

## Somerset Local Plan: City, Town and Parish Council's Engagement Activity 1

### Overview

Somerset Council is in the early stages of developing a new Local Plan for Somerset. This early engagement activity with City, Town, and Parish Councils looks to collect important information to help shape the Local Plan. City, Town and Parish Councils hold valuable knowledge about their local areas and settlements and therefore play a key role in voicing the interests and experiences of their communities. This activity aims to understand key issues about how settlements operate, including access to services, facilities, jobs, open spaces, and sports facilities. The areas of focus for this engagement exercise include:

- **Collecting information to inform our Settlement Assessment; and**
- **Considering options for our Open Spaces, Built Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy**

### Why your views matter

City, Town and Parish Councils play a crucial role in representing the voices of communities. Views and representations made by City, Town and Parish Councils will therefore be key in planning for the future of Somerset and considering environmental, economic and social opportunities and challenges. We want to know what you think. What are the key opportunities and challenges in your area? What matters most to you?

This activity runs from Monday, 21 October to Sunday, 17 November.

You can respond online <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/bf1957bd/>, or alternatively you can:

- Email responses to [localplanningpolicy@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:localplanningpolicy@somerset.gov.uk), or
- Post a response to Planning Policy, Somerset Council, County Hall, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DY.

### Your chance to help shape our places and spaces

Somerset Council is seeking to ensure that we bring about positive change for our people and places; that will make the Somerset an even better place to live, work and visit. This Local Plan, when adopted, will help to deliver on some of the objectives the Council has set out. Your views are important in helping to shape what this looks like.

### Your details

In order to ensure we can evidence fair and widespread engagement on the Local Plan, with members of the public and stakeholders, we need to ask you a few questions about your personal details.

We handle data in-line with GDPR, you can view our [privacy policy](#) to see how we will use and manage this data. We need this data in order to record your feedback as an official representation to this online engagement activity, and without it we cannot use your opinions to help shape the emerging Local Plan.

#### What is your name?

#### What is your email address?

#### What is your organisation?

## Section 1 - Settlement Assessment Overview

The new Somerset Local Plan will guide sustainable growth in the area, determining where new housing and jobs should go, and what infrastructure is needed. The plan aims to reflect the needs of local communities through early engagement with City, Town and Parish Councils, gathering their input and feedback.

A key part of this plan is the Settlement Assessment, which will look at the facilities and services in different areas to understand how self-sufficient and sustainable they are. This helps identify where more services or infrastructure are needed and informs decisions about where new developments should be focused. The overall development strategy will be based on this assessment and other evidence, aiming to promote sustainable growth by directing it to the most suitable places.

The current engagement seeks to understand the challenges and issues faced by City, Town and Parish Councils and gather suggestions for solutions. This will ensure the Local Plan aligns with the needs and goals of local communities.

**The new Somerset Local Plan** The new Somerset Local Plan will set out a strategy for delivering sustainable growth in Somerset, guiding the kinds of new housing and jobs needed and where they should go. It will identify appropriate areas and sites for development, along with the necessary infrastructure to support this growth, and set policies that will be used for determining planning applications.

This early engagement exercise with City, Town and Parish Councils aims to gather valuable input and feedback from local communities to inform the development of the Local Plan. This exercise is crucial in ensuring that the needs and priorities of these communities are considered from a very early stage in the plan-making process and will feed into our assessment of settlements in Somerset.

The Settlement Assessment forms part of the evidence base for the new Somerset Local Plan to understand the role and function of all the settlements across Somerset. The Settlement Assessment will provide a snapshot in time of the facilities and accessibility to services within the different settlements to understand the level of provision. This can help us see which settlements have the number and breadth of facilities to be more self-contained and those which may not be functioning in a way that would be classed as 'sustainable', where development may lead to additional car trips out of the settlement.

The Settlement Assessment will establish an evidence base that can assist in identifying service or infrastructure shortages which may help to underpin requirements from new developments. This, in turn, will support the formulation of a spatial strategy for the Local Plan, influencing how any identified developments needs are distributed across Somerset and promoting a sustainable pattern of development by focussing growth to the most sustainable places.

This piece of work will not ascertain the capacity for development of each settlement or to provide a quantum of new development that each settlement should accommodate. The overall level of new development directed to settlements in Somerset will be determined through the policies in the new Somerset Local Plan, taking account of the settlement assessment and other evidence as well as other relevant policy documents.

## 1a - Settlement Assessment

Understanding what services and facilities exist in your city or town, or in each settlement within your parish, will help us understand how self-sufficient they are or whether residents need to travel to access the things they need. We want to ensure that growth happens in sustainable locations, where people can access the services and facilities they most need close to home.

We have collected information on what services and facilities we think currently exist across the settlements of Somerset, but would like to verify this according to your local knowledge.

**The purpose of a Settlements Assessment** The purpose of the Settlements Assessment is to help us understand how our city, towns and villages currently work and function, as we start to shape the future and set a strategy for determining the pattern, scale and nature of future development for our new Local Plan for Somerset. How our settlements currently function can give us clues about what we need to do in the future, to deliver positive outcomes for our communities.

To do this, we are looking at three broad topic areas, each of which gives us some insight into the varied roles currently performed by the Somerset's settlements, and how their functionality might be strengthened or may become more vulnerable in the future:

- Settlement size and growth, population and demography
- Access to (and provision of) retail and community services and facilities
- Employment role and economic activity

This initial engagement activity aims to enhance our knowledge by gathering your insights and experiences from your towns and parishes. Understanding individual settlements' roles, functions, strengths and vulnerabilities is an important step in getting to a future growth and development strategy that reflects the particular characteristics and needs of individual settlements. Or, to look at it another way: how addressing the strengths, needs, opportunities and constraints of each of our individual communities can come together into a growth strategy for the Somerset as a whole.

## 1. Please review the Excel Spreadsheet, below.

\*\*\*The online questionnaire has a spreadsheet embedded so you will need to use the online survey to view it. Open the online survey, add temporary name/details and click through to question 1a (1) to see the spreadsheet. <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/bf1957bd/>

## 2. Are there any settlements, within your Council area, that you think are missing from the assessment that should be included?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes, please provide further information.

**3. To the best of your knowledge, do the community facilities we have identified match what you know is in your City or Town; or the settlements within your Parish?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

If not, please provide further information.

**4. Services and facilities within a settlement play a crucial role in shaping how a community functions and its significance in the broader context. In your view, what are the top 10 essential amenities that contribute to a community's self-sufficiency? Please rank them in order of importance, with 1 being the most critical.**

	Ranking (top 10 only)
District Hospital	
Community Hospital	
Health Centre / GP Surgery	
Pharmacy and Walk-ins	
Higher Education College	
Secondary / Middle School	
Primary School	
Nursery / Pre-school	
Food shop	
Comparison goods shops	
Village Hall / Meeting Rooms	
Public House / Restaurant / Café	
Bank / Building Society / Banking Hub	
Library	
Leisure Centre	
Post Office	
Recreation Ground (incl. sports field)	
Dentist / Optician	
Children's Play Area	
Place of Worship / Faith Facility	

**5. Does this list of community services and facilities need any changes, to reflect what might be necessary for a settlement to be self-sufficient?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Unsure

If yes, please provide further information on items to add or remove.

**6. If you have any further comments on community facilities and services, please add them here.**

## **1b – Key Issues**

We are keen to understand the key planning-related issues that you are experiencing in your city, town or parish, as we put together the evidence base that informs the development of the new Local Plan for Somerset. The geography of Somerset is wide and diverse and we want to ensure we hear about all the different issues affecting our communities.

A Local Plan covers topics such as: housing; employment; retail and services; infrastructure; conservation of habitats, species and heritage assets; and mitigating against and adapting to the effects of climate change. It is with these topics in mind, that the following questions are set.

Please note that questions on infrastructure provision and need are set out in the following section.

**1. What are the top planning-related challenges or issues your city, town or parish is currently facing? (Please select in order of priority, 1 being most challenging; and 8 being least)**

	Ranking
Housing affordability	
housing availability	
Adaptation to climate Change	
Ability to walk and wheel to key services and facilities	
Access to education	
Access to public transport	
Impacts on biodiversity, habitats and/or the environment	
Health and wellbeing	

**2. Are there any other challenges or issues, not mentioned here, that your city, town or parish is currently facing? How would you prioritise these?**

**3. How do residents perceive these challenges, and what solutions might there be? Please provide further information.**

**4. Do you have any other comments on this topic?**

## 1c - Infrastructure Priorities

The new Somerset Local Plan will set out a strategy for delivering sustainable growth in Somerset, guiding the kinds of new housing and jobs needed and where they should go. It will identify appropriate areas and sites for development, along with the necessary infrastructure to support this growth, and set policies that will be used for determining planning applications.

**1. What do you view as the top five infrastructure needs in your city, town or parish? (Please select in order of priority, 1 being most important; and 5 being least)**

	Ranking (top 5 only)
GP's and healthcare	
Pre-school education	
Primary education	
Secondary education	
Tertiary education	
Flood mitigation and alleviation	
Sports facilities, open spaces and play areas	
Broadband	
Mobile reception	
Public transport	
Active travel infrastructure	
Postal and banking services	
Community/village hall/meeting space	
Health facilities such as pharmacies, dentists and opticians	

**2. Are there any other provisions, not mentioned here, that you would like to mention? How would you prioritise these?**

*Section 2 begins on the next page...*



## Section 2 - Open Spaces, Built Sports and Playing Pitch Overview

We are currently working on an Open Space, Built Sports Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy, which aims to assess the needs and opportunities for playing pitches, built sports facilities, and open spaces for play and recreation in Somerset. The strategy will cover the entire Somerset area and include the creation of a delivery strategy and a prioritised action plan to meet identified needs.

The strategy will inform the development of policies for the Somerset Local Plan, bringing together new and existing evidence bases into one comprehensive document. The provision of public open space and facilities for sport and recreation is considered essential for individual health and well-being, as well as for promoting sustainable communities.

The strategy will satisfy the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which mandates local authorities to prepare planning policies based on robust and up-to-date assessments of open space, sports, and recreational facilities.

A robust strategy for improving spaces for play, sport, and recreation will contribute to improving the health and well-being of Somerset residents. Providing spaces where people can keep active, promotes healthy living, which has a positive impact on our physical and mental well-being. These positive outcomes contribute to reduced pressure on our valuable healthcare resources, whilst also tackling the root causes of some crime and anti-social behaviour.

Through this early engagement activity, we are seeking your local knowledge to further understand local provision and identify any areas of particular need.

### 2a - Community Views on Facilities

We would like to understand your views about the provision of open spaces, built sports and playing pitches in your city, town or parish, as we gather information to inform our Strategy and also the Local Plan.

#### 1. How satisfied do you believe your local community is with the current provision of play, recreational, and open spaces in their area?

Choose your level of satisfaction

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very Dissatisfied

**2. What are your primary concerns regarding the provision of play areas, recreational spaces, and open spaces for your local community?**

- ☐ Quality of provision
- ☐ Quantity of provision
- ☐ Accessibility via active travel
- ☐ Accessibility via public transport
- ☐ Physical accessibility
- ☐ Affordability
- ☐ Antisocial behaviour
- ☐ Littering
- ☐ Primary purpose misalignment with community needs/interests
- ☐ Lack of multifunctionality
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ No concerns
- ☐ Other (please specify)

If "other", please specify:

**3. Which types of play, recreational, and open spaces are most utilised currently by your local communities?**

- ☐ Sports pitches
- ☐ Indoor sports centres/recreational facilities e.g. sports halls
- ☐ Outdoor recreational facilities e.g. tennis courts, bowling
- ☐ Playgrounds (equipped play area)
- ☐ Parks and gardens e.g. urban or country parks
- ☐ Natural areas e.g. woodland, wetlands, waterways
- ☐ Community gardens e.g. village greens, allotments, orchards
- ☐ Other (please specify)

If "other", please specify:

**4. What kinds of additional play, recreational, and open spaces does the community need in your local area?**

- ☐ Sports pitches
- ☐ Indoor sports centres/recreational facilities e.g. sports halls
- ☐ Outdoor recreational facilities e.g. tennis courts, bowling
- ☐ Playgrounds (equipped play area)
- ☐ Parks and gardens e.g. urban or country parks
- ☐ Natural areas e.g. woodland, wetlands, waterways
- ☐ Community gardens e.g. village greens, allotments, orchards
- ☐ Other (please specify)

If "other", please specify:

Please provide further comments on any additional needs you have identified

**5. Which groups feel least served by the play, recreational, and open spaces in your local community?**

- ☐ Children and young families
- ☐ Teenagers
- ☐ Older adults
- ☐ Low-income families
- ☐ Persons with disabilities
- ☐ Ethnic minorities
- ☐ Girls and young women
- ☐ Other (please specify)

If "other", please specify:

**6. While the Local Plan doesn't deliver or maintain play, recreational, and open spaces, it ensures these needs are planned for in existing and new developments. What do you think are the most important roles of the Local Plan in enhancing these facilities in your community? (Please rank in order of importance, 1 being the most important)**

	Ranking
Allocation of sites - for additional facilities	
Protecting and enhancing sites – protecting from encroaching development and enhancing through considering other play/recreational uses	
Promoting community participation – in the planning process, ensuring that facilities meet local needs and support healthy lifestyles	
Sustainable development – integrating recreational facilities into urban and rural planning through improved accessibility through active travel and public transport	
Inclusiveness for everyone	
Ensuring climate resilience of recreational spaces	

**7. What are the main obstacles in sustaining and providing play, recreational, and open spaces within your local community? (Please rank in order of importance, with 1 being the most important)**

	Ranking
Funding	
Management	
Resources	
Land availability	
Addressing safety concerns	
Other (please specify)	

If "other", please specify:

## 2b - Location of Facilities

We have identified the location of open spaces, built sports and playing pitches in your area, but need to verify this against your local knowledge.

*\*\*\*The online questionnaire has an interactive map so you will need to use the online survey to view this map. Open the online survey, add temporary name/details and click through to question 2b (1) to see the map. <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/planning/bf1957bd/> It asks you to check the map below matches your local knowledge of open spaces, built sports facilities and playing pitches in your city or town, or for settlements in your parish. If there are any facilities you would like to add or amend, please drop a pin on the map.*

**1. Does the map match your knowledge of the location of open spaces, built sports facilities and playing pitches in your city or town, or for settlements in your parish?**

☐ Yes

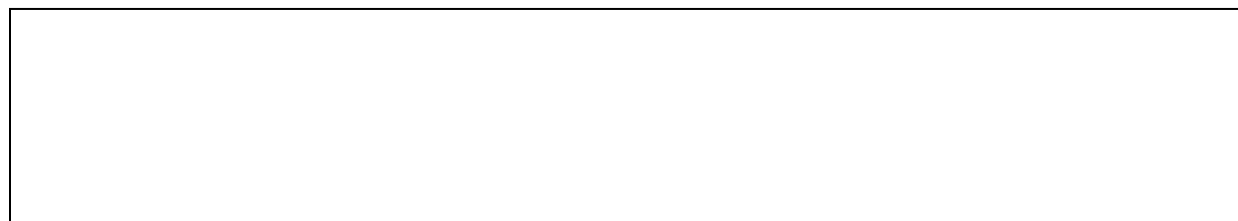
☐ No

☐ Unsure

If "no" or "unsure", please drop a pin on the map to identify an additional location, or a feature that is incorrect, and provide further comments below.



If you have any further comments on open spaces, built sports facilities and playing pitches, please add them here.



*This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time to contribute.*