

1. **Do you have any comments on the proposed scope and content of the Local Plan Partial Update, and the policies to be updated?**

More interaction is needed where there is an existing ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plan:

Under the heading, ‘Scope of the B&NES Local Plan Partial Update’, paragraph one refers to the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan, stating, “Together these Documents form the Local Plan for B&NES”. We would note that once made, Neighbourhood Plans also form part of the statutory Development Plan and have the same legal status. However, we cannot see evidence of that being taken into account by this process. Good practice would embrace consideration of the status of Neighbourhood Plans, ideally showing sensitivity and respect for their content, to help inform reviews and updates. Proper consultation in advance, and in anticipation of updates which could produce conflict with existing Neighbourhood Plan policies, would help facilitate positive outcomes.

We understand and concur with your reasons for undertaking this Partial Update. However, it is our view that some crucial policies relating to the Climate and Nature Emergency, and the Environment, have been omitted. We attach separate letters from our Climate and Nature Emergency Working Group and from the East Harptree Village Environment Group. Their responses in respect of the relevant policies together with summaries of why they should not be left until a future New Local Plan, have been approved by East Harptree Parish Council. Our responses to other policies are listed below:

Policy PMP: RA2 Villages:

We agree that this policy should be reviewed and would comment as follows: The designation of rural settlements to one of two categories, currently RA1 and RA2, is based on a list of local facilities. The Placemaking Plan then attaches one of two quotas to each and these, it considers, represent sustainable development. In the case of RA2 settlements such as ours, that figure is 10 – 15 dwellings and in our view, whilst that might be reasonable in some RA2 villages, it cannot be assumed to be the case.

Whilst available facilities may be a useful starting point, this is often far too broad an approach to consider properly what is sustainable in individual villages. Whatever number is allocated to RA2 settlements, there are other factors that must be considered before a sustainable figure is determined for an individual village. These should include: Topography; Parking and Accessibility; Pedestrian Safety; Public Transport; Utilities and Services; Local Employment and most importantly, the impact in respect of the Climate and Nature Emergency. We also strongly question the assumption that every five years there will be an allocation of dwellings to all RA2 villages outside of the Green Belt. **There must be a proven need for the type of development proposed.**

Even then, it is also our view that the level and density of any development in small villages should be consistent with their Parish Character Assessment. To avoid the sort of slow sprawl that is ruining many rural areas, this essential character must be protected, especially in AONBs. This also reflects Paragraph 122, d) of the Revised NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework).

Policy CS: CP5 Flood Risk Management:

In our view this policy, currently omitted, **should be included in your review**. When developers carry out a Flood Risk Assessment they typically only check against the Environment Agency flood risk from Rivers and Seas (i.e. flat area flooding). For communities on steep slopes, such as the Mendips, they will typically have the lowest risk from Rivers and Seas, but are particularly susceptible to Surface Water flash flooding. Please update this policy to also require the Flood Risk Assessment check to be done against the Environment Agency flood risk from Surface Water in the nearby vicinity as well, such that if either check shows an increased level of risk then this policy would escalate the requirements.

Policy CS: RA4 Rural Exception Sites: We would not want to see the wording of this policy changed.

Policy PMP: ST7 Parking Policy:

We agree that this policy should be included and would comment as follows: Each community has very different needs in respect of parking standards. Many rural villages do not have a full range of local facilities accessible via public transport and a high proportion of residents need a vehicle in order to work. This can result in a higher than average level of car ownership per household which, in reality, will not be reduced by fewer off-road parking spaces. Those same villages often have very narrow medieval lanes that get easily blocked for farm, emergency and delivery vehicles if cars have to be parked on the street due to insufficient off-street parking in developments. For reasons such as this it is important to give flexibility to different communities to be able to tailor their own minimum off-street parking standards. An example of this happening in practice is in the Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan policy HDE8b. Also, in these same rural communities it is very common for any garages to be used for storage or converted to living space and so not be available as a future off- street parking space.

With an increasing number of households changing to electric or hybrid vehicles, this will not in itself have a negative impact in respect of the Climate and Nature Emergency. For these reasons, we advocate the following approach:

- **Define parking standards in different spatial areas.**
- **Exclude garages and review the number of parking spaces for different sized dwellings.**
- **Facilitate the above by defining parking standards in a separate SPD (Supplementary Planning Document).** The Updated Local Plan policy should then just refer to the SPD or any made Neighbourhood Plan. This will allow Neighbourhood Plans to be used to define parking standards for the needs of specific communities.

2. **Do you have any comments on the programme for the preparation of the Local Plan Partial Update?**

No comments.

3. Do you have any other specific observations to make on the Local Plan Partial Update?

We have been made aware of concerns: As a Parish Council we are aware that some people have found the experience of taking part in this consultation less than straightforward and for some, off-putting. There is a great deal of new and therefore unfamiliar information and terminology, and the complete lack of prior briefing and meetings, combined with the difficulty of actually speaking to anyone for advice or clarification, has exacerbated the situation. Of course, most of this is due to the Pandemic, and we are aware that you say the Government is nevertheless directing you to progress Planning Policies. However, we do think that you could have given us background information, documents and written briefings, sooner than was the case and certainly prior to the first day of the Consultation itself. Also, if you could have found a way to facilitate easy access to the current policies, in order to inform assessments of the need for review or update.

4. What are your views on the new Draft Statement of Community Involvement?

The section on Neighbourhood Plans notes the Local Authority's legal duty to assist and advise in the preparation of new Neighbourhood Plans. However, the Commencement Document states that "In the light of the Partial Update some existing Neighbourhood Plansmay also need to be updated in part or in full." Whilst it goes on to say that, "this will be kept under review and Parish Councils advised accordingly" In our view, the detail needs to be firmed up in the Statement of Community Involvement which should, therefore, also address how B&NES will liaise with those communities with made Neighbourhood Plans. Once made, Neighbourhood plans form part of the statutory Development Plan and have the same legal status. Good practice would embrace consideration of the status of Neighbourhood Plans, ideally showing sensitivity and respect for their content, to help inform reviews and updates. The provision of proper consultation in advance, and in anticipation of updates which could produce conflict with existing Neighbourhood Plan policies, would be required and would help facilitate positive outcomes.

Figure 2 on page 7 of the SCI makes it clear that public site notices for local planning applications are not always displayed. We believe the general public have an expectation that such notices would always be displayed to alert them to local planning applications (even where immediate neighbours receive a personal letter). There is a danger that not meeting this expectation will harm the reputation of B&NES' planning process especially for those people who do not have access to online notifications. We would recommend that the B&NES's process is updated to always include publicly displayed site notices to address this expectation (even if that goes beyond the strict legal requirements). If this is not possible, then an alternative practical suggestion would be whenever a planning officer does not intend to display a notice and chooses to write to neighbours instead, that they also send 2 laminated copies of a site notice to the Parish Council which it could put up locally instead. (Note it is not reasonable to just assume that all parish councils have the resources to laminate and post notices themselves).