

Engagement and Communication Strategy
B&NES Local Plan 2022 – 2042

October 2022

**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**

Improving People's Lives

Contents

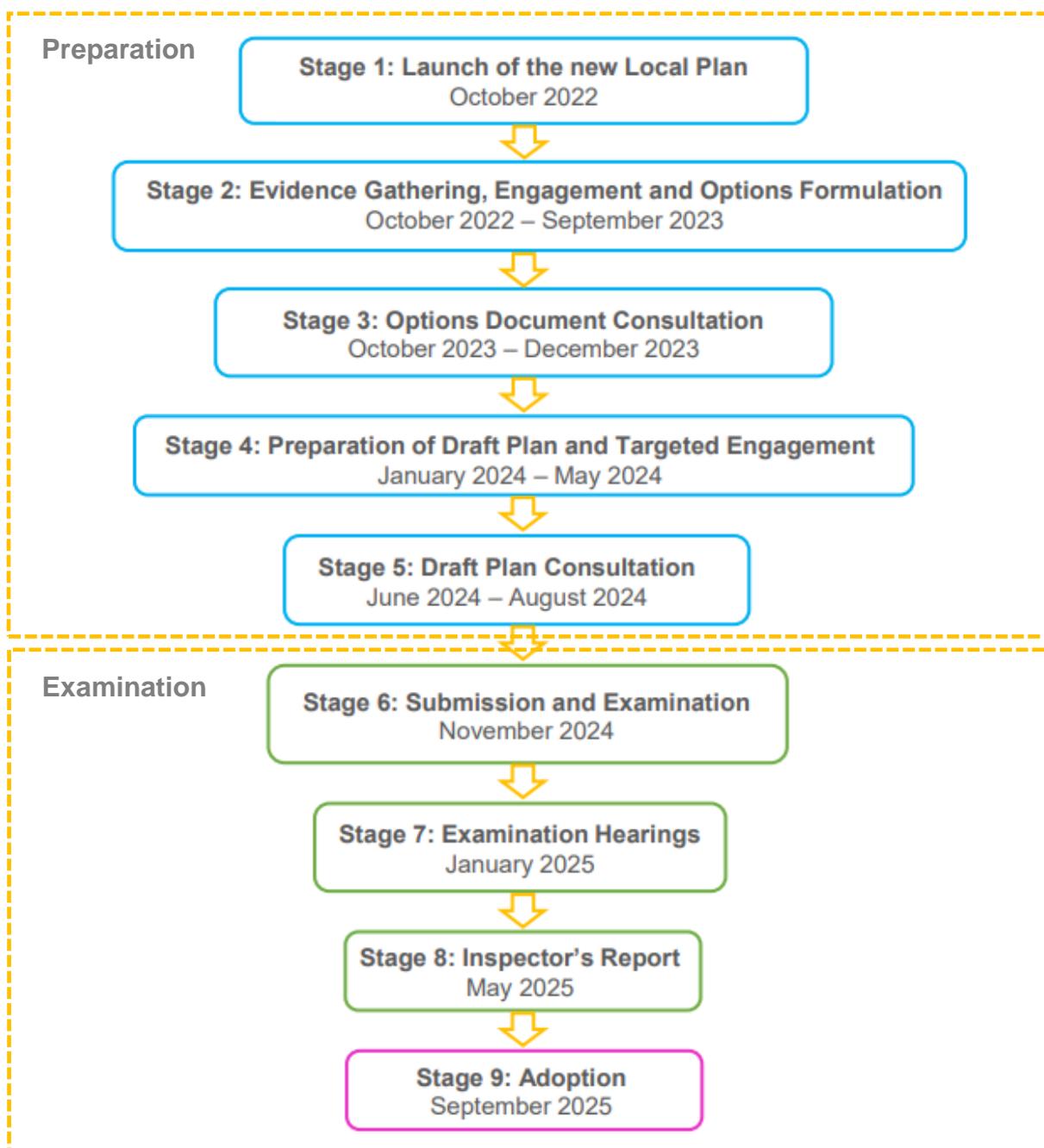
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Bath and North East Somerset Council is beginning the preparation of a new Local Plan for the District. The involvement of communities and stakeholders is key to preparing a strategy for the District which allows it to grow sustainably, meets the needs of our communities, and protects and enhances the things we value most.
- 1.2 The Council will therefore work closely with communities and stakeholders in preparing the new Local Plan, carrying out a range of engagement and consultation throughout its preparation, in line with the Council's core policy of **'giving people a bigger say'**.
- 1.3 This document sets out the Council's approach to consulting and engaging the community and stakeholders on the new Local Plan. It is important that we involve communities and those affected by the Plan at an early stage in the process, when it is possible to make a difference. The Council seeks to take an inclusive and proactive approach to engagement, providing the opportunity for all to engage in the plan-making process.
- 1.4 The Local Plan goes through various stages of preparation, and it is important to clearly set out how and when people can become involved. A summary of these stages is set out in section 2.
- 1.5 The principles set out in this document are consistent with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, which has recently been updated. We welcome feedback from communities and stakeholders on the content of the Statement of Community Involvement and this Draft Engagement and Communication Strategy.

2 Stages in the preparation of the Local Plan

- 2.1 The process of producing a Local Plan involves various stages, each of which entail consultation with stakeholders and communities. The stages and timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS), and is summarised in the diagram below.
- 2.2 The Engagement and Communication Strategy set out in this document provides details on how the Council will engage communities and stakeholders at each of the stages.



3 Engagement and Consultation

- 3.1 There are a variety of ways in which communities and stakeholders can become involved in the preparation of the Local Plan. The minimum requirements for consultation and engagement are set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. However, the Council is seeking to be much more proactive in engaging with local communities and stakeholders in the preparation of the new Local Plan.
- 3.2 The tables below set out a comprehensive engagement strategy for the Local Plan designed to reach out to as many people and groups as possible. The tables contain information relating to:
- The methods of consultation and engagement proposed at each stage of the Plan making process;
 - The stakeholders and community groups to be engaged;
 - The scope of the engagement and consultation; and
 - The desired outputs for each stage of the process.
- 3.3 The engagement is proposed to be carried out on a place-based basis, splitting the District into local areas, with technical work and engagement in each area led by a member of the planning policy team. The areas will comprise:
- Bath and Environs
 - Keynsham and Saltford
 - Hicks Gate
 - Whitchurch
 - Somer Valley
 - Rural Communities
- 3.4 The place-based engagement will comprise engagement with a variety of different groups in each area, particularly via the Council's Area Forums, including targeted engagement with parish and town councils, community groups, key stakeholders, landowners, and seldom-heard groups. The Council will be preparing Strategic Place Assessments for Keynsham, Saltford, Hicks Gate, Whitchurch and the Somer Valley, and engagement with stakeholders and communities will be key to feeding into this process.
- 3.5 At **Stage 1 (Launch of the new Local Plan)**, the proposed engagement and consultation aims to ensure that all interested parties and relevant groups are aware of the launch of the new Local Plan, its context, scope, and the ways in which they can be involved in its preparation. The Council seek an

understanding of initial views, through consultation on the Launch Document. Various methods of engagement and consultation shall be used at stage 1, comprising mail outs, press releases, webinars, consultation questionnaires and meetings.

- 3.6 The proposed engagement at **Stage 2** of the Local Plan preparation (**Evidence Gathering, Engagement and Options Formulation**) is split into two sections. Initially, between November 2022 and January 2023, the Council seeks to build a clear understanding of the key issues facing stakeholders and communities, and begin to understand the opportunities that exist across the District to address these issues (**Stage 2A** in the tables below). We'll also work with stakeholders and communities to establish the evidence base required to better understand these issues. Methods of engagement at this stage will comprise, targeted meetings and online engagement with parish and town councils, community groups, key stakeholders and landowners, and targeted meetings and online engagement with the specific seldom-heard groups set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Following this, in March 2023, the Council will circulate a communication / newsletter to all stakeholders and communities providing:
- An update on progress with the preparation of the Local Plan
 - Outcomes from previous engagement sessions
 - A link to any available evidence produced to date
 - Details regarding future engagement sessions
- 3.7 Then, in June / July 2023, the Council will engage further with stakeholders and communities, to share evidence collated to date, discuss the options emerging for policies and allocations in local areas, and to seek input into these options (**Stage 2B** in the tables below).
- 3.8 At **Stage 3 (Options Consultation)**, a District-wide consultation on policy options will be carried out, in order to understand the views of stakeholders and communities, with various webinars held during the consultation period to ensure understanding of the content of the Options Document, and how parties can provide comments. Consultation on the Options Document will be carried out in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 3.9 Representations from communities and stakeholders will inform the content of the Local Plan as it moves towards a Draft Plan. At **Stage 4 (Preparation of Draft Plan)**, some targeted engagement with community groups and stakeholders will be carried out, to feedback responses from the options consultation and discuss preferred options.

3.10 At **Stage 5 (Draft Plan Consultation)** a Draft Plan will be published, and consultation on this document will be carried out for a period of at least 6 weeks in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Engagement / Consultation	When?	Who?	Method	Scope
Stage 1: Launch				
Comms	October 2022	District-wide	<p>Mail out (email and postal)</p> <p>Social media</p> <p>Press releases</p> <p>Posters in One Stop Shops / Libraries</p>	<p>Inform interested parties about the context of the new Local Plan, its launch, the accompanying proposed engagement strategy, and details on how to get involved in its preparation.</p> <p>Set the new Local Plan within context of the One Shared Vision, the new Corporate Strategy, the Economic, Cultural & Wellbeing Strategies and JLTP5 (Joint Local Transport Plan 5).</p> <p>Comms to be clear, meaningful, and useful.</p> <p>Inform all parties that Easy Read versions of the Launch Document and Engagement Strategy are available online and in print format.</p>
Launch Webinar	October 2022	District-wide	Webinar followed by online Q&A session	<p>Inform interested parties about the context of the Local Plan, the Launch Document / Engagement Strategy consultation, and how to get involved.</p> <p>Answer any initial questions interested parties have about the Launch Document and Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Provide information on how to comment on the content of the Launch Document and Engagement Strategy.</p>
Consultation on Launch Document	October 2022	District-wide	Online publication of Launch Document, Engagement Strategy, Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and Local Development Scheme (LDS).	<p>Publish Launch Document and Engagement Strategy, plus Easy Read version of the Launch Document.</p> <p>Publish updated Statement of Community Involvement and Local Development Scheme alongside Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Seek comments from interested parties on each document.</p> <p>Interactive web questionnaire to provide simple way to respond to</p>

			<p>Online publication of Easy Read versions of Launch Document.</p> <p>Hard copies in One Stop Shops and libraries.</p> <p>Web questionnaire for responses.</p> <p>Email / written comments where parties cannot use web questionnaire.</p>	<p>consultation, with the option of written comments where users are unable to comment online.</p>
Parish / Town Council engagement	October 2022	All Parish and Town Councils, and Council / Area Forums including Bath Area Forum	Online presentation and Q&A	<p>Inform parishes about context of the new Local Plan, Launch Document consultation, and engagement strategy / SCI.</p> <p>Answer any initial questions Parishes have about the Launch Document and Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Ask parishes to agree whether we work with each parish directly, or a broader parish working group.</p> <p>Initial discussions relating to potential updates to Neighbourhood Plans.</p>
Informal engagement with Statutory Consultees and other consultation organisations	October 2022	Statutory Consultees and other consultation organisations	Statutory Notices sent by email / post	<p>Inform statutory consultees and other consultation organisations about context of the new Local Plan, Launch Document consultation, and engagement strategy.</p> <p>Identify any Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) required.</p>

Duty to Cooperate Letter	October 2022	Prescribed Duty to Cooperate Bodies and neighbouring authorities	Letter sent by email / post	<p>Inform Duty to Cooperate Bodies and neighbouring authorities about the Launch of the new Local Plan, its context, and how to comment on the Launch Document and Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Identify initial strategic planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, which will need to be addressed.</p> <p>Identify any Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) required.</p>
Call for sites	October 2022	Landowners / agents	Email notification and web questionnaire	Request submission of potential sites for housing, economic land, renewable energy, Biodiversity Net Gain, and other uses.
Targeted landowner engagement	October 2022	Landowners	Post / email / meetings	Request submission of potential sites for housing, economic land, renewable energy, Biodiversity Net Gain, and other uses.
Engagement with Members	October 2022	LDF Steering Group and Ward Councillors	Online presentation followed by Q&A session	<p>Inform Members about context of the new Local Plan, Launch Document consultation, and engagement strategy / SCI.</p> <p>Answer any initial questions Parishes have about the Launch Document and Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Agree Members' role in engaging with local communities.</p>

Stage 1 Key Outputs

- Ensure all interested parties and relevant organisations are aware of the launch of the new Local Plan, its context, scope, and the ways in which they can be involved in its preparation.
- Ensure SCI seldom-heard groups are aware of Easy Read versions of the Launch Document.
- Understanding initial views of interested parties and relevant organisations, following consultation on the Launch Document.
- Clarity on the next steps of Local Plan preparation and basis for further work, including timescales for engagement and consultation moving forward.
- Understanding of available sites, following call for sites and initial targeted landowner engagement.
- Understanding of how Parishes would like to be engaged, i.e. individually or part of Parish working groups.
- Establish specific community groups for engagement in each area.
- Establish specific seldom-heard groups for engagement, using SCI as starting point.
- Preparation of Consultation Statement to record outcomes of engagement and consultation.

Engagement / Consultation	When?	Who?	Method	Scope
Stage 2A: Understanding Key Issues and Opportunities (Reg18)				
Parish / Town Council engagement	November 2022 – January 2023	Individual Parish and Town councils, and Council / Area Forums including Bath Area Forum, or broader Parish working groups	Presentation at meetings and discussion	<p>Seek understanding of key issues facing local areas, and opportunities in the local area. Key issues for discussion comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of the Local Plan • Local priorities • Key issues and opportunities in local areas • Approach to Neighbourhood Plans • Evidence required to better understand issues raised. • Desire and capacity of parishes to feed into the new Local Plan, eg through local area assessments, site searches etc
Targeted engagement with community groups	November 2022 – January 2023	Community groups	In-person or online meetings	<p>Seek understanding of key issues facing local areas, and opportunities in the local area. Key issues for discussion comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context of the Local Plan • Local Plan objectives • Local area priorities • Key issues and opportunities in local areas • Evidence required to better understand issues raised.
Key stakeholder engagement	November 2022 – January 2023	Targeted key stakeholders i.e. educational	Online meetings	<p>Seek understanding of key issues facing stakeholders, and opportunities in the local area. Key issues for discussion comprise:</p>

		establishments, businesses, health facilities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder priorities • Local Plan objectives • Key issues Local Plan needs to address • Evidence required to better understand issues raised
Informal engagement with Statutory Consultees, other consultation organisations, Duty to Cooperate Bodies, and neighbouring authorities	November 2022 – January 2023	Statutory Consultees, other consultation organisations, Duty to Cooperate Bodies, and neighbouring authorities	Online meetings	<p>Seek understanding of key issues facing stakeholders, and opportunities in the local area. Key issues for discussion comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultee priorities • Local Plan objectives • Key issues Local Plan needs to address • Evidence required to better understand issues raised <p>Begin Duty to Cooperate conversations with Prescribed Bodies and prepare first drafts of Statements of Common Ground.</p>
Targeted engagement with SCI seldom-heard groups	November 2022 – January 2023	SCI Seldom-heard Groups	Online / in-person meetings	<p>Bespoke engagement with SCI Seldom-heard groups set out in updated SCI (including young people, Faith, Ethnic and Language groups, Disabled People, Gypsies and Travellers, small business owners, People living in rural areas).</p> <p>Seek understanding of key issues facing seldom-heard groups, and how the Local Plan might address these issues. Key issues for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Plan objectives • Key issues Local Plan needs to address

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence required to better understand issues raised • Preferred approach to consultation at options / draft plan stage
Targeted landowner engagement (place-based)	November 2022 – January 2023	Landowners	Online / in-person meetings	Seek understanding of availability and deliverability of land across the District.
Evidence Sharing Communication	March 2023	All communities and stakeholders	Online newsletter / communication with all communities and stakeholders	<p>Provide all communities and stakeholders with an update on progress relating to the preparation of the Local Plan.</p> <p>Provide a summary of outcomes from previous engagement sessions (potentially through publication of a draft Consultation Statement).</p> <p>Provide a link to any available evidence produced to date.</p> <p>Provide details regarding future engagement sessions.</p>

Stage 2A Key Outputs

- Agreed local visions / key local issues and opportunities
- Agreed priorities with stakeholders
- Established working relationships
- Understanding of evidence base required to better understand issues raised through engagement
- Shared evidence base with all relevant parties
- Clarity on the next steps of Local Plan preparation and basis for further work
- First set of SoCG with prescribed bodies and adjoining authorities
- New consultee database
- Preparation of Consultation Statement to record outcomes of engagement and consultation
- Agreed outcomes from engagement sessions
- Access to relevant evidence for participants
- Understanding details regarding future engagement

Engagement / Consultation	When?	Who?	Method	Scope
Stage 2B: Options Formulation (Reg 18)				
Parish / Town Council engagement	June / July 2023	Individual Parish and Town councils, and Council / Area Forums including Bath Area Forum or broader Parish working groups	Presentation at meetings and discussion	<p>Share evidence collated so far with Parishes, including transport and place assessment work.</p> <p>Seek feedback on evidence base.</p> <p>Seek update on potential for Neighbourhood Plan updates.</p> <p>Start to discuss potential site and policy options.</p> <p>Provide information on next steps in Plan preparation, and further opportunities to engage with the process.</p>
Targeted engagement with community groups	June / July 2023	Community groups	In-person or online meetings	<p>Share evidence collated so far, including transport and place assessment work.</p> <p>Seek feedback on evidence base.</p> <p>Start to discuss potential site and policy options.</p> <p>Provide information on next steps in Plan preparation, and further opportunities to engage with the process.</p>
Key stakeholder engagement	June / July 2023	Targeted key stakeholders i.e. educational establishments, businesses, health facilities	Online meetings	As above.

Informal engagement with Statutory Consultees, other consultation organisations, Duty to Cooperate Bodies, and neighbouring authorities	June / July 2023	Statutory Consultees and other consultation organisations	Online meetings	As above. Continue Duty to Cooperate conversations with Prescribed Bodies and prepare drafts of Statements of Common Ground.
Targeted engagement with SCI seldom-heard groups	June / July 2023	SCI Seldom-heard Groups	Online / in-person meetings	Share evidence collated so far, including transport and place assessment work. Seek feedback on evidence base. Start to discuss potential site and policy options. Provide information on next steps in Plan preparation, and further opportunities to engage with the process.
Targeted landowner engagement (place-based)	June / July 2023	Landowners / Agents	Online / in-person meetings	As above.

Stage 2B Key Outputs

- Community and stakeholder understanding of evidence base collated to date
- Agreement on potential options as a basis for preparation of the Options Document
- Clarity on the next steps of Local Plan preparation and basis for further work
- Continue to prepare SoCG with prescribed bodies and adjoining authorities
- Preparation of Consultation Statement to record outcomes of engagement and consultation

Engagement / Consultation	When?	Who?	Method	Scope
Stage 3: Options Consultation (Reg18)				
Reg18 Options Consultation	October 2023	District-wide	Online Web Form	Consultation on Options Document (plus Easy Read version of the document)
Reg18 webinar	October 2023	District-wide	Webinar	Inform interested parties about content of Options Document, and how to submit representations.
Stage 4: Pre-Draft Consultation Engagement				
Targeted community engagement session (place-based)	January 2024	Place-based community groups - approx. 10 representatives in each area	In person: round table discussion	Feedback responses from reg18 consultation and discuss preferred options.
Stage 5: Draft Consultation (Reg19)				
Reg19 Draft Local Plan Consultation	June 2024	District-wide	Online Web Form	Consultation on Draft Local Plan
Reg19 Webinar	June 2024	District-wide	Webinar	Inform interested parties about content of Draft Local Plan, and how to submit representations.
Stage 6: Submission				
Stage 7: Hearings				
Hearings	January 2025	All interested parties	Hearings	Opportunity for those who submitted representations on the draft document to speak at hearings.

4 Our Engagement and Communication Website

4.1 The Council will set up a webpage which will be live throughout the preparation of the new Local Plan, providing regular updates regarding progress on its preparation. The webpage will be updated regularly, and will comprise the following:

- A webform to which residents and stakeholders can add their contact details, to sign up to our mailing list.
- A live 'Call for Sites' webpage providing a space for landowners and interested parties to upload details on potential development sites. This will also include key dates by which potential development sites should be submitted by.
- A live 'evidence page', to which evidence documents are uploaded as and when they become available.
- A programme showing key dates in the preparation of the Local Plan.
- An engagement page, which will be updated to include dates and details of engagement sessions.

5 Engaging with seldom-heard groups

- 5.1 The Council's Statement of Community Involvement sets out seldom-heard groups with whom the Council will seek to engage directly throughout the preparation of the Local Plan, as summarised below:

Seldom-heard groups the Council will seek to engage

Young people

Children and young people have not traditionally been involved in planning issues.

Involvement will be encouraged through initiatives linked to local universities, colleges, schools and youth groups or other voluntary and community organisations. To effectively engage young people we will need to provide information which is accessible, relevant and engaging. Interactive workshops and the use of models and diagrams would be appropriate.

We will seek to secure the support of youth workers, teachers and play workers to assist us in developing and delivering appropriate activities.

Ethnic Groups

Further work needs to be done to ensure that people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds are engaged and informed in the planning process. Voluntary and community organisations representing ethnic minorities will be routinely consulted. Information might also be disseminated through community newsletters or at community events and made available in different languages.

Faith communities

We also want to ensure that people from a wide range of faith backgrounds are engaged in the planning process. Work undertaken by other initiatives within the Council will be used to guide us in the best ways to engage faith communities. This may include disseminating information through places of worship.

Disabled people

We will seek ideas and feedback from disabled individuals as well as local and national organisations representing disabled people to ensure that community consultation is inclusive and their views are obtained. We will ensure that all community involvement events are fully accessible, and will always respond to any accessibility requests in a positive way by providing Easy Read documents where appropriate.

Gypsies and travellers

We will involve gypsy and traveller groups, particularly as part of the policy evidence gathering process. We will consult members of the gypsy and traveller communities, particularly where issues are of direct relevance.

People living in rural areas

Residents in rural areas may not have easy access to council offices and may have less access to community events depending on where these are held. We aim to build on established Parish Council networks in order to disseminate information and attain feedback at the most local level possible. We will also make links with the creation of Neighbourhood Plans and help to support the development of these Plans.

The development of e-consultation within the Council will ensure that consultation reaches a wider audience. Information, posters and leaflets will be provided for display on village notice boards and in community libraries and mobile libraries for those who may not have access to the internet.

Small business owners

Small businesses have an important role in the local economy. However, there is evidence that small business owners often do not have the time or resources to spare to become involved in planning issues. To overcome this, organisations representing small businesses will be consulted.

Residents

We acknowledge that we need to ensure that all residents in the district have opportunities to be involved in planning issues. Information about a variety of opportunities to be involved in the preparation of planning policy will need to be disseminated widely, and advertised in good time. Residents Associations will also be utilised as a way of disseminating information where they are established. It is noted that unlike residents in the rest of the district, residents of Bath are not represented by either Town or Parish Councils, and that extra effort is needed to reach these residents.

6 Alignment with other Council engagement and consultation events

6.1 The preparation of the Local Plan will be aligned with the preparation of other relevant strategies for the District, and where possible, engagement and consultation events will also be aligned.

6.2 The planning policy team will meet with other services within the Council on a regular basis through an officer steering group, to ensure alignment.

6.3 The services involved in the steering groups will comprise:

- Planning Policy
- Development Management
- Project Management
- Transport Development
- Public Health and Prevention
- Regeneration
- Business and Employment
- Housing
- Green Transformation
- Waste
- Parks and Green Spaces
- Cultural Strategy
- Community Engagement
- Education
- Adult and Children's Services
- Leisure
- Data Analysis

7 Duty to Co-operate

- 7.1 B&NES Council has a duty to co-operate on strategic planning issues that cross administrative boundaries and must collaborate with other strategic authorities to identify any relevant strategic matters which need to be addressed.
- 7.2 Cross-boundary strategic issues relating to the Local Plan might include issues such as addressing the sub-region's housing need, strategic highway issues, and flooding.
- 7.3 We will liaise with the prescribed Duty to Cooperate bodies in identifying the cross-boundary strategic issues and work jointly with them to address such issues through the preparation of the Local Plan. The Council will prepare and maintain a statement of common ground documenting the cross-boundary matters and progress in co-operation.
- 7.4 A full list of 'duty to cooperate bodies' is set out in Part 2 of the Local Plan Regulations 2012. Bath and North East Somerset Council's main duty to cooperate bodies are:
- Bristol City Council
 - South Gloucestershire Council
 - North Somerset Council
 - Mendip Council
 - Wiltshire Council
 - West of England Combined Authority
 - Somerset County Council
 - The Environment Agency
 - Historic England
 - Natural England
 - The Civil Aviation Authority
 - The Homes and Communities Agency
 - NHS Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board
 - Office of Rail and Road