***BACKWELL RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION***

*Hon. Secretary: Mike Veal, 36 Longthorn, Backwell, Bristol BS48 3GY*

West of England Joint Planning Consultation

c/o South Gloucestershire Council

PO Box 299

Corporate Research and Consultation team

Civic Centre

High Street

Kingswood BS15 0DR

6 December 2016

Dear Sirs

**WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT SPATIAL PLAN AND JOINT TRANSPORT STUDY**

Backwell Residents Association (“BRA”) is an independent organization representing over 550 residents in the village of Backwell, which takes a keen interest in all planning matters which could influence the village. Our representatives have attended several of the exhibitions and studied the available literature and on-line material.

We have sought to address all the issues throughout the region, but our comments are largely confined to the strategies which could potentially affect Backwell – notably:

- Up to 3600 houses to be provided in Nailsea/Backwell, of which Backwell’s share

 would be 800.

- A strong suggestion not to interfere with the existing Green Belt, which would mean

 development on the western edge of the village.

- To achieve this housing total would require “improved infrastructure” –notably

 station improvements and a new road link from A 370 to J. 20 of M5 motorway.

**The proposals referred to above, if implemented, would have a profoundly damaging effect on the character and viability of the village of Backwell. BRA strongly objects to all of them, and questions both the logic and the ability to implement.**

Our reasons for objecting include:

\* 800 dwellings added to the existing 1750 in Backwell (i.e. an uplift of nearly

 50%) would destroy the character of the village.

 (N.B. in the period 2012 – 2026 a total of c. 120 new dwellings is anticipated

 (excluding anything which might happen in Farleigh Fields, which is currently the

 subject of a Planning Inquiry).

 A similar pro-rata increase in the following 10 year period would be a reasonable,

 steady expansion). This level follows the reasoning identified in the Backwell

 Neighbourhood Plan which was only made in March 2015

\* It is incorrect and lazy to “lump” Nailsea and Backwell together as a sub-region.

 The two communities are very different in size, in character, and in housing needs,

 and are divided by a strategic gap.

 Each has its own schools, shops and local facilities and operates as different

 entities. BRA understands Nailsea Town Council does favour significant

 additional housing (although not as many as identified in the current JSP

 proposals), whereas Backwell is only suitable for very modest year on year

 growth.

\* A development of 800 new dwellings is unsustainable – Backwell has very few

 employment sites - and the new properties would create major out-commuting.

 A feature of the draft plans so far is that virtually all the areas identified for further

 housing (the “orange blobs”) are totally removed from the areas identified for

 employment (the “purple diamonds”).

 It is totally illogical to identify large new areas of housing miles away from the

 principal employment areas (mainly Bristol and Weston), and contrary to other

 parts of the Strategy which emphasize sustainability.

\* Such a development would have catastrophic consequences on traffic movement

 through the village. The suggested infrastructure improvements would have

 minimal impact, and would do little to address the existing problems. Both roads

 and rail through the village are already at or close to capacity for much of the day,

 and this will be exacerbated by incremental increases over the next 10 years with

 further development along the length of the A370 road.

 There has been minimal improvement to the existing roads through the centre of

 the village for the last 40 years, despite massive increase in traffic (vehicular and

 pedestrian), with space constraints making significant improvements very difficult.

 Proposed improvements to the station (assuming the lack of space and significant

 structural impositions can be overcome) would no doubt be helpful, but would not

 address the main issue – this rail line is already overcrowded at peak periods, with

 very little opportunity for increasing capacity.

 It is not at all clear how the suggested new roads (clearly not yet designed in any

 detail) would be constructed. One road appears to pass directly through Backwell

 Lake – a nature conservation area, an area proposed as Local Green Space, and

 part of the Strategic Gap. Other roads appear to cross the railway twice, and the

 overall infrastructure cost would far outweigh the possibility of funding from local

 sources.

 Bearing in mind North Somerset’s decision to “go it alone” independent of the

 other 3 Authorities in the region, there are also serious questions about where any

 national funding might come from.

\* There are a number of better and more sustainable sites – in both North Somerset

 and in the rest of the West of England region, which could far better satisfy the

 housing requirements.

 The one area which BRA believes is the most logical is the area on the south

 western edge of Bristol city, in the vicinity of the new southern relief road (where

 a private developer has submitted outline proposals – known as “The Vale.”)

 This site is mainly in Green Belt, but has been largely degraded by the construction

 of the new link road, and includes two landfill sites. We consider it is a prime

 example of where a “Green Belt swap” would be logical and reasonable, e.g. by

 helping to reduce long commuting distances to outlying villages.

 One of the ideas emerging from the original strategy document was to build in

 a number of “service villages” such as Backwell which have “good

 communications”.

 The reality, certainly in Backwell, is that it is not a sustainable location for

 significant further development, and its communications are already at or close to

 capacity with little chance of significant improvement.

 For the above reasons BRA requests a serious re-examination of the logic behind

 proposing such a large number of new houses into a small service village such as

 Backwell.

Yours faithfully

Michael Rose

On behalf of BRA