

FOBRA AGM Planning & Major Projects Report 2025

B&NES Local Plan 2022-2042

The programme for producing the next Local Plan for B&NES has been delayed by the new government's revision to National Planning Policy – largely setting new targets for addressing the urgent need for more housing across the country and to stimulate economic growth.

B&NES have now published a document explaining the new programme. 'Re-setting the Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan and the District-wide Spatial Strategy' and the consequent 're-launch' of conversations with key stakeholders. The increase in the housing target for the District equates to an uplift of 105% - rising from 717 new homes a year to 1,471 – a total target of 29,000 over the 20 year plan period.

The City itself is seen as the 'starting point' given the acute need for housing within Bath – and that it offers the best range of employment, services and facilities. Where possible the Council will be looking for opportunities to increase density on sites already identified for development and exploring any brownfield sites which may be suitable (whilst recognising the importance of protecting the WHS and its Cotswold NP setting).

A new call for sites was issued at the beginning of the year and this closed in March. Further consultation with communities has been promised. All Local Plans are to be submitted for examination by December 2026.

Co-Living Policy

The Council has also been consulting on a draft policy on Co-Living developments which, whilst offering to help meet the general housing need in the District, are currently sui-generis and not subject to CIL contributions. The proposal is to restrict occupation to non-student occupiers, using a planning condition or legal agreement. Also, to enable the Council to demand an off-site financial contribution.

Lidl

A new application (ref 25/01403/FUL) has been submitted, which appears at least to address the major reason for withdrawal of the earlier scheme with improved pedestrian and cycle access via a short stretch of new bridge. But we remain concerned by the infringement of the green fringe of Bath in this location (despite the undermining of this fringe by allowing housing development beyond the site) and have now formally objected to the new application. FoBRA's objection to this application is attached at the end of the report.

Bath Rec- Rugby Stadium Proposals

Representations have been submitted on behalf of FoBRA expressing concerns in particular regarding the impact (noise and visual) of the number, scale and frequency of intended 'events' on neighbouring residents and across large parts of the city. We have also pointed out a number of other issues which we consider have not been fully addressed by the applicants including flood risk and the impact of the proposed eating and entertainment uses on existing businesses in the city. The objection lodged by ICOMOS has now been withdrawn – saying that whilst they still have some reservations, they conclude:

"Taking into account all the constraints imposed by the standards with which new stadiums must comply, ICOMOS notes that its wish for a further reduction in the height of the roof cannot be accommodated, and therefore declares that it has no further objections to the revised proposal for the new Bath rugby stadium."

In view of the ICOMOS report, Historic England has also withdrawn its objection to the height of the proposed stands. It should also be noted that there are still objections to the flood analysis /

prevention measures, though it is not clear on whose behalf the objections are lodged due to the extent of the redactions. PERA are maintaining their objection on traffic grounds, especially due to perceived flaws in the travel plan.

University of Bath

The university is proposing to build student accommodation for another 960 students on site – to be built on existing carparking areas. This is in line with Council policy. However, it does raise questions about the intentions for parking (off-site or prohibited perhaps?), particularly as the latest proposal involves building on current areas of parking. If this means a reduction in parking provision and restriction on student and staff parking, this would be supported.

We are also concerned that the building heights will not be such that they intrude on the skyline and views from the city. It also implies a further increase of 5% in total student numbers at the BU and the city.

New Planning reform consultations

Two government papers are currently open to consultation.

Technical consultation on implementing measures to improve Build- Out transparency – with the intention of speeding up the implementation by developers once planning permission has been granted for a scheme – aimed (it would seem) primarily at identifying (and penalising) those developers who routinely sit on land with planning permission. The government is considering a requirement for sites of more than 500 homes to be mixed tenure by default. (which should also speed up build-out rates – also seeking ‘further views on the right threshold’) The National Planning Policy Framework will also be updated later this year.

The government is also exploring whether to give councils the power to refuse to determine applications for more than 50 new homes submitted by slow-build developers (not just by applicants but by any person connected to a consented development that is built unreasonably slowly.)

Councils could have the power to confirm compulsory purchase orders ‘conditionally’ for sites where plans stall where landowners put forward alternative proposals that then fail to come forward.

- There could be a fine for developers who are slow to build permitted homes.
- There is a proposal for measures to assist small- medium sized builders – possibly exempting or limiting small sites from biodiversity net gain rules. This is likely to be controversial with conservationists.
- The government is to publish a “design code” and digital tools to support the delivery of housing on very small sites and new “Housing Delivery Fund for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A new Small Sites Aggregator Pilot is being trialled in Bristol, Sheffield and Lewisham aimed at unlocking sites that would otherwise not be developed and attracting private investment to build new social rent homes.

Reform of Planning Committees: essentially to increase the number of applications delegated for determination by officers, rather than referred to Committee. CPO’s and Committee chairs could be given the power to decide which applications go to committee for delegation. B&NES already have a practice of officer delegation, with only major and controversial applications being referred to Committee. There is also a process for local Councillors to request a call-in to Committee which appears to work successfully. The criteria under which LPAs are at risk of ‘planning performance ‘special measures’ may be tightened.

NORA have contacted members to ask for feedback on this issue, the Planning Group will discuss the issue but also discuss whether we submit our own response to the Government Consultation or we sign up to the NORA submission.

Jan Shepley 10 June 2025

Federation of Bath Residents' Associations (FoBRA) – Comments on the planning application for the Lidl at Lambridge sports ground on the London Road , REF 25/01403/FUL
June 6th 2025

OBJECTION

The Federation of Bath Residents' Associations is an apolitical organisation that is an umbrella representative voice for 34 resident associations (representing about 5,000 resident association members in the City of Bath) and six affiliate organisations that include the University of Bath and both universities' student unions. The residents of Bath are neither represented by a Town nor City Council nor Parish Councils, and thus FoBRA, inter alia, reflects a significant part of the community. Many local residents in Lambridge object to the development on the basis of a variety of reasons: Damage to their local traders' businesses in Larkhall, traffic and congestion impacts on the London Road, displacement of more traffic onto roads in Camden and Larkhall, environmental risks to the sensitive river corridor where protected wildlife now reside in a "wildlife haven", risks to the heritage nature of their neighbourhood. Also they point to the fact that there is a Morrisons a few hundred metres from the proposed site (negating any rationale for another value based supermarket to be built so close).

FoBRA has discussed the proposed change of use of this field at full committee meeting in 2023 and objects to the proposed development of this site. For clarification FoBRA supports appropriate and sustainable development on brown field sites within the city. Our objection relates specifically to this site NOT to Lidl opening new stores on other brownfield sites in Bath.

We are concerned by the erosion of the green ring surrounding Bath resulting in significant harm to the conservation area and World heritage city, the impact of development of this site on the river corridor given the lack of formal Environmental Impact Assessment and contamination survey or report prior to planning application. Finally, the impact of more congestion on the London Road which already contends with substantial traffic volumes impacting on air quality.

Objection 1. Green field development in Bath, erosion of World Heritage setting

The green field site which is subject to this application sits within the conservation area at this most iconic of gateways. We therefore question the selection of a green field site whose very existence helps to make Bath a unique city in the UK and indeed in the world. The gateway to our UNESCO (doubly) inscribed city should exemplify the World heritage values which make the city of Bath so special. The London Road at Lambridge is an important and historic entrance to the city with a clear distinction between the green rural setting and the Georgian town planning.

Of the six Universal values which make up Bath's UNESCO inscription, this site exemplifies three of these universal values:

Georgian town planning

Georgian architecture

Green setting of the city in a hollow in the hills

The Local Plan SPD "Bath city wide character appraisal" identifies the importance of the entrance to the city, describing the character as a "grand gesture entering the city", "This area is an historic route into the city. For many visitors it was and still is the first impression of 18th Century Bath". Chipping away at the universal values which combine to make our city so rare and so special will damage our city irrevocably.

Thus, the current green/agricultural landscape abutting the Georgian town planning makes this a rare and unique entrance to Bath, an iconic gateway to the city where Georgian development meets green fields and the rolling hills.

This green setting itself (as one of the UNESCO universal values) requires the same level of protection as the listed Georgian architecture it sits beside. It is the combination of the two which gives our city the unique World Heritage status.

We have precedent for protecting the green setting of our city, although currently used as a sports field it was originally used for agriculture as river meadow pasture and sits between two protected landscapes of Bathampton and Kensington meadows. All of these meadows require protection not development.

Objection 2. Lack of Environmental Impact Assessment prior to planning application

The field at Lambridge hosts a diverse large population of bats, hawks, kingfishers and, most recently, endangered European beavers. We have photo and video of beavers directly on the site, swimming past the site and feeding nearby. Of-course there are also insects, bees and a wide variety of mature trees and plants. The field is part of the tree lined river corridor which is designated SNCI in the BNES' local plan, a key component of the District's green infrastructure providing benefits for "people, place and nature". The Local Plan Partial update 2023 states that it supports a rich diversity of wildlife, including nationally and internationally protected species for which protective legislation applies.

The environmental sensitivity of the site to a change of use of this nature should have been addressed in a formal Environmental impact assessment. We question why the pre -screening did not require Lidl to submit a formal Environmental Impact Assessment?

Also, given the sensitivity and size, why has an independent contamination survey not been conducted prior to planning application registration under policy PCS5 which requires a proposal to not cause significant harm or risk to health or the environment from contaminants. It is not acceptable to leave an applicant to conduct their own contamination survey post planning; given the commercial pressures they would be under it is difficult to accept full and transparent disclosure or the concept that they will police/scrutinise themselves. Residents of Bath need to understand the implications for public health of any disturbance of this site by developers and be given the chance to scrutinise consultants' reports as consultees as part of the planning process. A formal EIA process prior to planning application would have disclosed the level of contamination at this site and local people would be able to comment on this as part of the planning process.

Objection 3. Traffic impact on congestion and NO2 emissions at Lambridge

It is current practice to require that when a local level is close to 40 microgram/cubic meter modelling is required to show this won't be exceeded. Looking to understand how other significant developments in the city have to demonstrate compliance we have examined a recent scoping exercise conducted by the Council for development at the Recreation Ground. The consultation response from Environmental Monitoring in the EIA Scoping application for the Recreation Ground for example said *"As the Council has been directed by Government to meet 40 µg/m3 any development which causes concentrations to exceed this in Bath will be considered significant in terms of air quality. Due to model sensitivity, areas above 36 µg/m3 should be carefully considered and sensitivity tested."*

Consultees have been deprived of the opportunity to scrutinise the impact on air quality at this part of the London Road where there is a children's play park and where people live.

The latest proposed adjustments to the design of the access to the site for pedestrians and cyclists will have minimal mitigating impact on the traffic arriving in Bath, passing through the junction with Gloucester Road and the flow of traffic into the city on the London Road.