

BACKWELL RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

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Representations to the West of England Joint Spatial Plan (Publication Version, November 2017) prepared by Lucy White Planning Limited on behalf of Backwell Residents Association supported by Backwell Resistance

1. These representations are prepared by Lucy White Planning Limited on behalf of Backwell Residents Association, supported by Backwell Resistance.
2. Established in the 1960s, Backwell Residents Association (BRA) works to safeguard and promote the collective interests of local residents of Backwell. The Association has over 700 paid up members and has represented the community in respect of a number of development proposals affecting the village.
3. The Backwell Resistance (BR) is a local community group established in response to the proposals within the Joint Spatial Plan to ensure local residents are fully informed of the proposals and empowered to engage in the planning process. The two community groups share common views on the proposals within the Joint Spatial Plan and in the interests of efficiency for the examination process, have agreed to submit a joint response. The combined membership of the groups is estimated to be around 1300.

Summary of Representations

4. Backwell Residents Association and Backwell Resistance express strong objection through these representations to the principle of Strategic Development Location (SDL) at Backwell for 700 new homes and South West Nailsea for 3,000 homes and the associated strategic transport infrastructure which serve both SDLs.
5. The JSP authorities have failed to give due consideration to the full range of development options available to meet objectively-assessed development needs within North Somerset. The draft proposals are underpinned by an evidence base which lacks critical information which is necessary to reach an informed decision on the soundness of the proposals. In particular, the proposals are silent on the cost and the availability of funding to enable delivery of the transport infrastructure which is critical to achieving sustainable patterns of development. Similarly, the Habitat Regulations Assessment fails to put beyond doubt that the proposals would not result in harm to European protected species and habitat, contrary to the Habitat Regulations Directive.
6. The draft proposals for SDLs at Backwell and Nailsea are **unsound** for the following key reasons:

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- The proposals are **not positively prepared**: The JSP fails to meet the objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including the needs of Bristol in a manner which is consistent with achieving sustainable development. The proposals are borne out of a resistance on the part of North Somerset Council to review the Green Belt to accommodate long-term development needs. A Green Belt Review is vital to enable development to be directed to the right place, at the right time to meet a proportion of Bristol's housing's needs. The Green Belt was last amended by the North Somerset Replacement Local Plan (Adopted 2007) which at that time extended the Green Belt between Portishead and Portbury Dock. The South West Regional Spatial Strategy (SWRSS) proposed development at South West Bristol, which would have required removal of land from the Green Belt. North Somerset Council was opposed to the South West Bristol proposal and therefore did not carry forward amendment to the Green Belt through the Core Strategy and the SWRSS was subsequently abandoned following the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies. North Somerset persists with its position that a Green Belt review is unnecessary and consequently the draft JSP proposals result in unsustainable patterns of development which are heavily reliant upon extensive new road building in an attempt to improve the sustainability of the identified SDLs. The proposed SDLs at Backwell and Nailsea would result in the loss of substantial areas of high quality agricultural land and large swathes of vital foraging grounds for the rare Greater Horseshoe Bats in close proximity to the Brockley Hall Stables SSSI. The evidence fails to demonstrate that the proposals would not cause harm to this rare and protected species, contrary to the Habitat Regulations Directive.
- The proposals are **not justified**: the proposals for the North Somerset area, in particular, Backwell SDL, fail to represent the most appropriate strategy for meeting the objectively assessed housing needs within the plan period. North Somerset Council has failed to give proper consideration to areas of land within the Green Belt which could offer the opportunity to meet needs within the plan period and longer term in a more sustainable manner. Land at Ashton Vale (South West Bristol) has been promoted for development through the JSP, however, the JSP Authorities has failed to demonstrate that the merits of developing land within the Green Belt has been duly considered against other development options through the Sustainability Appraisal. Accordingly, the proposals for the SDL at Backwell and Nailsea are not justified.
- The proposals are **ineffective**: the SDL at Backwell is expected to deliver 700 new homes over a period of 8 years with a peak build rate of 100 dwellings per annum to be sustained over 5 years (Ref: Strategic Development Location Templates). Such high rates of building are highly questionable in an edge of village location, particularly given the simultaneous high build rates proposed for the other NSC SDL's and the Council's poor track record of housing delivery. The proposed transport infrastructure has yet to be costed and funding has not been secured or identified. North Somerset Council is not part of the Combined Authority and therefore does not have access to the dedicated funding available to the other three JSP authorities. Any funding gap would rely upon a successful bid to the Department of Transport. As a result, the evidence fails to demonstrate that the Backwell

SDL is capable of delivery within the plan period in a sustainable manner supported by the timely delivery of strategic transport infrastructure.

7. The proposals would have a significant adverse impact upon the village of Backwell, placing unsustainable pressure upon existing community facilities and services, compounding existing traffic congestion along the A370 and associated air quality issues. The proposed development of the Backwell SDL, Nailsea SDL and new road and metrobus infrastructure would compromise the already limited physical separation of the Nailsea and Backwell urban areas, cutting through the Green Belt which is intended to prevent coalescence. The proposals would also result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, including Grade 1 land, contrary to Government policy. Finally, the planned route of the road and metrobus would result in the loss of or harm to listed buildings. It would also have a detrimental impact upon the Local Wildlife Site of Backwell Lake, a local community asset which serves as an important recreational space for the quiet enjoyment of residents.
8. The provisions of the JSP for affordable housing (Policy 3) would serve to direct affordable housing to Bristol, thereby limiting the benefit of the scheme to local residents who are unable to live in the Backwell area due to high house prices. Accordingly, the harm caused by the proposals fails to be outweighed by the delivery of sustainable balanced communities.
9. For these reasons, Backwell Residents Association and Backwell Resistance object to the JSP proposals, in particular the inclusion of the SDL at Backwell but also the SDL at South West Nailsea and the associated strategic transport infrastructure intended to support both SDLs. We urge the JSP authorities and Inspector to revisit the proposals within the context of a thorough and comprehensive review of the Green Belt to achieve sustainable patterns of growth which are well-related to Bristol, capable of meeting its housing needs without the need for costly, extensive and harmful new transport infrastructure and without such extensive harm to the natural and built environment.
10. The following representations refer to the relevant paragraph and policy references within the JSP.

Chapter 1: Paragraph 6-9

11. BRA and BR recognise the status which will be afforded to the Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) once adopted. The Plan will form the strategic tier of the Development Plan Documents for the four local planning authorities and therefore full weight will be given to its policies in decision-making. In this regard, the JSP must be treated in the same manner as a Local Plan in the plan-making process. The subsequent local plans must comply with the JSP and therefore it is crucial that the JSP delivers the most appropriate spatial strategy when tested robustly against all reasonable alternatives and which is capable of delivery within the plan period. Moreover, the JSP must not defer decisions to the Local Plan which may have influenced the decision on the selection of Strategic Development Locations. **All known impacts of development must be thoroughly assessed at the JSP stage; to defer consideration to the Local Plan could result in fundamentally flawed proposals which are undeliverable and/or result in demonstrable harm.** In this regard,

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it is not appropriate to simply expect Local Plans to be able to introduce suitable mitigation measures unless the extent of harm is fully understood and effective mitigation measures can be identified at the JSP stage.

Chapter 1: Paragraphs 10-12

12. Paragraphs 10-12 explain that the JSP has been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) which has formed an integral part of its production and is based on substantial evidence involving key stakeholders. BRA and BR express serious concerns regarding the robustness of the Sustainability Appraisal and the associated evidence which informs its findings. Further details are set out in the following representations to the JSP.

13. In particular, the following concerns are raised:

- **Air Quality:** Whilst there are no Air Quality Management Areas within North Somerset, there is no recognition of the air quality issues within the Backwell area attributed to the traffic congestion on the A370, in close proximity to homes.
- **Community Facilities:** The SA Baseline Data (Appendix B, SA) is limited to the location of sport and leisure centres and library services within North Somerset. This does not represent a thorough assessment of the full range of community facilities across North Somerset and the comparative availability of such facilities across the District. It is noted that the availability of such evidence varies significantly across the West of England. Within South Gloucestershire a detailed audit of community facilities has been undertaken through Sustainable Access Profiles. This provides an understanding of the level of sustainable access to key services and facilities through the settlements, enabling comparison between the settlements. A similar evidence base should be prepared for North Somerset to enable an accurate comparison between the settlements.
- **Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna:** Figure x on page 14 of Appendix B of the Sustainability Appraisal illustrates the relative concentration of Natura 2000 sites within North Somerset or close to its boundaries within Mendip. It is concerning to note that the findings of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) undertaken for recent Local Plan documents will inform the baseline and assessment of the JSP HRA.

The JSP should be based on a new and up to date HRA; to rely on previous HRAs of varying dates places into the doubt the robustness of the study. In respect of North Somerset, the most recent HRA was prepared in October 2016 to inform the Site Allocations Plan. In respect of the Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC), it is noted that North Somerset Council (NSC) prepared guidance on development for the Bats SAC which would be applied as mitigation against adverse impacts on bats.

A draft of the guidance was sent to Natural England alongside the HRA to assist in their consideration of the assessment. Natural England's response advised that ***“whilst this guidance currently provides strong evidence that the Site Allocations Plan for North***

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Somerset will not have a likely significant effect, until the guidance is confirmed by Natural England as adequate, we cannot confirm that the Plan will not have a likely significant effect. The guidance was subject to further revisions and consultation in November 2017. The guidance remains to be agreed with Natural England and therefore there are no agreed measures to mitigate the effects of the Site Allocations Plan upon the bats SAC. This work has been in progress for over 12 months and no solution has been identified. The scale of development proposed through the JSP and its proximity to the Brockley Stables SSSI (Bats SAC), in particular the Juvenile Sustenance Zone would result in demonstrably more significant impacts upon the SAC than the Site Allocations Plan.

In this regard, Natural England's comments to the "Emerging Spatial Strategy" of the JSP (December 2016) are noteworthy. Their representations noted that

"A number of the Strategic Locations are subject to significant potential environmental constraints. We advise that sufficient evidence is gathered to demonstrate that these are not, in fact, significant environmental constraints, prior to adopting these as Strategic Locations. The constraints we have identified are:...Nailsea Backwell 3,600: We are particularly concerned about this Strategic Location. The area is highly constrained by the Tickenham, Nailsea and Kenn Moors SSSI, which is, as we understand it, already being affected by hydrological and water quality impacts from existing development. The road proposal in the Joint Transport Vision appears to go through the above SSSI. Development in this location would strengthen the case for such a road (or be unsustainable without it) and so we would need to see evidence that the road could be delivered without adverse effect on the SSSI before we would find this Strategic Development Location acceptable. There are key SAC related bat foraging areas in this area."

In responding to whether the proposals represent the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives, Natural England concluded that ***"for the locations of Nailsea/Backwell and M5 to A38 corridor, the evidence may well not support the strategy."***

In light of Natural England's comments it is highly questionable whether the evidence base is capable of sustaining the proposed SDLs in North Somerset, including Backwell and Nailsea in light of the significant harm to the natural environment.

- **Flood Risk:** BRA and BR express concern at the absence of an up to date Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) within North Somerset. A level 1 assessment was undertaken in 2008, followed by level 2 in 2009. The SFRA assessed the land around Nailsea and Backwell, amongst other areas. A further level 2 assessment was undertaken in 2010 limited to Weston-Super-Mare. There have been no further assessments since 2010. However, it is recognised that due to the low lying land of the Somerset Levels and the potential threat of severe tidal inundation across NSC area, a third of properties across the study area are located in areas at risk of flooding from both rivers and sea. In light of the scale of development proposed through the JSP, an up to date SFRA must be undertaken.

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- **Agricultural Land:** BRA and BR support the Agricultural Land Classification provided by Natural England as evidence to inform the SA. It is notable that the land south of Nailsea and West of Backwell provides high quality agricultural land with a high prevalence of Grade 1, 2 and 3a land, as illustrated by the map on page 31 (SA, Appendix B). The Government advises that development proposals should be directed away from areas of high quality agricultural land and Natural England has a statutory role in advising local planning authorities about land quality issues.

Chapter 2: Figure 3 - Critical Issues and Strategic Priorities

14. We support the summary of critical issues and strategic priorities contained within Figure 3. In particular, Figure 3 recognises that there is currently a dependence upon settlements which are over reliant on the private car for new growth and this places undue pressure on existing infrastructure. To alleviate these problems one of the strategic priorities of the Plan is to focus development at the three main towns of Bristol, Bath and Weston Super Mare with market towns providing a complementary role, to achieve sustainable growth. This strategic priority is supported.
15. A further identified priority is to protect and enhance the world class environment, the diverse and high quality natural, built and historic environment and secure a net gain in biodiversity. Within this priority it proposes to retain the overall function of the Bristol and Bath Green Belt. Reference to retaining the Green Belt within the context of conserving the natural and built environment is misplaced; there is no direct correlation between the Green Belt designation and the attributes of the natural and built environment within it. Green Belt is a policy tool to check urban sprawl and prevent coalescence of settlements, it does not of itself, protect the most important natural or built environments and therefore protection of the Green Belt does not necessarily serve to protect these irreplaceable sub-regional assets. To the contrary, as this JSP has demonstrated, over-zealous protection of the Green Belt can result in planned patterns of growth which would radically and adversely affect the environment around the North Somerset and Mendip Special Area of Conservation, removing and/or undermining the value of large areas of foraging grounds for a large colony of Lesser and Greater Horseshoe Bats.
16. The strategic priorities promote development which is properly aligned with infrastructure and maximises opportunities for sustainable and active travel. **These strategic priorities are supported, however they are not reflected in the subsequent policies which are proposed to deliver the Vision and Strategic Priorities.**

Chapter 3: Paragraph 15-17

17. Paragraph 15 defines sustainability as being closely related in proximity and accessibility to services and facilities, particular those in Bristol, Bath and Weston-Super-Mare and the potential to use existing and new transport corridor opportunities. Other sustainability priorities include rebalancing economic growth, maintaining and enhancing the environment and retaining the overall function of the Green Belt. Paragraph 17 identifies the role which larger villages can play in delivery sustainable economic growth.

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18. BRA and BR object to the identification of Backwell as a Strategic Development Location within the context of these priorities for sustainability. Backwell is located over 12 kilometres from the centre of Bristol and 22 kilometres from the centre of Weston-Super-Mare. It is not closely related to the services and facilities at either of these settlements. Whilst it is recognised that Backwell is served by a mainline railway station providing connections to both settlements, its capacity is severely limited with commuter services into Bristol already above their operating capacity. The JSP is silent on how its plans would be supported by improvements to existing rail services by the network operators. In the absence of any increase in the capacity of services, any expectations to achieve a modal shift to sustainable transport modes are, at best, optimistic and unrealistic.
19. In addition, larger villages can only be expected to deliver sustainable economic growth where there is a reasonable scale of existing and planned employment development in the locality. Employment opportunities within Backwell are limited, with no business parks and only small industrial estates within Backwell Parish. Employment opportunities are generally limited to isolated business units and a limited number of shops and small scale offices. There are no plans within the Backwell SDL to deliver any additional employment to achieve balanced growth.
20. Fundamental concerns are raised in respect of the impact of the Backwell SDL proposals on the natural environment. The location and scale of the proposals, combined with the extent of transport infrastructure required to mitigate the traffic impact of the proposals would be demonstrably harmful to the environment. In particular protected habitat for the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bats at Brockley Hall Stables SSSI, would be adversely affected contrary to the Habitat Regulations Directive, such that any benefits of the proposals associated with delivery of new housing would be outweighed by the harm. **Accordingly, in respect of this matter alone, the proposals are unsound and should be removed from the plan.**
21. In this regard, there are a number of fundamental concerns with the current proposals for Backwell SDL which will be addressed in further detail through these representations:
 - The location of the SDL lies within 2 kilometres of the North Somerset and Mendip Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a European Site of International Importance for wildlife. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) recognises the qualities of the SAC as a *“site containing an exceptionally good range of sites used by the population, which includes two maternity sites in lowland north Somerset”*. The SAC comprises component SSSIs including the maternity roost at Brockley Hall Stables which lie to the south west of Backwell. North Somerset Council recognises the importance of the greenfields surrounding the maternity roosts to provide foraging grounds for the protected species (paragraph 3.2, North Somerset and Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation). Of critical importance is the rich foraging grounds provided by cattle farms (horseshoe bats are reliant upon dung beetles as a crucial component of their diets). The proposals for Backwell SDL would result in the direct loss of a cattle farm, removing important foraging grounds within close proximity to Brockley Hall Stables in an area known to be frequented by the bats.

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- A radio tracking study of Greater Horseshoe bats at Brockley Hall Stables SSSI (May – August 2001) recorded the important role of the area identified within the Backwell SDL as foraging grounds for these bats. It recorded the following in respect of the low-lying area spanning the railway between the eastern end of Kenn Moor (south of West End) up to Backwell: ***“A mixture of improved and semi-improved grassland with areas of wetland and woodland strips. The bats mainly feed along the tree lines, hedgerows, and the scrub along the railway, particularly associated with the less improved wetland areas. This was the most significant foraging area identified in this study. 15 bats were recorded here. An important early summer foraging area for serotine bats lies along Chelvey Lane.”*** (Paragraph 5.5.1.2, English Nature Research Report No.442, Geoff Billington, Greena Ecological Consultancy) (Emphasis added).
- The construction of a new road link from the Flax Bourton junction of the A370, across Backwell Common and Backwell Lake (Local Nature Reserve), traversing Tickenham and Clevedon Moor to connect to Junction 20 of the M5 motorway, would have a significant adverse impact upon the natural environment, resulting in:
 - The introduction of noise, light and air pollution into a tranquil, rural landscape and dark skies;
 - Substantial harm to Backwell Lake as a local nature reserve and community asset. The lake provides important habitat for the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats, other protected species of bats, otters and a range of birds including migrating birds. In respect of otters, Natural England and DEFRA advises that the European Otter is the only native otter species in the UK. It is a European Protected Species (EPS) and fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Surveys of otters should be carried out where development will affect habitats near a water body directly or through environmental impacts such as noise or light. There is no apparent reference within the evidence base to the presence of otters within Backwell Lake or the watercourses in considering the proposed alignment of the new road and therefore it can only be assumed that the impact of the proposals upon the otter population has not been assessed.
 - The impact of the proposed route upon the Moors. This area is identified as coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and would directly impact upon the Tickenham, Nailsea and Kenn Moors SSSI which is designated in recognition of the diverse range of flora and rare species contained within the low lying floodplain and marshland. Notwithstanding the fundamental concerns regarding the availability of a viable engineering solution to construct a road across such unstable ground, the proposals would have a significant impact upon the SSSI.
 - The proposals for Backwell and Nailsea SDLs, combined with the road infrastructure would result in the direct loss of high value agricultural land, including areas of Grade 1 land within the Nailsea SDL and Grade 3a within the Backwell SDL and would threaten the continued operation of agricultural holdings

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along the route of the proposed new link road, removing good quality agricultural land from viable use and reducing the availability of cattle within the local area, resulting in the depletion of critical foraging grounds for the protected Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats. The loss of farmland, including entire agricultural holdings including some of the most productive, high quality agricultural land within the Nailsea/Backwell area would have a significant impact on the rural economy and local food production, contrary to National Planning Policy (NPPF, paragraph 112).

Chapter 2: Proposed Vision

22. The proposed Vision for the West of England aspires towards the West Of England being one of the fastest growing city regions in Europe, closing the gap between disadvantaged and other communities, achieving a higher quality of life, a rich environmental character and patterns of development which facilitate healthy lifestyles. We support the proposed Vision and its plans to achieve economic growth and development whilst enhancing environmental quality and achieving sustainable growth.

Chapter 3: Paragraph 11 - Non-Strategic Growth

23. Concern is raised regarding the modest contribution which non-strategic growth is proposed to make towards the overall housing supply. Of the 44,000 homes which the JSP is tasked with delivering, only 3,400 are to be delivered through non-strategic growth, of which only 1,000 are within North Somerset. This equates to less than 8% of the future housing supply. Non-strategic proposals provide a more flexible supply of housing. Timescales for achieving planning permission and first housing completions are typically much shorter, thereby enabling housing to be delivered earlier in the Plan period and reducing reliance on high build rates at the end of the Plan period.
24. However, the current spatial strategy places a significant reliance upon strategic development locations, requiring upfront delivery of extensive and costly new infrastructure with protracted build programmes. The first phase of the Metrobus is yet to be completed and tested to ensure it is a workable and reliant transport solution. Yet the JSP is reliant upon the large scale expansion of the Metrobus route, particularly through North Somerset to achieve sustainable transport patterns.
25. The corollary of this approach to infrastructure is an ineffective plan, with no certainty of funding, technical deliverability or timescales for infrastructure. Moreover, the plan is reliant on unrealistically high build rates on SDLs at the end of the Plan period which even based on a best case scenario would not be supported by infrastructure before significant housing completions have already been achieved. This presents a high risk of under-delivery of housing within the Plan period and under-delivery of infrastructure, resulting in unsustainable growth. Therefore the plan is **unsound** on the basis that it is **ineffective**.

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Chapter 3: Paragraphs 12- 17 - Strategic Development Locations

26. Paragraph 17 identifies a role for towns and larger villages to support economic growth through investment in high profile public transport. This infers the funding for such infrastructure has been identified and secured. However, this is not the case within North Somerset which is not part of the West of England Combined Authority and therefore unable to access the allocated funding. Instead North Somerset is reliant on bidding to Central Government for funding, competing against a wide spectrum of other infrastructure projects across the UK. In the absence of any certainty of funding, **the JSP strategy is unsound**. It is not **positively prepared** given the reasonable alternatives available on the urban edge of Bristol, within North Somerset, which could achieve sustainable patterns of growth without the need for such significant levels of investment in public transport infrastructure. Moreover, the Plan is **ineffective** in the context of a significant funding gap with no certainty that funding can be secured in a timely manner.

Chapter 3: Paragraph 18 and 20 - Strategic Development Locations

27. The role and importance of the Green Belt is acknowledged. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 83) states that when a review of the Green Belt is required to meet future development needs, the local authorities should remove sufficient land from the Green Belt to enable its boundaries to endure beyond the Plan period to meet longer term needs. When reviewing Green Belt boundaries the NPPF required local planning authorities to consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary (paragraph 84).
28. The JSP acknowledges that land currently within the Green Belt will need to be used to deliver growth in sustainable locations. The position of the Joint authorities in this regard is supported.
29. However, objection is raised in the absence of any recognition of the need to review the Green Belt in North Somerset to meet the national policy objectives outlined above and achieve sustainable patterns of growth for the long term.
30. Of the twelve strategic development locations identified across the West of England, five locations delivering a total of 8,550 dwellings require land to be removed from the Green Belt. This approach is broadly supported; it facilitates delivery of housing and employment in sustainable locations in accordance with the plan's strategic priority to direct growth to the main urban area and market towns. Crucially it enables delivery of housing at Bristol where the most significant need for housing and affordable housing exists.
31. However, none of the proposed SDL locations selected within North Somerset require Green Belt review despite North Somerset placing the greatest reliance upon SDLs to meet future growth needs (31%) of the four authorities. Rather the plan proposes sites in locations beyond the outer boundary of the Green Belt which are rural in nature and character and do not correspond to the strategic priorities established in the Plan. As outlined in earlier representations, the consequence of directing strategic scale growth to locations beyond the Green Belt is

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unsustainable patterns of growth, heavily reliant upon the construction of extensive strategic road infrastructure which are likely to encourage car travel rather than achieve a modal shift to more sustainable travel modes. The evidence base supporting the JSP is unable to place beyond doubt that the SDL at Backwell can be delivered without harm to the protected habitat of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC, contrary to the Habitat Regulations Directive.

32. With reference to paragraph 84 of the NPPF, inadequate consideration has been given to the potential benefits for sustainable long term growth through a review of the Green Belt within North Somerset. Accordingly, the Plan is **inconsistent with Government Policy** and **not positively prepared and therefore unsound**.

Chapter 4: Policy 2- The Spatial Strategy

33. Objection is made to the spatial strategy, in particular the identification of Backwell as a strategic development location and more broadly the spatial strategy for North Somerset which does not align with the Strategy Priorities to direct most development to the main urban areas and market towns. Within North Somerset, 60% of the proposed growth at strategic development locations will be located outside the main urban areas and market towns. The approach is contrived to seek to avoid the need for a fundamental review of the Green Belt to better meet the needs of West of England through the southern expansion of Bristol.
34. The outcome is a spatial strategy which promotes unsustainable patterns of development, reliance on large scale, complex and costly infrastructure with no certainty of funding. This represents a high risk approach with no flexibility to accommodate any potential delay in the delivery of infrastructure or housing. Any delay will result in under-supply of housing within the Plan period. The plan is therefore **ineffective** and contrary to **Government policy**. **Accordingly, the plan is unsound**.
35. BRA and BR also object to the contingency component of the housing supply which is reliant on a review of the JSP to enable its release. Plans should be designed to be flexible and capable of responding to change quickly and effectively. Policy 2 refers to a contingency of sites which could be released if monitoring demonstrates that planned housing rates are not being met. However, this would require a review of the plan to facilitate the release of these sites. It is therefore assumed that following a review of the JSP it would be necessary to review relevant Local Plans to provide an allocation against which a planning application can be considered. Such an approach is inflexible and unresponsive and therefore represents an ineffective tool within Policy 2. It is not appropriate to defer all meaningful consideration of contingency sites to a review of the JSP; sites should be identified, thoroughly assessed and tested against all reasonable alternatives to ensure suitable, sustainable sites are selected. Full policy provision should be made within the JSP for contingency sites alongside detailed policy on the release mechanism which would warrant the site(s) being brought forward. Provision of policy within the JSP would enable Local Plans to provide reserve allocation policies which would expedite the release of these sites to enhance supply if required.

36. The proposed SDLs are planned to build out at a rate which has yet to be seen within North Somerset. North Somerset Council has persistently under-delivered housing over the last 9 years, with build rates no higher than 935 dwellings over that period (see Diagram 1, WoE Housing Delivery 2006-2017, Topic Paper 1, November 2017). The strategic allocation of 6,500 homes at Weston Villages has been the source of most of North Somerset's housing delivery issues. The sites were allocated to deliver 6,500 homes by 2026, however since 2011 it has only delivered 835 dwellings with the highest delivery in 2016/17 of 268 homes.
37. North Somerset Council is currently unable to demonstrate an independently tested five year supply of housing.
38. Despite this track record of persistent under-delivery and low build rates at strategic sites, the JSP proposes that at their peak, the SDLs within the JSP will deliver 900 homes per annum consistently for almost 5 years. This relies upon all four SDLs building achieving exceptionally high build rates simultaneously and persistently, all within a relatively small market area.
39. This raises a number of issues:
- the improbability of achieving build rates which far exceed rates historically achieved within North Somerset;
 - the need for numerous developer outlets across each of the SDLs simultaneously;
 - the likelihood of market saturation reducing build rates amongst the SDLs in response to lower demand to avoid a glut of unsold stock;
 - the substantial risk of delay in housing delivery across North Somerset and the wider implications of failing to meet the JSP housing requirement by 2036.
40. The Strategic Development Location Methodology Paper, section 7.0 assesses the prospects for delivery of the SDLs. It explains how delivery aspects which have been considered to identify an indicative development trajectory for each SDL. The indicative build-out rate is based on a single development profile based on a phased approach to the entire development and is based on the number of developers (sales outlets) to be known to be actively engaged in the plan making process at this stage. Paragraph 7.3 recognises that there are many unknowns such as the number of developers. This phase of work has therefore considered the "broad potential" considered reasonable to the location and scale of development.
41. Nailsea and Churchill are both expected to deliver 300 homes per annum. Based on a single developer outlet building an average of 1 house per week, this rate could only be sustained if **12 developer outlets** were building at full capacity across both sites consistently for 7 years. Similarly, the Backwell SDL assumes a build rate of 100 dwelling per annum for 5 of the 8 year build programme. On the basis that Taylor Wimpey is promoting the land as a single developer interest, it is unreasonable to expect rates above 50 dwellings per annum. It is understood that

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Taylor Wimpey propose to submit an outline planning application early in 2018 to enable commencement of development in advance of the delivery trajectory contained within the SDL Template (first occupations 2028). However, to bring forward housing sites earlier could prejudice the outcome of the JSP and Local Plans and place significant burdens on existing infrastructure. The SDL Methodology recognises the long lead-in times required to enable necessary infrastructure to be delivered.

42. In short the JSP provides no evidence to demonstrate that such high build rates are reasonable or achievable. Indeed, it is entirely unreasonable to expect such high build rates in the context of historic rates of delivery within North Somerset, the absence of a consortium of developers promoting these development areas, the finite supply of materials and building trades and having regard to the typical build rates for large scale developments. In the absence of such evidence, there is a very high probability that the housing need identified and allocated to North Somerset will not be met within the Plan period. **For this reason the Plan is ineffective and therefore cannot be found to be sound.**

Chapter 4: Paragraph 13

43. BRA and BR support the reference within paragraph 13 to the opportunity to extend the Green Belt at Nailsea/Backwell through the Local Plan.

Chapter 4: Policy 3 – The Affordable Housing Target

44. Policy 3 establishes an affordable housing target of 24,500 homes within West of England over the plan period. The plan proposes to take every opportunity to maximise the delivery of affordable housing in Bristol in recognition of the substantial need (paragraph 20) for affordable housing in the City. Where proposed sites are well-related to Bristol it is proposed that these locations will contribute to the affordable housing needs of Bristol via on-site provision. For sites in locations less well-related to Bristol off-site contributions would be made to fund further affordable housing provision within Bristol. These contributions would be held in a central fund by West of England Housing.
45. BRA and BR recognise the substantial affordable housing needs of Bristol and accept that significant efforts need to be taken to address this need. Provision of housing and affordable housing closely related to Bristol is the most appropriate means of meeting the City's needs. In the case of North Somerset, the Council has failed to provide any housing or affordable housing at Bristol (within its administrative area) to meet these needs. Rather the proposals direct major housing schemes to locations up to 30 kilometres from Bristol, poorly related to Bristol with high living costs associated with sustaining employment in the City.
46. Moreover, the provisions of Policy 3 would lead to reduced provision of affordable housing within North Somerset to meet the needs of its own resident population. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2015 identifies a need for 4,800 affordable homes within North Somerset over the period 2016-2036 (North Somerset Housing Strategy 2016-2021). If Strategic Development

Locations within North Somerset are required to provide off-site contributions towards affordable housing in Bristol this would result in:

- Under-delivery of affordable housing to meet North Somerset's housing needs;
- Delivery of unbalanced, monotonous communities which fail to cater for a mix of housing needs or build vibrant, mixed communities.

47. Moreover, the plan is silent on the proportion of affordable housing contributions which would be directed to Bristol, whether this would result in provision of an equivalent number of off-site affordable homes and where, when and how these affordable homes would be delivered, given the lack of available land within Bristol City's boundaries.

48. As a consequence, the provisions of Policy 3 when considered in the context of **the proposed spatial strategy would result in unbalanced communities, contrary to the national planning policy framework. Accordingly, the policy is unsound.**

Chapter 4: Policy 5 – Place Shaping Principles

49. BRA and BR broadly support the provisions of Policy 5 which promotes the delivery of high quality and sustainable places. It requires all new development to ensure the protection and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment and meet a number of other key principles through the preparation of masterplans for the strategic development locations. However, BRA and BR are concerned that consideration of these issues is being deferred through this policy to the Local Plan preparation stage. The JSP establishes the principle of development at the SDLs and therefore it must be satisfied that the final SDLs are capable of meeting the key principles of Policy 5. Should mitigation be required in order to comply with Policy 5, the JSP must be satisfied that adequate measures can be employed as part of the proposals to ameliorate any harm arising from the proposals.

50. As drafted, the JSP fails to provide sufficient certainty that the key principles within Policy 5 can be satisfied.

Chapter 4: Policy 5 – Paragraphs 41 - 44

51. Policy Principle 4 regarding the environment is addressed at paragraphs 41 – 44. It recognises the plethora of international and national sites of ecological importance that exist throughout the WoE and the numerous historic sites and features which contribute towards its distinctiveness and sense of place.

52. Paragraph 42 recognises that it is "crucial" that new development works with natural systems. Paragraph 43 advises that the WoE authorities have worked closely with key environmental partners to establish a strong evidence base which provides net gains to biodiversity. This is designed to ensure that new development will conform with planning legislation to ensure the protection of local to International designated sites including SSSI and SACs and should ensure enhanced protection through complementary habitat creation to extend and/or buffer the site,

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implemented through the delivery of green infrastructure corridors. New development is expected to contribute towards a net gain of the sub-region's diverse and high quality natural environment and biodiversity.

53. Strategic Development Locations will incorporate provision of multi-functional green infrastructure as mapped in the Strategic Development Location framework diagrams. The vehicle to deliver an assessment of the sub-region's key environmental assets is proposed to be the Green Infrastructure Plan for the West of England.
54. Notwithstanding these statements, BRA and BR raise serious concerns over the quality of the evidence base which underpins the selection of the Strategic Development Locations, in particular Backwell and Nailsea. The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) accompanying the JSP recognises the requirement of the Habitats Directive for an "appropriate assessment" to be undertaken when a plan or development project is likely to have a significant effect upon a European Site. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are protected by Article 2 of the Directive which requires the maintenance or restoration of these habitats and species in a favourable condition. Where an appropriate assessment is carried out and results in a negative assessment, the proposals can only be granted if there are no alternative solutions; and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the development and compensatory measures have been secured.
55. Paragraph 4.2 of the HRA confirms that the assessment has only been carried out at a strategic level; the specific assessments of impacts and detailed mitigation requirements are deferred to the Local Plans. At this point, the principle of development in the SDLs will be established. BRA and BR are concerned that this high level approach to the appropriate assessment fails to provide the level of certainty necessary to demonstrate that the proposals would not result in significant effects upon the European protected sites. These concerns are reinforced by paragraph 4.9 of the HRA which advises that the profile of each of the affected sites will "need to be drawn up based on up to date information...This work will be undertaken once options for development are better defined." This infers that the current HRA has been undertaken on the basis of out of date, inaccurate information.
56. Paragraph 5.8 of the HRA refers to the screening of the Natura 2000 sites (including the North Somerset and Mendip SAC) using appropriate buffer zones to help identify sites that could be at risk of impact from the JSP proposals. The buffers comprised a 4 km boundary from the Bat SACs (including North Somerset and Mendip SAC). This reflected the fact that these sites at most potential risk from loss and fragmentation of foraging areas and flight lines, resulting from the development of greenfield sites and associated potential loss of grazing and hedgerow networks.
57. However, paragraph 5.12 goes on to explain that the potential for likely significant effects on the Natura 2000 sites will need to be considered by the four unitary authorities through their Local Plans which will allocate sites to deliver the JSP spatial strategy. BRA and BR express strong objections to this approach which is fundamentally flawed in its application of the Habitats Directive. As outlined above, proposals which would result in harm to European sites can only be brought forward if there are no reasonable alternatives and there is an overriding public interest

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and compensatory measures have been secured. The approach proposed by the JSP predetermines the outcome of the detailed stages of the Appropriate Assessment, confirming the principle and scale of development deemed acceptable at SDLs prior to detailed assessment of the sites through the Local Plans. This poses a significant risk and threat to the integrity of the European Sites.

58. Section B1 of the HRA recognises that the Backwell SDL lies within the 4km buffer of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC.
59. Section B2 recognises that it is uncertain whether the Green Infrastructure requirement is sufficient to be certain that there is no risk of harm to the integrity of European Sites associated with the delivery of ALL SDLs.
60. In respect of Backwell, section B2 notes that the SDL would *“likely”* impact upon the integrity of the Bat SAC. Moreover, it is *“uncertain whether the requirement to assess, safeguard and enhance Greater Horseshoe bats is enough to ensure no risk of harm”*. In order to address this risk it proposes to include a strategic habitat assessment within Policy 7 and the provision of additional strategic green infrastructure through Policy 6. Once again, this approach is fatally flawed; in accordance with the appropriate assessment, the JSP authorities as the competent authorities must be satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the proposals would ensure the integrity of the North Somerset and Mendips SAC, or that there are no reasonable alternatives and it is in the public interest and compensatory measures have been identified. However, the JSP authorities propose to take forward the proposed SDL at Backwell despite the potential risk of harm to the SAC and defer further assessment and potential mitigation to the Local Plan stage. **Unless the evidence base supporting the JSP can demonstrate unequivocally that the three tests above can be satisfied, the proposals for the Backwell SDL should not be proposed for inclusion within the JSP. Based on the current evidence base, the Backwell SDL Policy 7.4 should be deleted from the Plan.**

Chapter 4: Policy 6 - Strategic Infrastructure

61. The JSP is reliant on strategic infrastructure to underpin delivery of the strategic development locations. Policy 6 states that priority will be given to scheme which support the delivery of the spatial strategy, although it is not explicit which are the priority projects. The accompanying Infrastructure Position Statement (IPS), paragraph 8.3, cautions that detailed costs, phasing of delivery and funding sources are unavailable for the majority of the schemes included in the Infrastructure Schedule. The IPS states that viability work has clearly demonstrated that there is still a significant funding gap to be covered by other funding sources. Indeed the Infrastructure Schedule indicates that not only is there a funding gap, but the overall cost of transport infrastructure projects within North Somerset is unknown. In respect of the Nailsea Improvement Corridor comprising the link between the A370 and M5 at Clevedon:

- costs are **to be confirmed**
- funding sources are **unknown**
- Phasing is proposed from 2025-2030

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62. Similarly for the Metrobus to Clevedon and Nailsea:

- costs are **to be confirmed**
- Funding sources are **unknown**
- Phasing is proposed from 2025-2035

63. Nailsea and Backwell SDLs are both dependent on these projects being delivered, yet completion of public transport infrastructure is not anticipated before at least 2030 and 2035.

64. Based on the delivery trajectories contained within the Strategic Development Location Templates, around 900-1,300 homes would have been built at Nailsea and Backwell ahead of completion of the new road. Moreover, Backwell and Nailsea SDLs would be virtually completed before the metrobus route was completed, placing significant pressure upon existing road infrastructure and public transport prior to completion of the new infrastructure.

65. In the absence of any certainty over funding or costs, the Plan is ineffective and incapable of demonstrating that the infrastructure necessary to support the spatial strategy can be delivered and indeed whether it can be delivered in parallel with the housing. There is a serious risk that infrastructure will be undeliverable, resulting in highly unsustainable patterns of growth and significant pressure upon existing road infrastructure.

66. The proposed route of the road and Metrobus connection from the A370 to the M5, J20 traverses large areas of land which lie within Flood Zone 3 and are therefore at greatest risk of flooding. Backwell Common frequently suffers from surface water flood issues and the network of rhynes and drains across the Tickenham and Nailsea moor land lie on floodplain and marsh land. Whilst it is accepted that road infrastructure is an appropriate form of development within Flood Zone 3, the technical delivery of the road must be thoroughly tested and examined before the JSP is adopted to ensure such infrastructure is deliverable. The draft JSP is based on an indicative route only. NSC Officers at recent public consultation events could provide no assurances that the route had been properly considered to understand:

- The physical and technical constraints to delivery of major road infrastructure across flood plain and marshland;
- The implications for the construction of the route and the associated impact upon the natural environment in respect of ecological and landscape impact;
- The associated cost of the proposed route taking into account the abnormal costs of delivering a route across marshland.

67. Without a thorough examination of the above issues, there is no evidence available to demonstrate that the proposed new road link and metrobus route would be:

- Capable of construction;

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- Deliverable without harm to local, national and European protected ecological sites (Backwell Lake Local Nature Reserve, Nailsea and Tickenham Moor SSSI, North Somerset and Mendips SAC);
- Viable and capable of funding;
- Deliverable within the plan period and in line with the delivery of the SDLs at Backwell and Nailsea.

68. **The plan is therefore unsound, ineffective and not positively prepared.** There is a considerable risk that the JSP proposals would not comply with the Habitat Directive to ensure no harm to the SAC. Moreover, there is a high risk that the proposals would be found to be undeliverable at the detailed proposals stage at which point the principle of development at the SDLs would be confirmed. There is a genuine risk that the SDLs would be brought forward at Backwell and Nailsea without the infrastructure necessary to make these proposals sustainable.

69. In this context, further consideration must be given to alternative strategies to deliver sustainable growth within North Somerset, having regard to the potential for growth adjacent to the Bristol urban area on land currently within the Green Belt.

Chapter 4: Policy 7.4 - Backwell Strategic Development Location

70. Policy 7.4 establishes the key strategic principles and infrastructure requirements for the proposed strategic development location west of Backwell. Strong objection is raised to the principle of strategic scale development at Backwell. The proposed delivery of 700 homes at Backwell would result in a 40% increase in the resident population of the village (Census 2011). This does not take account of the other proposals within Moor Lane and Farleigh Fields which remain to be determined. If these proposals are also permitted, the village would experience growth in excess of 50%, placing significant pressure upon existing infrastructure and services.

71. The JSP advises that sustainable strategic growth at Backwell and Nailsea is dependent on delivery of a new multi-modal link from the A370 Long Ashton Bypass at Flax Bourton to the Strategic Development Location at Nailsea and beyond to connect with the M5 at Clevedon. In addition, a new metrobus route would be required to connect Bristol to Nailsea and potentially onwards to Clevedon. Policy 7.4 advises that opportunities to phase delivery of the highway improvements in step with parts of the development at Backwell **may** be explored.

72. The extent of highway infrastructure is disproportionate to the scale of development proposed at Backwell and Nailsea and would give rise to significant adverse impacts upon the natural and built environment. The proposed route of the new road and metrobus route is yet to be confirmed, however the key diagram indicates that the route would involve upgrading and widening of the B3130 through Cambridge Batch, the creation of a new road cutting across Backwell Common,

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passing immediately south of Backwell Lake and onwards to the Nailsea SDL, through Tickenham Moor to eventually connect to the M5 at Clevedon.

73. A number of concerns are raised regarding the proposed indicative route of the new road and metrobus route:
 74. The proposed widening of the B3130 and creation of a new road across Backwell Common lie within close proximity of the Tyntesfield Estate. Agricultural holdings on Backwell Common were historically owned by the Tyntesfield Estate and continue to contribute positively to the rural setting of the Estate. The introduction of a major new road cutting through Backwell Common to the south of the Estate would bisect the setting of the estate, causing significant harm to the setting of the historic park and garden and associated listed buildings.
 75. National Government policy places great weight upon the conservation of heritage assets; the more important the asset the greater the weight which should be afforded to it in the consideration of development proposals. Tyntesfield Estate comprises listing buildings of the highest significance, with Grade I and II* status. Accordingly, great weight should be given to the protection of Tyntesfield Estate in the consideration of the proposals for the proposed new road and metrobus route.
 76. In addition to Tyntesfield Estate, there are a number of listed buildings along the proposed route of the new road. It is not clear whether these buildings would be demolished as a consequence of the proposed or significantly compromised through the close proximity of the road to the properties. Again, the proposed route of the new road would have a demonstrably significant impact upon these heritage assets.
 77. The proposed route of the road and metrobus route across Backwell Common would have a significant impact upon the tranquillity and rural nature of Backwell Common. The area is rural in character, with low levels of activity and traffic. As a result, the agricultural landscape is relatively unspoilt with rural roads and small clusters of buildings, many of which are or have been associated with agricultural activity. At night time, low levels of artificial light provide valuable dark skies which support habitats for a variety of bats, including the lesser and greater Horseshoe bats. The introduction of the proposed new road and associated increase in activity, traffic, noise and light pollution would have a significant adverse impact upon the natural environment and rural character and tranquillity of Backwell Common.
 78. The proposed route of the road and metrobus continues across Station Road, presumably involving a new road junction at the intersection, and onwards immediately south of Backwell Lake, a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). The lake supports a diverse range of wildlife including migrating birds and a range of flora. In addition, the SNCI and surrounding agricultural fields are known to provide important foraging grounds for the Greater Horseshoe bats which fly from their maternity roost at Brockley Hall Stables (SSSI) to the south west of Backwell. The proposed route of the road and metrobus route would result in the loss of land within the SNCI
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and associated habitat for Greater Horseshoe bats. Moreover, the introduction of traffic, noise and light pollution which would impact significantly upon the habitat and the quiet enjoyment of the lake as a local community asset for recreation.

79. The proposed route of the road and metrobus continues across Tickenham Moor towards the Clevedon junction of the M5. The ground conditions and high water table associated with Tickenham Moor present significant technical constraints to the delivery of major road infrastructure. There is no evidence within the JSP or supporting evidence base that these issues have been thoroughly assessed to establish that the road is deliverable. Moreover, the Infrastructure Position Statement confirms that the costs of constructing the road are not yet confirmed. In the absence of a thorough assessment of the deliverability and costs, together with certainty of funding and viability, the proposals for the new road and metrobus route are not positively prepared, ineffective and unjustified. **Accordingly, the proposals are unsound. In the absence of sound infrastructure proposals, the strategic development locations at Backwell and Nailsea must also be unsound, given their reliance upon this infrastructure to achieve sustainable growth.**

80. In respect of the proposals for 700 homes at Backwell, a number of objections are raised to the principle of strategic scale development in this location:

81. The proposals would result in the loss of around 30 hectares of agricultural land, including best and most versatile agricultural land contrary to paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework which requires local planning authorities (LPAs) to take into account the economic and other benefits of such high quality land. Where significant development of agricultural land is deemed necessary, LPAs should seek to use areas of poorer land in preference to land of higher quality.

82. The proposed loss of grazing land used by cattle will result in the loss of 30 hectares of foraging grounds which serve the maternity roost of Greater Horseshoe Bats at Brockley Hall (SSSI). Agricultural land, particularly pastures and associated cattle grazing is vital to the survival of this roost. A crucial component of the Greater Horseshoe Bats' diet is dung beetles which are prevalent in agricultural pastures. The combination of watercourses, grazing land, cattle, ancient woodland and hedgerows around Backwell and Nailsea provide the ideal habitat to sustain the Brockley SSSI. The summer foraging areas for adult horseshoe bats has been found to be within 3-4km of maternity roosts, and the mean adult range in one extensive study (Durge) was 2.2km'. Furthermore 'Billington tracked the maximum distance covered by bats to be 6.8km from Brockley Hall'.

83. The development of Grove Farm would result in the loss of greenfields and the destruction of important foraging grounds associated with the Brockley Hall SSSI. The JSP acknowledges (Backwell SDL Template) that the proposed alignment of the road junction onto Chelvey Road would correspond with a highly sensitive foraging area, whilst policy 7.4 recognises the critical

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importance of this area as habitat for bats. However, there is no evidence within the JSP or the supporting evidence base that the impact upon this protected species can be adequately mitigated to ensure there is no risk of harm. Indeed the Habitat Regulations Assessment (JSP Evidence Base) expresses uncertainty over whether the requirement to assess, safeguard and enhance Greater Horseshoe Bat habitat is enough to be sure there is no risk of harm and therefore there is likely to be a significant effect upon the habitat.

84. It is not sufficient simply to replace agricultural land with public open space within the residential development as this will not replace the vital foraging grounds. Put simply the loss of Grove Farm as a working farm could result in the immediate and catastrophic loss of the Greater Horseshoe Bats from Brockley Hall which will no longer be able to sustain their existence in this area.
85. The proposals within Policy 7.4 include a number of measures to seek to mitigate the impact of the development upon existing infrastructure. However, a number of uncertainties remain:
86. The timing of infrastructure delivery and funding (see representations to Policy 6 in respect of the proposed timing of infrastructure to support Backwell and Nailsea). Even based on the best case scenario set out within the JSP, up to 1,300 new homes would be built and occupied at Backwell and Nailsea prior to the opening of the new road. Moreover, both SDLs would be virtually completed by the time the metrobus route is proposed to open. This does not represent the timely delivery of infrastructure, as required by Government policy.
87. The proposed timing of local junction improvements to Station Road, the A370 and the rail station are unknown.
88. No commitment is provided within the JSP to the provision of a new primary school within the Backwell SDL. Although Policy 7.4 refers to provision of a primary school of at least 2.4 hectares, it does not stipulate that this would be a new replacement to increase the provision of school places within Backwell. However, the Sustainability Appraisal commentary on Policy 7.4 scores the policy on the basis of a new, additional primary school. It is therefore critical that this is recognised in Policy 7.4, if retained.
89. There are no proposals included within Policy 7.4 for enhanced secondary school provision within Backwell to meet the increased demand.
90. Strong objection is raised to the proposals for 700 homes at Backwell. The proposals would result in a substantial increase in the population of Backwell, unsupported by local employment. The proposals are dependent upon delivery of un-costed, unfunded infrastructure which based on the best case scenario would not be capable of delivery until 2030, significantly behind the delivery of the proposed housing. The planned build rates for the proposed SDL at Backwell assumes delivery of 100 homes per annum consistently for 5 years with construction planned from 2028 to the end of the plan period. Any delay in construction and/or any reduction in build rates would

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place at risk the delivery of the scheme within the plan period. A single housebuilder typically builds up to 50 dwellings per annum on a development site, at the peak of the construction phase. To propose a rate of 100 dwellings per annum over an extended period, within a village location is highly unrealistic and places further doubt over its delivery in line with the necessary infrastructure.

91. **The JSP has failed to consider all reasonable alternatives** to the construction of 700 homes west of Backwell and the associated delivery of 3,000 homes south west of Nailsea. The spatial strategy for North Somerset is based on the long term retention of current Green Belt boundaries, despite high levels of housing need which are set to continue beyond the plan period of the JSP. In accordance with Government Policy the JSP should ensure that the Green Belt can endure for the long-term without further modification to meet the development needs of the sub-region. The JSP has failed to comply with this national policy approach within North Somerset. Accordingly, the JSP has failed to consider all reasonable alternatives to development at Backwell and Nailsea, in particular delivery of sustainable growth south of Bristol, at the Vale, utilising existing road and public transport infrastructure without the need for significant additional infrastructure investment. **In the absence of a thorough assessment of reasonable alternatives, the plan is not positively prepared and therefore unsound.**

92. **For the above reasons, Policy 7.4 is not positively prepared, it is ineffective, unjustified and contrary to Government Policy. It is therefore unsound and should be removed from the plan.**

Chapter 4: Policy 7.7 – South West Nailsea Strategic Development Location

93. Backwell Residents Association supported by Backwell Resistance object to the identification of land south west of Nailsea to accommodate 3,000 new homes. The proposed location, scale of development and necessary mitigation would fail to support the planned sustainable growth of Nailsea. The scale of development proposed in this location would fundamentally undermine the separation of Nailsea and Backwell in an area which is not protected by the Green Belt. The associated strategic road link and metrobus route would further compromise the green space between the two settlements.

94. The proposed SDL would result in the direct loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, including Grade 1 land, contrary to National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 112. The loss of agricultural land would also impact upon the availability of foraging areas for the Lesser and Greater Horseshoe Bats, to the detriment of the Brockley Hall SSSI Maternity Roost.

95. The delivery of the site within the plan period is reliant on developers achieving a consistent build rate of 300 dwellings per annum over 7 years. As set out within our representations to Policy 7.4, such rates of development are unrealistic within the context of the local housing market, the availability of trades and building materials and the historic track record of North Somerset Council in respect of housing delivery. The completion of 2,575 dwellings within the plan period is simply unobtainable.

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96. The proposed strategic road infrastructure and Metrobus link are deemed crucial to the delivery of sustainable planned development at Nailsea. However, the costs of delivering the infrastructure are unknown and sources of funding are yet to be identified which places into question the deliverability of the road infrastructure (See our representations to Policy 6). **The sustainability of the Nailsea SDL is therefore unproven in this context and the policy is ineffective.**
97. The proposals at SW Nailsea have not been tested against all reasonable alternatives for development within North Somerset. As outlined in our representations to Policy 7.4 and Chapter 3, paragraphs 18-20, the proposed SDLs have not been assessed against alternative development locations within the Green Belt, including land South West of Bristol. The release of land from the Green Belt offers the opportunity for more sustainable patterns of development, closely related to the main urban area of Bristol where it is recognised that there is greatest need for housing. In the absence of an assessment of land within the Green Belt and recognition of the role this land can play in meeting housing needs, **Policy 7.7 fails to provide a positively prepared strategy and is therefore unsound.**
98. In the context of the above and with reference to our representations to other relevant policies of the Plan, we strongly object to the proposals for South West Nailsea SDL and the associated transport infrastructure. **The proposals fail to provide a positively prepared, effective, justified approach to the delivery of housing and are contrary to National Planning Policy. Accordingly, the proposals are unsound and should be deleted from the Plan.**

Backwell Residents Association
9 January 2018