

# NORTH SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN 2038

## Choices for the Future: A Northern Corridor

### Proposal from the Parish Councils of Abbots Leigh and Pill and Easton-in-Gordano

#### 1 Introduction

The North Somerset Local Plan 2038 *Choices for the Future* proposes four approaches to how and where new housing development might be located. We are concerned about the scale of housing required by Government as well as the capacity of the development industry to deliver such numbers. Nevertheless, North Somerset will be vulnerable to planning applications for major development should housing targets not be met and this proposal, therefore, respects the target numbers.

In our view each of the four approaches - Retain the Green Belt, Urban Focus, Transport Corridors and Dispersal – have strengths and weaknesses. This submission proposes an approach to North Somerset as a whole which draws on elements of the four approaches and meets the required target housing numbers (15,500 to 17,500). This hybrid approach is set out below in Table 1.

**Table 1 Choices for the Future: a hybrid Approach**

Approach	Location	Site Size		Housing	Green Belt
Urban Focus	SW Bristol,	4,000	1	4,000	4,000
Urban Focus	Weston, Nailsea	2,250	2	4,500	
Northern Corridor	Portishead, Portbury, Pill/Easton-in-Gordano, Abbots Leigh	2000		2,000	2,000
Weston Corridor	Yatton, Claverton, Backwell, Flax Bourton, Long Ashton	500	5	2,500	1,000
Airport Corridor	Dundry, Felton, Wrington	500	3	1,500	1,000
Other Dispersal	Bleadon, Tickenham,	500	4	1,000	
<b>Total</b>				<b>15,500</b>	<b>8,000</b>
Spare	Churchill, Winscombe Failand, Congresbury	500	4	2,000	500
				<b>17,500</b>	<b>8,500</b>

Within this approach a **Northern Corridor** is proposal. This draws on both the *Choices for the Future* consultation paper and the supporting Sustainability, Housing Land Availability Assessment, and Methodology Reports which accompany it. It also draws on the Abbots Leigh, Ham Green, Pill and Easton-in-Gordano Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2026, agreed by the NSC Executive on 9th December to move to the next stage of consultation.

Preparation of the Northern Corridor proposal has been assisted by conversations with the Bristol Port Company and Portishead Town Council covering the broad aims of the proposal as well as specific issues relating to target housing numbers, land availability, housing provision and employment.

## What is the Northern Corridor?

The Northern Corridor would run from the boundary of Bristol at Bower Ashton through Leigh Woods and Abbots Leigh to Pill and Easton-in-Gordano and to the Severn Estuary. It would include the parishes of Abbots Leigh, Pill and Easton-in-Gordano, Portbury and Portishead and parts of the parishes of Weston in Gordano, Clapton in Gordano and Long Ashton. Whilst there are important transport elements to the proposals, this proposal is **not** simply a Transport Corridor but offers an approach which addresses all three of the economic, social and environmental sustainability objectives set out in the Sustainability Report underlying *Choices for the Future*. Retention of most of the North Somerset Green Belt is proposed together with both an Urban Focus and a Transport Corridor dimension.

Whilst *Choices* picks out individual 'places' (Portishead, Portbury, Easton-in-Gordano, Abbots Leigh) for their potential contribution to meeting housing need and demand it is important to recognise the extent to which it is the interdependence and functional connections between these places which provides the basis for an effective strategy. The influences which have led to development of the Northern Corridor strategy include:

- The growth of Portishead as a counterweight urban focus to Bristol, stressing the potential to attract development away from rather than towards Bristol whilst preventing urban sprawl from Bristol to Portishead.
- The potential to provide housing/employment provision which offers integrated home/work connections combined with the growing significance of working at or from home.
- The role of Pill, not mentioned in *Choices for the Future*, as a railway station town, a local service centre complementary to Portishead, and a site for modest housing growth.
- The role of Royal Portbury Dock (lying within the Neighbourhood Plan Area), the growth of which, with or without a Freeport, will have a major influence on jobs, and vehicle traffic.
- Consistency with the Abbots Leigh, Ham Green, Pill and Easton-in-Gordano Neighbourhood Plan 2026 which stresses the cohesion and interrelationships of the four communities.

## 3 Housing Growth

The requirement for the Local Plan is 15,500 new dwellings (or 17,000 if government requires more). The four options offered in *Choices for the Future* provide 12,000 to 17,000 (Retain Green Belt), 9,500 to 15,500 (Urban Focus), 9,500 to 18,500 (Transport Corridors), and 15,000 to 19,000 (Dispersal).

In each of these, the 'Northern Corridor' contribution would range from nil (Green Belt retention), 500-1,500 (Urban Focus), 1,500 to 3,500 (Transport Corridors), and up to 2,000. (Dispersal).

**This submission does not identify specific sites but our view is that the Northern Corridor proposal as a whole could offer up to 2,000 new homes.**

## 4 Sustainability

The Abbots Leigh, Ham Green, Pill and Easton-in-Gordano Neighbourhood Plan 2026 has demonstrated consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework and with the North Somerset Council Core Strategy and meets the basic conditions set by European Environmental and Habitats Regulations. A Northern Corridor would extend this commitment to sustainability, both geographically to Portishead and Portbury (each in the preparation stages of their own Neighbourhood Plan) and in terms of a time-scale to 2038.

The *Choices for the Future* Methodology, Sustainability and Land Availability Reports give a very clear description of how the options have been developed - the selection of the four approaches, the 'places' to which each approach might apply, the criteria used to assess the rating given to different places, and the housing growth each might accommodate.

The options are assessed against sixteen objectives which reflect three elements of sustainability – economic, social and environmental. The sustainability report documents the criteria used to assess each objective. The following paragraphs assess how we consider the Northern Corridor performs against the criteria used for the four approaches in *Future Choices*.

### **Economic sustainability**

*Objective 1.1 - Ensure a range of job opportunities are easily accessible without having to use a car.*

There will be significant job opportunities accessible without use of a car in Portishead and, given the rail link, in Bristol. Royal Portbury Dock also provides employment for Pill residents (some of whom cycle to work) and the new rail service will make Portishead/Bristol, Bristol/Portishead, Pill/Bristol and Pill/Portishead work journeys easier. Elsewhere development close to the A369 will fall within the 'limited access; criterion for accessibility. Whilst travel to work flows from Portishead and Pill may remain strongly Bristol oriented, there are also important flows in a range of non-Bristol directions. Working at or from home will become even more prevalent and the Neighbourhood Plan contains planning policies which will allow conversions or extensions for home working. We believe that the design of new housing should contain allowances for home working. The challenge of getting to work at Royal Portbury Dock work sites needs to be addressed.

*Objective 1.2 – Locate development where there is a demand for new employment particularly where there is a known sector demand.*

The designation of Portishead as an 'urban focus', together with the growth of Royal Portbury Dock, with or without a Freeport, would create a demand for new employment. But there is also already significant employment in the Neighbourhood Area (Plan Chapter 9) with around 1,700 jobs in the Neighbourhood Area and a further 6,000-7,000 at Royal Portbury Dock. The Neighbourhood Plan reserves Eden and Old Brewery Business Parks in Pill for employment and suggests new economic opportunities in eco-tourism and agri-tourism. We would also point to the commitment in the Neighbourhood Plan to the production and consumption of local food – a modest economic activity, but significant for the development of sustainable local living. All of this emphasises the importance of linking the provision of housing with local jobs and reinforces the potential of the Northern Corridor idea. The analysis suggests that the rating for this objective is slightly stronger for the corridor as a whole than that for individual areas other than Portishead.

*Objective 1.3 Provides opportunities to improve economic wellbeing and reduce inequalities* Growth across the corridor and in Portbury and Portishead and at Royal Portbury Dock would have positive effects on economic wellbeing and have the potential to reduce inequalities (although possibly creating new inequalities as well as environmental challenges),

*Objective 1.4 – Promote the optimal use of land which supports regeneration, maximise re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land and protects BMV and the agricultural economy*

It seems unlikely that development in Abbots Leigh/Pill Easton - Chapel Pill or Martcombe (Pill Green) would represent the best use of land but Portishead and Portbury would make use of appropriate land, some of it brown field. In the Neighbourhood Plan 2026 there are already 30 houses and 60 jobs offered on a brown field site in Ham Green.

*Objective 1.5 – Promote development which requires a deliverable level of high quality and sustainable infrastructure*

In relation to infrastructure there would be major parking problems for rail users at both Pill and Portishead. A new station-halt for rail passengers (off Marsh Lane/Royal Portbury Dock Road/A369) could attract residents of Easton (Plummers Hill), and Portbury. Otherwise, essential infrastructure investment would be needed wherever growth is proposed but the major demands would be found at the proposed major new greenfield developments such as those proposed at Chapel Pill, and at Martcombe and Plummers Hill.

## **Social Sustainability**

*Objective 2.1 Meet housing need*

The Northern Corridor, with 2,000 new homes (including 60 new care home places) would meet both local housing need and new residential growth, mainly in Portbury and Portishead but also within the Neighbourhood Area.

*Objective 2.2 Deliver affordable or specialist housing where it is most needed*

The corridor would offer affordable housing (hopefully at a level of 30-40%). Pill and District Community Land Trust has already shown its commitment to affordable housing with its Chapel Pill Lane proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan by 2026.

*Objective 2.3 Achieve reasonable access to a wide range of community, educational, town centre and healthcare facilities*

Portishead already offers access to a range of services, and service provision will grow as Portishead grows. Development at the Portishead end of Pill/Easton would have rail access to services in Portishead as well as the existing local services in Pill. Improvement of the Pill Precinct as proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan will increase the attractiveness of Pill.

Abbots Leigh and Ham Green have become less reliant on Bristol services. On line shopping and local delivery is increasingly meeting local need – albeit creating local delivery-van traffic problems - and Portishead click-and-collect shopping is easily accessible avoiding the difficulties of getting to, and parking in, Bristol.

### *Objective 2.4 Enhancing community cohesion and community facilities provision*

The communities along the Northern Corridor are distinct with differing historical and cultural characteristics. Nevertheless coming together to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan has led to greater knowledge, understanding and interaction between the different settlements. Concerns about traffic volume, noise and pollution together with addressing environmental conservation and climate change are shared across the corridor as are concerns about major housing growth which could increase the population of the Neighbourhood Area by 60 per cent and in effect create separate communities, so only increasing car use. The Neighbourhood Plan proposals to locate new development adjacent to existing settlements would in contrast favour walking and cycling.

### *Objective 2.5 Achieve healthy living opportunities - access to Open Spaces, Public Rights of Way, walking and cycling opportunities, Outdoor leisure and cultural activities*

The Corridor as a whole would offer the chance of extensive walking, cycling and recreational activities. Leigh Woods, Watchhouse Hill and Portbury reserves offer many opportunities and are well-used by families from Portishead, Pill and Bristol especially following COVID

The Healthy Living objective does not mention pollution – road vehicle or air pollution. Given that the A369, generating the third worst air pollution in North Somerset, runs throughout the Northern Corridor, any further growth in road vehicle traffic would reduce sustainability all along the corridor.

## **Environmental Sustainability**

### *Objective 3.1 Supports decentralised renewable energy generation - (assessed just for wind or solar and heat networks) RERAS study 2021*

Low-Carbon Gordano has taken initiatives relating to energy efficiency and there is a section in the Neighbourhood Plan addressing Climate Change in general and energy efficiency in particular. Further exploration of wind turbines is a specific policy recommendation in the Neighbourhood Plan. Decentralised renewable energy generation is clearly a strategic priority and the NSC Local Plan 2038 should introduce planning regulations to facilitate the installation of ground mounted solar PV systems in appropriate locations. A specific exception might, for example, be made for installations that would improve the viability of agricultural or other businesses sited within the Green Belt. The Northern Corridor approach should receive a higher assessment for this objective.

### *Objective 3.2 Minimise vulnerability to tidal & fluvial flooding, without increasing flood risk elsewhere. Also minimise surface water flood risk and harm to water quality and availability*

Flooding is a perennial issue for Pill with tidal water and run-off both covered in the Neighbourhood Plan, again with policy recommendations offered.

### *Objective 3.3 Reduce the need to travel by car*

Establishment of Portishead as an urban focus centre with related employment opportunities relatively close at hand helps the reduction of car trips and the rail line will also make a major contribution to reduction of car usage, especially if the frequency of service can be increased from that currently proposed. At the same time major development in Abbots Leigh (Chapel Pill) and at Martcombe (Pill Green) would be neither close to employment opportunities, nor served by the rail line.

*Objective 3.4 Minimise impact on and where appropriate enhance treasured landscape/townscape such as the Mendip Hills AONB.*

Major development in Abbots Leigh, Easton in Gordano or Portbury would have a damaging effect on landscape. One feature of the proposed Northern Corridor is landscape quality as the land falls down from Abbots Leigh/Failand towards Pill and beyond that to the Severn.

*Objective 3.5 To conserve and enhance historic places, heritage assets and their settings*

Abbots Leigh, Pill and Portbury are areas of heritage importance. There are areas of international, national, and local significance designated for protection – RAMSAR wetlands, Special, Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, three SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves and Wildlife Sites/Sites of Nature Protection. The Avon Gorge and the Severn Estuary are designated under the EC Habitats Directive. There are 28 listed buildings in Abbots Leigh and Pill (as many in Pill as Abbots Leigh) as well as registered and unregistered gardens. The Portbury Hundred and Portbury Priory add to this set of heritage assets – much enjoyed by residents and visitors all along the corridor. Large scale development would impact on the wider setting of heritage assets in Abbots Leigh, Pill/Easton-in-Gordano and Portbury.

*Objective 3.6 Protect and where possible enhance Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Green Infrastructure, particularly with respect to protected habitats and species*

Finally, the NSC sustainability assessment states that Portishead's urban focus would make a 'significant contribution' to the biodiversity objective. It also suggests, however, that in Abbots Leigh (or more specifically the major housing developments identified by developers) the positive impact on bio-diversity would be negligible. Our view is that the housing development of up to 2000 dwellings in Chapel Pill/Martcombe would have a significant negative effect. Both Abbots Leigh and Pill/Easton Parish Councils have declared Climate and Ecological Emergencies and there are numerous initiatives across the Neighbourhood Area to respond to climate change. In this respect there are many shared values across the communities of the corridor. The Neighbourhood Plan highlights protection of international and local environmental assets including the nine NSC recognised wildlife sites and three SSSIs in the Area (including those located within Royal Portbury Dock).

**Summary** A comparison of the sustainability ratings given to individual places within the Northern Corridor and the ratings given to the Corridor as a whole is set out in Table 2 below. The Urban Plus and Corridor options contribute to sustainable objectives, but do not fully reflect full range of economic, social and environmental sustainability elements. Our own assessment of sustainability (see below) is that the Northern Corridor has a range of attributes and assets which taken together across the area combine to offer a stronger sustainability rating than that of the contributing places assessed separately. We think the evidence is that the Northern Corridor as a whole provides a marginally stronger - rated on some economic criteria (Objectives 1 and 2 and a significantly stronger rating on environmental criteria (notably Objectives 3.5 and 3.6). The economic potential of the corridor is positive; its social interactions cohesive, its environmental strengths outstanding.

**Table 2 NORTH SOMERSET LOCAL PLAN 2038 SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS**

	Range of job opportunities; no car use	Demand for new employment	Economic wellbeing; reduce inequalities	Best use of land; brown field: BMV	Promote development requiring infrastructure	Meet housing need	Deliver affordable housing	Access to community services/facilities	Enhance community cohesion	Access to Open Space, walking/cycling	Renewable energy generation	Minimise flood risk	Reduce the need to travel by car	Minimise impact on landscape	Conserve/enhance heritage assets	Enhance biodiversity; protect habitat species
<b>Objective</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Abbots Leigh</b>																
	-	?	-/+	--	-	-/+	+	-/+	0	++/-	0	++	+	--	+	-/-
<b>Easton-in-Gordano</b>																
	0/+	-/+	-/+	-	+/-	++/-	++	++/-	+	+	-/+	++	+	-	+/?	-/+
<b>Portishead</b>																
	++/-	++	++/-	+/?	++	++/-	+	++	++	++	0	+/-	++	++	-	+/-
<b>Portbury</b>																
	0/+	-/+	-/+	-	++	+/-	+	-/-	0	+	+/-	++	+	+	-	
<b>Northern Corridor</b>																
<b>Rating</b>	+	-/+	+/-	+/?	++	++/-	++/-	++/-	++/-	++/-	++/-	++/-	-/+	--	+/-	--/+

## 4 Land Availability

The Housing Land Availability Report suggests there is considerable available land within the Northern Corridor. The report lists:

Chapel Pill (Abbots Leigh)	384 hectares
Land north of A369 Abbots Leigh (Abbots Leigh)	44 hectares
Land at Leigh Woods	8 hectares
Clifton College site (Abbots Leigh)	34 hectares
West of Stokeleigh Park near Leigh Woods (Abbots Leigh)	12 hectares
Pill Green (Martcombe in Easton-in-Gordano/Pill)	102 hectares
Land adjacent to the M5 (Lodway, Easton-in-Gordano)	10 hectares
Court House Farm (south of Royal Portbury Dock, Easton-in-Gordano)	12 hectares
Court House Farm (Plummer's Hill, Easton-in-Gordano)	9 hectares
Moor Farm Portishead (Portbury)	36 hectares
Church Lane (Portbury)	6 hectares
North east of Shipway (Portbury)	27 hectares
Land south of Portishead (Portbury/Clapton-in-Gordano)	60 hectares
Tower Farm (Portishead)	28 hectares
Old Mill Road (Portishead)	5 hectares
Cedar Way (Portishead)	4 hectares
North of Clevedon Road (Portishead)	9 hectares

Other than land within the settlement boundaries of Portishead and Pill and within the Royal Portbury Dock all of the Northern Corridor lies within the Green Belt and is thus tightly restricted in terms of release for development. This proposal argues that whilst retention of a Green Belt is essential in principle, in practice the release of some Green Belt land for strategic development may be appropriate. The Neighbourhood Plan is clear that transport constraints (traffic overload at peak times and heavy traffic flows throughout the day) would make major (1000 dwelling) proposals at Chapel Pill and Martcombe unsustainable. The transport sector, at 42%, is the largest single source of carbon emissions in North Somerset and the NSC draft Active Travel Plan is clear that that new developments (both residential and employment) will be 'active travel neighbourhoods' from the outset. The sustainability assessments show that sites adjoining or generating motor vehicle traffic onto the A369 through Easton, Martcombe and Abbots Leigh are unwelcome on environmental and landscape grounds as well as traffic grounds. No new development should offer immediate access to the A369, but at least some traffic generated in Portishead and Portbury would find its way onto the A369 further exacerbating traffic issues. A Transport Corridor of the scale suggested in Option 3 would be unviable in terms of road vehicle use.

In contrast the Neighbourhood Plan argues that the release of small Green Belt sites adjacent to existing settlements would make a contribution to meeting housing need. Towards and beyond the M5, in Easton-in-Gordano/Portbury, some development would be more acceptable and would relate well to growth of a wider Portishead area. A new rail-halt (off Marsh Lane/Royal Portbury Dock Road/A369) would improve rail access. The new rail line is welcome but sites in Abbots Leigh will not be served by the rail line.

Finally, proposals for the Northern Corridor will need to reflect the growth prospects at Royal Portbury Dock. Bristol Port Company own extensive land between the Dock and Portishead and would welcome the release of that land for mixed housing/economic development Freeport designation (taking the form of a hub and spokes model) would stimulate manufacturing activity at a number of major businesses in the sub-region and also have spin-off effects on local employment. Consequent traffic (much of its HGV) would support the logic and viability of a Northern Corridor, although also presenting environmental and traffic challenges. Nearly all freight traffic to and from the Port uses the national strategic road network with most going northbound on the M5 with some then using the M49 to Wales and M4 to London and the East. Only a few Port workers who commute using the A369.