimate 28 primary school pupils per 100 households). This will put a significant demand on school places in Yatton. A further two classrooms will be required immediately to accommodate the increase in pupil numbers.

It would appear that the type of housing to be built at North End will be three, four and five bedroom properties which would suggest families with a wide spread of age groups. There is land owned by NSC off Chescombe Road that has been reserved for a new school but this will not address the problem of access from North End. Rather than build additional schools the education authority may decide to bus pupils to schools outside of Yatton. The current schools policy of placing all pupils in the local school has over the years provided a community cohesiveness that is a fundamental requirement of a

vibrant society. This can so easily be lost if spiralling numbers of children force them to be educated elsewhere.

Yatton is currently full at Infant level but this will spiral upwards as the pupils reach junior and secondary ages.

Better bus transport - If the majority of new houses to be built are for families there will not be a huge demand for public transport. Most people prefer to use their cars as this gives them freedom of choice. There has always been a need to subsidise bus services in the area in order to guarantee services and unless this is expanded it is unlikely better bus services will emerge. NSC and First Group need to be tasked with providing projections of passenger numbers based on increasing numbers of residents. YPC should consider lobbying NSC for more targeted funds to ensure current and future services are maintained. A community bus service could help solve some of the infrastructure problems.

Village boundary revision - Most of the village boundary is surrounded by SSSI or farm land. There is some scope for brown field development within the current village but this is limited to small scale developments. The approval of the Bloor Homes site at Arnolds Way has moved the boundary significantly. If the new proposed development opposite the Bloor Homes site is approved then this will provide the potential for infill development all the way to Kenn Moor Road. This could significantly increase the number of houses already considered above. NSC will be happy to approve this large scale development as it will assist them in their search for land to accommodate the estimated twenty six thousand houses the planning inspector is expected to demand as well as providing significant Central Government funding.

There is land identified for potential housing development in the SHLAA between Mendip Road and the Strawberry line. There will be opposition to any proposed development in this area due to the preserved environment and the flood plain so it is likely that this will be the trade-off to give the go ahead to further North End development.

The only other area that is not affected by the flood plain is the green space (Strategic Gap) between Yatton and Congresbury.

Comprehensive cycle network - There is little scope for designated safe cycle routes other than the Strawberry Line and the old railway line to Clevedon. The local road network has no scope for prioritising cyclists. Providing Landowners agree, it would be possible to build a designated cycle route around the village. However this would require two or three bridges over the B3133 and the railway.

Walking Routes - There are a significant number of pathways that run parallel to the High Street that could be widened and improved to provide safe walkways to the schools. This is currently being assessed by the Parish Council and NSC.

Expansion of playing fields and youth facilities - Yatton has adequate sports facilities but there is scope for enhancement. The main playing field at Hangstones requires a comprehensive drainage system and the BMX track needs refurbishment.

There is a need to introduce exercise facilities in order to encourage better fitness of all households. This can be achieved by building a circular path around the circumference of Hangstones Playing Field. This will promote circuit training and walking in a safe and tranquil environment and at selected points vandal proof exercise equipment can be sited.

There is a need to refurbish the Broadcroft Play Area and provide additional play and exercise equipment.

The Youth Club building needs to be refurbished. Due to the lack of funding from NSC there is also an annual funding shortfall for youth workers and this needs to be addressed. Evidence is required to justify the continued employment of Youth Workers.

Adequate funding for Children's Centre and Citizens' Advice Bureau -

There is a continuing need to provide a central and private space for CAB staff to provide their service. For several years this has been held at Yatton Library but the lift has now been permanently taken out of service and for the past year the service has not been provided. A single payment of approximately £80K is needed to provide a safe escape route from the first floor, however this not a NSC priority.

Funding for the Children's Centre has also been cut and there is an urgent need for this to be reinstated. Evidence is needed to justify the continued use of this facility.

Parish Councils working together to form a single voice of concern -

Congresbury Parish Council has voiced concern that the sewage system in the village is at full capacity and further development will create major problems.

The sewage system in Yatton is thought to be in a similar state. As both villages use the treatment works at Kingston Seymour there is concern that the plant is also nearing capacity.

Wessex Water have confirmed that the surface water drainage is a problem as older parts of the system use the foul system. This causes problems during heavy rain and additional storage tanks have been built at the Kingston Seymour Treatment Works to cope with the additional demand. Wessex Water do not consider the current systems in Yatton and Congresbury to be a problem and they will increase capacity if and when required.

The main area of concern is the removal of sludge from the Treatment Works at Kingston Seymour by heavy Tanker. This happens several times a day and there is increasing concern for public safety and the condition of the minor roads used. Additional houses in Yatton and Congresbury will add to the number of vehicle transits a day and this could be significantly increased by the proposed 700 plus houses at Nailsea, Backwell and Clevedon which also drain into this system. Again Wessex Water do not consider the increase in vehicle movements to remove the additional sludge to be a problem.

Smart Systems cannot get the electricity they require from the current infrastructure and have been forced to install a new cable from the transformer at Congresbury. Wind turbines and backup generators are also being installed at the Yatton Site. Western Power will also install an additional cable to Yatton the cope with the increased demand.

One of the Developers made the statement that the new developments will have updated broadband. However this would not be rolled out to the rest of the village. The PC has recently been informed that work to update the local area is currently under way and super-fast broadband should be available to the Parish by mid 2015.

Traffic flows impact on all the service villages and the Smallway Junction on the A370 is a focal point that will only get worse if by-passes for Yatton and Congresbury are not prioritised.

Proposed Way Forward

- The Parish Council needs to agree that while there is a vacuum in NSC Housing Policy following the legal ruling in May 2014 for the housing strategy in North Somerset to be reviewed, all unused land above the floodplain is ripe for an outline planning application to be submitted. It is therefore imperative that the Parish Council take urgent action to provide robust responses to all future planning applications.
- All reasons for not supporting an application need to be specific and backed up by fact or data. This may require approaching other stakeholders for the supply of existing data or commissioning new data.
- The Parish Council has met with the Planning Department at NSC. They have confirmed that the revised Core Strategy will require the need for a five year supply of land to be always available and this whilst this is currently met it is likely to be challenged and if the overall housing figure of 20,985 is not agreed and a higher number are required then this supply will no longer be met which may leave Yatton vulnerable to further applications from major developers.
- Yatton Parish Council have set up meetings with adjacent Parish Councils to try and agree a range of local policies that can be brought together in order to provide a unified voice where applications have a common impact. A joint letter from Yatton and Claverham, Cleeve, Churchill and Kingston Seymour Parish Councils is currently being drafted and agreed. This will request that NSC consider all the potential and agreed developments as a whole.
- The Parish Council needs to agree a range of requirements requiring new funding that can be awarded if applications are approved by NSC. The Planning Sub-committee has agreed a list of requirements to be funded by the S106 agreement for the Hallam Development at Northend.
- YPC should produce a Neighbourhood Plan in order to be fully compliant with NSC's Core Strategy. Consideration should also be given to producing a joint Neighbourhood Plan with the adjacent Parish Councils in order to strengthen our position with NSC. A new Working Party should be set up ASAP.

Recommendation

The Working Party recommends that the proposals above are adopted by Full Council.

Working Party Members

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