

The Core Strategy: A response from Radstock Action Group

Prior to addressing issues raised under the questions in the Core Strategy area dealing with Midsomer Norton, Radstock and Environs, we wish to make the following central, key points:

1. The overall document contains a wide-ranging view of the future development of the area. Unfortunately a very large proportion of the claims and suggestions in the Core Strategy are directly undermined by the current Norton Radstock Regeneration Company (NRR) proposals for the area.
2. The sections referring to Radstock are in many points inaccurate, out-of-date and reveal a very serious level of ignorance about the town, its history, its social make-up and its economy. For example, the figures quoted for the proportion of residents now working outside Radstock.
3. The residents and businesses of Radstock have repeatedly stated that their priorities for the town are not represented through the NRR proposals. We regret that the Core Strategy does nothing to reflect the debates which are central to the future development of the town as expressed through the opinions of local residents and businesses.
4. We note (p6) that the Core Strategy must be in 'general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy'. Our reading of the Core Strategy suggests that it most certainly is not in general conformity in some very striking ways, amongst which is housing in Radstock.
5. Whilst totally different from Bath, Radstock has a long and illustrious history which is totally ignored in the Core Strategy. We trust that the same set of values will eventually be applied equitably across all the towns and villages involved. Each one has to retain and nurture its sustainability, inclusiveness and distinctiveness – we reject any double standards between Bath and other areas.

Headline Issue

The vulnerable local economy and the need for diversification and expansion

Q63 Are tourism opportunities being overlooked?

Not only are tourism opportunities being overlooked, the Core Strategy contains virtually no reference to the historical and cultural heritage of Radstock – the current plans for Radstock (NRR) would virtually put paid to any development of Radstock as a tourist area. This is also true of the natural and environmental wealth of Radstock which would serve as a major source of interest for many tourists.

Q64 How far should existing employment sites be retained? Should more land be allocated for employment use?

It is unclear what is meant by allocation of land 'for employment use'. Radstock has effectively been home to a wide range of employment, and there is no reason to suppose that this cannot continue. In addition, working and employment opportunities are now much more varied and Radstock, with its mixed town and rural surroundings, is ideally suited to develop smaller scale, less traditional employment, but only providing that adequate economic support and incentives are in place.

Radstock must be promoted as a small business area and there should be substantial programmes to promote apprenticeships for young people, including better links to education facilities and real incentives to local, small employers to take on trainees and participate in the development of a local skilled workforce.

Q65 Alternatively, should we accept that a growing proportion of residents will commute out of the area and therefore seek to improve public transport to major employment centres such as Bath and Bristol?

The idea that a growing proportion of residents will commute is predicated on the assumption that Radstock will be a site for massive increases in housing. We entirely reject this model. What is required is the provision of employment in the area for those who already live there. Such jobs will only be created if a sensitive use is made of present employment sites and proper emphasis put on tourism, leisure and suitably scaled retail, all of

which will provide jobs for local people.

Q66 How can the economy be diversified and revitalised to create a stronger economic base?

Serious attention should be paid to encouraging small businesses, through the development of tourism, specialist shopping (as an alternative to the mall-type experience offered by Bath and Bristol).

Seed money and economic guarantees for nurturing business should be put in place.

Issue NR1

The role and function of the settlements

Q67 Should the relationship between Midsomer Norton, Radstock and the surrounding villages be recognised and the development of the wider area planned for in an integrated way?

The relationship between all the above mentioned is misunderstood throughout the Core Strategy document.

Radstock has always been a totally distinctive settlement and residents are proud of its separate identity. Despite the claims of the Strategy to have at its centre the principles of being sustainable, inclusive and distinctive (p7), any move to a so-called, 'integrated way' belies ignorance on the part of the authors of the document and runs totally against the wish of Radstock to retain and develop its distinctive character.

Q68 Should Midsomer Norton be classified as a market town as defined by the Regional Spatial Strategy?

Any attempt to develop Midsomer Norton at the expense of the thriving retail profile of Radstock will certainly be counter to the best interests of Radstock. We would certainly expect an enhanced plan to develop Radstock. We also believe that any moves in this direction should be subject to detailed public consultation.

At this point, we also wish to stress that to characterise Radstock as once a market town, is not accurate. Radstock has a healthy retail existence and did have a market, but this was secondary to its primary function and designed to serve those in the area, so

supporting the mining priorities of the town.

Q69 Should development be concentrated in Midsomer Norton and Radstock or distributed between the settlements in the area?

In terms of business and employment, Radstock Action Group maintains that jobs should be available near to where people already live; increased concentration in Radstock and Midsomer Norton will deflect from this principle and increase traffic unnecessarily – we would like the strategy to work to keep local people employed locally.

Q70 Alternatively should the Green Belt be extended to this area and only small scale development within the existing built up areas be permitted?

Radstock Action Group recognises that there are inevitable pressures but we note that the green belt is already under threat and wish to preserve the rural nature of the town's surroundings as they are part of the distinctiveness of the town, through such special features as the hills.

Q71 How far can planning of the southern Bath & North East Somerset and northern Mendip be co-ordinated?

Such planning coordination would require widespread and meaningful public consultation. It would also be dependent on the named authorities acting on the views of those consulted rather than continuing on an alternative and opposing route

Issue NR2

New housing – a threat or an opportunity

Q72 How much new housing should be accommodated to assist the economic growth in the south of the District?

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), as highlighted in this Core Strategy paper, sets out a series of housing proposals which are entirely different from those currently proposed by BANES.

We fail to see how the RSS is supported by current BANES and NRR proposals and urge the authority to keep to its claim of wishing to implement the RSS.

Q73 If more houses are needed, where should they go? Should one or two of the towns and villages be expanded or should the houses be dispersed – perhaps along a circular transport corridor?

Nowhere in the Core Strategy document is there any statement of a unifying housing policy. It should make clear what the housing is required for – we support the principle that housing should be affordable to local people and should be a part of a local economy which enables residents to work near their homes, rather than increasing swathes of commuter housing estates which increase pollution and traffic and destroy the distinctiveness of each individual settlement.

In addition, the principle of being 'inclusive' as defined in the document 'addressing inequalities within our area' is directly flouted by ignoring the principle of local jobs and housing affordable to local people.

Q74 Should the gaps between villages such as between Paulton, Hallatrow and High Littleton be protected?

They should – to be sustainable, inclusive and distinctive, it is essential to retain the separate identity of each of the local villages.

Issue NR3

Transport Improvements to assist economic growth and meet social needs

Q74 How can public transport – in particular links to Bristol and Bath be improved?

Radstock Action Group supports the development of proper public transport for Radstock, linking it to Bristol, Bath and other towns and villages, particularly as a properly regenerated Radstock would enable local people from surrounding villages to use Radstock rather than always having to go to major centres.

At present, the lack of any possibility of a bus lane makes public bus transport very poor – it is the responsibility of the authority to address this issue, in conjunction with other matters relating to the management of car use.

Q76 Should the former railway lines continue to be safeguarded for sustainable transport use?

Radstock Action Group wishes to state that it entirely supports the principle of keeping open the options for the reintroduction of rail links between Radstock and other towns.

It is a matter of the deepest concern that the current NRR proposals, coupled with their recent vandalising, by the developer, of the railway land in Radstock, fly in the face of this principle, even though it was earlier adopted in planning principles for the area. It also flies in the face of national policy which is now designed to preserve and develop rail links where they already exist or where they have existed and could be revived.

Any further pursuit of the NRR plan in relation to the railway land will lead to an irreversible obstacle to the rail link being reopened – houses will have completely covered it in the centre of the town.

BANES should not move from the original allocation of the railway land to mixed development which would keep open the possibility of the renewal of rail links. An Impact Exercise on this whole area should be an urgent priority.

Mass housing on the site will lead, not to regeneration but to degeneration.

Issue NR4

How can regeneration improve the centres of Midsomer Norton and Radstock? What should their respective roles and function be?

Q77 Should Radstock continue to compete with Midsomer Norton as a shopping centre or should the latter's key role be protected and enhanced?

Radstock residents would generally be surprised to hear that there is a simple competition here. Each town provides particular and specialist services in the retail sector.

Radstock needs to retain its distinctive character as a shopping centre; only in this way will it be able to benefit from growing as a centre for tourism, leisure activities and education and training.

Issue NR5

Improvements to Local Facilities

Q78 What gaps are there in social, health, recreational and cultural facilities?

Whilst relatively well-endowed with football pitches, Radstock has virtually no other sports facilities.

Radstock requires affordable sports and leisure facilities for all its residents, of all ages.

Any proposals which will further damage the chances of local residents of receiving full healthcare should be addressed immediately – transport to Bath is poor, especially for the elderly and ill who need to go there to obtain treatment.

We wish to see an enhancement of local healthcare facilities, close to people's homes.

The young people of Radstock are particularly poorly served in recreational terms and we wish to see improvements to the hours and facilities available for youth.

Whilst boasting one of the finest museums of its type, Radstock deserves such key facilities to be recognised and developed at the heart of the tourist programme.

This would be a core plank for developing other cultural sites and facilities in the town.

Nowhere in the Core Strategy is there any mention of the fact that the town centre has been designated the best preserved mining town centre in the country; the local authority is currently intent on supporting a development (NRR) which would effectively lead to the collapse of the beautiful late Victorian town hall – it would not be able to withstand the traffic flow in the new road planned.

The heart of the conservation area which should form the heart of the regeneration of the town in cultural, social, health and recreational terms, is destined to the same fate – the old buildings will not withstand the road plans – the Core Strategy will be

meaningless for Radstock if these plans go ahead.

We propose that building on the success of initiatives such as those put in place by Sustrans, there should be a Nature and Industrial Heritage Reserve which would develop, tend and safeguard the natural, environmental, industrial and cultural wealth for which Radstock is already noted.

Q79 How can we bring forward the town park and is the extent of the existing proposal still appropriate?

The town park in Midsomer Norton is nothing to do with Radstock.

As far as the development of green spaces in Radstock is concerned, we welcome any such development within the town and we have only one question to those managing the core strategy – how does destroying the centre of Radstock through the development of a massive road plan and crowded housing (205 houses where the national housing inspectorate said no more than 50) help to develop green spaces at the centre of the town?

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