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Nailsea and Backwell Transport Position Statement

September 2023

This Position Statement is prepared collaboratively by the NSC Strategic Transport Policy Team and its advisors, AECOM. It is intended to succinctly summarise the position on the level of development for allocation in the Local Plan which would be considered acceptable in transport terms. It was first issued in June 2023, to inform the Reg 19 site allocation decision making process. It has been updated in September 2023 to reflect the increased size of the Grove Farm emerging allocation, from 370 to 515 dwellings. This statement is supported by a technical evidence base including transport modelling¹.

The issue

Backwell Crossroads is a known capacity constraint on the A370. It experiences congestion at peak times at present, which is likely to be exacerbated to an unacceptable level with future development. Congestion in this location can result in traffic queues which extend along the A370, Station Road and Dark Lane. The A370 is a key bus corridor in North Somerset, linking Weston-super-Mare, Yatton/Congresbury, Backwell, Flax Bourton and Bristol. Congestion at Backwell Crossroads is likely to introduce delay to bus services, impacting on the quality of service and the commercial ability to improve service frequency. Traffic impact at Backwell Crossroads is a limiting factor on the cumulative level of development that should be allocated in the Nailsea and Backwell area through the Local Plan, without substantial mitigation. This statement is made without prejudice to the potential that other impacts and local issues may require mitigation, and/or may make individual development proposals unacceptable in transport terms.

Transport Interventions

The West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan² submission has been successful and the funding accepted³ by the North Somerset Council Executive. BSIP proposes to make Dark Lane an exit only arm and add a bus lane onto the A370E arm at Backwell crossroads. This provides additional traffic capacity through reducing the number of traffic stages, enabling that capacity to be given to through movements on the A370, and provides additional bus priority in the westbound direction. This is a committed scheme. All development in Nailsea and Backwell, and indeed North Somerset as a whole, will be expected to promote a sustainable transport-led strategy, as defined in the emerging Local Plan transport policies, including demonstrating how future residents will benefit from opportunities to travel by sustainable modes to key destinations. This will require an appropriate level of investment.

¹ "B:\D&E\Highways & Transport\Strategic Transport Policy & Development\23.1 Local Plan 2020\16 Stage 6-7 - April 22\220815 NB Rail Crossing Technical Note v3.0.pdf"

"B:\D&E\Highways & Transport\Strategic Transport Policy & Development\23.1 Local Plan 2020\16 Stage 6-7 - April 22\230224 Backwell Crossroads LinSig (BSIP) Modelling (Sensitivity Test) - Results Summary_v6.pdf"

² West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan (n-somerset.gov.uk)

³ 09 Bus Service Improvement Plan Enhanced Partnership adoption Executive.pdf (modern.gov.co.uk)

The housing numbers proposed at Nailsea Backwell in the Reg 18 draft Local Plan were such that their combined impacts upon Backwell Crossroads would have been severe. Therefore we investigated a strategic mitigation that would have provided a “Backwell Crossroads Bypass”. This included a potential additional rail crossing to enable an alternative route between Nailsea and the A370 to be provided. This would have the benefit of alleviating congestion at Backwell Crossroads, providing a useable route for double decker buses, reducing traffic impacts on Station Road, and improving walking and cycling within Backwell by removing through traffic. However, this would be a major investment which would require external funding of which there is no certainty. It would also have had notable environmental, visual and heritage impacts, with technical and stakeholder delivery challenges⁴. With the reduced housing allocations now being proposed for the Reg19 draft Local Plan in the Nailsea Backwell area this intervention will not be required or be desirable. This Position Statement is made on the basis of this intervention **not** being delivered.

Impact Assessment

Transport modelling has been based on observed conditions in 2022, with industry-standard approaches to future forecasting. A validated 2022 Base Linsig Model has been used to create an updated baseline model with committed development to incorporate the BSIP changes. The assessment assumes a forecast year of 2030. This is appropriate given the scale of housing and likely build out rates.

The model has been used to assess a number of sites in the Reg 18 Local Plan, both in isolation and in combination. This includes Grove Farm, west of Backwell (Taylor Wimpey, originally 370 homes, increased to 515 homes in this iteration of the Position Statement), South Nailsea (Gleeson and others, 600 homes), and East of Backwell (M7, 350 homes), based on capacity numbers provided by NSC Planning Policy. Whilst East of Backwell is understood to not be proposed for allocation as it is in the Green Belt, in transport terms it is a reasonable site to be considered for allocation.

Trip rates used are consistent for all development options and are appropriate for a strategic approach to modelling the cumulative transport impacts of a Local Plan. Planning applications will be required to provide site-specific Transport Assessments, which will be assessed on their own merits by the NSC Highways & Transport Development Management Team.

The acceptability of a development in transport terms will come down to whether the residual cumulative impact is severe, in line with the NPPF. Whilst there is no set quantitative definition of “severe”, it is based on the forecast performance of the junction in capacity terms, and the degree to which this is caused by the proposed development. There is a requirement for housing to be delivered across North Somerset, and the Spatial Strategy seeks to focus this on main towns and service villages. There is therefore a need for a level of housing to be allocated in Nailsea and Backwell, albeit with highways constraints, and therefore there will be a level of impact which will need to be accepted up to the point of it being “severe”, and reduced through measures to enable mode shift. Clearly there is a level of subjectivity in determining the definition of “severe”, and each

⁴ "B:\D&E\Highways & Transport\Strategic Transport Policy & Development\23.1 Local Plan 2020\16 Stage 6-7 - April 22\220815 NB Rail Crossing Technical Note v3.0.pdf"

development will be expected to reduce its impact by achieving mode shift through investing in sustainable transport, which would lessen the modelled impact on the junction. However, at this stage it is reasonable to draw the following conclusions on the acceptability of sites delivered in isolation or combination, in transport terms.

- East of Backwell Only: This is likely to be **acceptable** as the junction will operate within capacity in AM and PM peaks. However, it is noted that this is not proposed to be allocated as it is in Greenbelt.
- Delivering both Grove Farm and South of Nailsea would be **unacceptable** in combination due to substantial impact on both A370 S and Station Road arms in the AM peak, and all arms of the junction in the PM peak. It is unlikely that measures to achieve mode shift would have sufficient benefit to deliver effective mitigation for this scale of impact.
- Delivering one of Grove Farm or South of Nailsea would result in capacity impacts on the A370 S and Station Road in the AM peak, albeit the impact of Grove Farm is marginally lower than South of Nailsea. This would necessitate significant investment in measures to achieve mode shift to mitigate that impact to a level that would be acceptable.
- Grove Farm will have a lower impact on the junction than South of Nailsea in the PM peak. A370 S will exceed 90%, but not 100%, saturation with Grove Farm, whereas with South of Nailsea, both Station Road and A370 N will exceed 100% saturation.
- With reference to the Appraisal Framework included within the Stage 5 Transport Assessment, Grove Farm better aligns with the transport objectives of the Local Plan than South of Nailsea. It should also be noted that the BSIP project provides the infrastructure to improve bus journey times along the A370, and Grove Farm is better placed to facilitate improved service frequency through patronage and contributions.
- A choice has needed to be made between Grove Farm and South of Nailsea as allocating both sites would not be acceptable in transport terms without strategic mitigation. **It is NSC Transport's position that Grove Farm should be allocated** for the following reasons:
 - o Marginally lower impact on A370 Backwell Crossroads in the AM peak
 - o Substantially lower impact on A370 Backwell Crossroads in the PM peak
 - o Better alignment with Local Plan Transport objectives
 - o Better alignment with the BSIP programme and greater opportunity to improve bus services.
- A planning application for Grove Farm will need to demonstrate a robust approach to sustainable transport as there will be a requirement to achieve mode shift for the development to be acceptable in terms of impact on Backwell Crossroads. Substantial investment in bus services and high quality masterplanning and supporting facilities will be needed to reduce car travel to lessen the capacity impact.

Other Options

NSC Strategic Transport Policy appreciates that there is a level of housing to deliver to meet the requirements of the Local Plan and is seeking to find solutions which enable housing to be delivered without unacceptable transport and traffic impact. As previously stated in the initial potential site assessments presented in the Reg18 transport

assessment⁵ Strategic Transport Policy considers that the North Nailsea site is likely to be an acceptable alternative to South of Nailsea. It is noted that both North Nailsea, and East of Backwell, are within the Green Belt which has prevented their allocation at Reg19.

Notwithstanding this, Strategic Transport Policy considers that a strategic allocation at Yanley, delivered in the right way, presents an opportunity to deliver housing needs in a transport sustainable way without excessive growth in the Nailsea and Backwell area. If Green Belt release is to be progressed it should be considered holistically and that development at Yanley should be part of the consideration.

⁵ "B:\D&E\Highways & Transport\Strategic Transport Policy & Development\23.1 Local Plan 2020\15 Stage 4-5 - May 2021\220307 Stage 4-5 Final Output\220307 Stage 4 and 5 Transport Assessment-FINAL.pdf"