How will Congresbury plan for its future?

A report for Congresbury Parish Council

June 2015

Authors: Liz Greaves, Stuart Sampson
Planning for the future

For most of us we go about our daily routines and look forward to a planned holiday in 12 months’ time. However as a village we need to plan not for the next 12 months, or even the next 5 years but look forward and decide how our village will develop over a longer timescale – what will our village look like in 10, 15 or 25 years?

This is the key question for many cities, district councils and parish councils throughout England. Population growth, rising house prices and changes in lifestyles have increased the demand for homes. North Somerset faces these same issues.

This document reviews the current situation in 2015, the current planning tools and recommends a neighbourhood plan should be developed by Congresbury Parish Council covering the next 25 years. This plan should cover future housing requirements, infrastructure and support requirements, enhancement of open spaces, provision of community buildings and business opportunities.
1. Current position in North Somerset and Congresbury

In 2012, North Somerset Council adopted its new core strategy outlining development until 2026. This gave the necessary planning protection for Congresbury that would not allow development outside the settlement boundary (Figure 1). The Parish Council agreed that there was sufficient protection in the core strategy and decided not to develop a neighbourhood development plan (Decision made in 2012).

Figure 1 – Congresbury defined settlement boundary

Bristol University challenged the core strategy policy CS13 about scale of housing and following a high court decision North Somerset Council had to revise its forecast of future housing numbers. Although the core strategy remained in place, in March 2013 a number of policies were remitted.

North Somerset Council then developed a new property forecast and this was examined by the Planning Inspectorate. The initial examination took place in March 2014 and the inspector provided his findings in April 2014. North Somerset Council made further comments in August 2014. The inspector than re-examined the numbers in January 2015 before providing his final report in March 2015. The judgement was North Somerset Council should plan to build a total of 20,985 houses by 2026. In 2012 the core strategy had planned for 14000. The inspector noted that there is now a
backlog of housing. In his view the backlog in the ‘five-year supply’ should be addressed within that time period. North Somerset Council contend that they should be given time to address any backlog (as a result of the new target) within the whole planning period to 2026.

Figure 2 – North Somerset Council – core strategy

North Somerset Council in March 2015, made a request to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to intervene directly in the determination of the appropriate level of housing to be provided in North Somerset. Under a rarely used piece of national planning legislation, the decision commits the Secretary of State to review and consider the housing requirement contained within the North Somerset Core Strategy.

However this uncertainty about land supply and property numbers has allowed for a number of speculative planning applications from three developers on land outside Congresbury’s settlement boundary during 2014 and 2015. This is against policies within the Core Strategy and Congresbury Parish Council current planning policy. This unregulated and unsustainable development could seriously impact the village and its future growth. The village of Congresbury needs to take back ownership of its future from developers and ensure it decides where, when and what type of housing should be built.

Figure 3 – Current planning applications that are outside settlement boundary (as of June 2015)

[Map showing current planning applications]

2. How Congresbury has planned its future

Following extensive consultation Congresbury developed and published its ‘Village character statement’ in 1998. Village Character Statements encapsulate what is best and most attractive about villages and, once adopted by North Somerset Council, have to be taken into account in planning applications or decisions of a similar nature.

This was superseded in 2007 when Congresbury published its Parish Plan\(^2\). This Parish Plan was built around five main themes:

- Governance, Power and Influence
- Individuals, Community and Society
- A balance community
- Facilities and amenities
- Our Environment

The Parish Plan still remains in force.

Congresbury Parish Council has a planning policy\(^3\) that it adheres to when assessing planning applications. This current states it will not support any planning applications outside the settlement boundary.

3. Current central government policy

The government encourages sustainable development and has through the Localism Act 2011 aimed to devolve more decision making powers from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils. The National Policy Planning Framework was revised and published in March 2012. This installed a requirement for local authorities (such as North Somerset Council) to ensure they identified a 5 year land supply and a plan for development. Without this, housing developers could apply for permission in areas not identified for development if they could demonstrate the development was sustainable.

4. Options for Congresbury to plan its future

Congresbury Parish Council has several planning techniques it could use to help support its planning policy and North Somerset Council core strategy (known also as a local plan). The three main techniques are:

- Neighbourhood plan
- Parish Plan
- Village design statement

The CPRE\(^4\) provides a good overview of these techniques on its website at - http://planninghelp.cpre.org.uk/improve-where-you-live/shape-your-local-area

The review of the different planning strategies are outlined in Figure 4.


\(^4\) CPRE – Campaign to Protect Rural England
### Figure 4 – Review of planning strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of plan</th>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood plan</td>
<td>• Has legal status through Localism Act 2011</td>
<td>• Time consuming as could take several years to develop</td>
<td>To be useful, the Neighbourhood Plan must complement North Somerset Council core strategy (Local plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Local authority will need to take account of the plan</td>
<td>• Expert opinion will cost money</td>
<td>Estimate cost could be £30,000 to develop and would need to be updated to support the core strategy. Grants are available of £8,000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community involvement is key</td>
<td>• Needs a lot of community support and volunteers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Plan based on evidence and facts and independently verified</td>
<td>• That it may cause confusion within the community as it’s not a blocker to development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Grants are available to offset costs</td>
<td>• Plan may get neutered down to pass the inspectors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish Plan</td>
<td>• Parish Plan already developed. Update current Plan and build on work already done</td>
<td>• Has no legal status but can be used to support decisions</td>
<td>Estimated cost would be around £20,000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Includes everything, not just planning and housing development</td>
<td>• Time consuming as would need to consult the community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community involvement</td>
<td>• Will incur costs to gather evidence and no grants are available.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Developers can ignore the Parish Plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Type of plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Needs a lot of community support and volunteers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Village design statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Help with keeping a certain look to new developments so in keeping with current settlement • Quick and cost effective</td>
<td>• No legal status • Very limited scope of influence • Out of date • No formal community involvement • Vague</td>
<td>Estimated cost of £5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 5. Recommendations

Following a review of the possible planning strategies, it is recommended that Congresbury Parish Council:

- **Develop a neighbourhood development plan.** A neighbourhood development plan has a legal standing compared to other alternatives. However it will take time to produce and will need to complement North Somerset Council core strategy i.e. need for future development.

- **Seek funding from external organisations as soon as possible for assistance in producing a neighbourhood development plan.** Currently £8,000 is available as a grant from an organisation called ‘Locality’. Further grants are available. North Somerset Council will not be able to help financially but will provide access to data and technical help depending on staff resources.

- **Allocate a budget for the development of a neighbourhood development plan during financial years of 2015-16 and 2016-17.** An initial estimate shows that up to £30,000 may be required to produce a neighbourhood development plan. Possible expenditure could be:
  - £10K for expert reports on infrastructure issues
  - £5K for expert reports on future population growth for Congresbury
  - £10K for legal and technical planning advice to ensure the plan is compliant with current regulations
  - £5K for community engagement

## Get in contact
If you want to know more or want to get involved in Neighbourhood planning, please contact the Clerk at Congresbury Parish Council:

The Old School Rooms
Station Road
Congresbury
BS49 5DX

Email: Clerk@Congresbury-pc.gov.uk

Telephone: 01934-838802

Web-site: www.congresbury-pc.gov.uk/