Retail & Town Centres Briefing Note

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan

ON BEHALF OF BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

September 2025

Contents

1. Introduction

Scope and Purpose

1.1 This Briefing Note has been prepared by Nexus Planning ('Nexus') for Bath & North East Somerset Council ('B&NES') in order to provide information, analysis and advice on retail and main town centre land use issues associated with the preparation of the new Local Plan for Bath & North East Somerset.

1.2 B&NES commenced work on its new Local Plan in 2022, although, following the publication of the new version of the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') in December 2024[1], a decision was taken to reset the preparation of the Local Plan. This decision was primarily based upon the way that housing need is calculated, which led to a significant increase in the number of new homes which should be planned for in the Local Plan.

1.3 Given that the provision of new homes will be within the context of creating sustainable healthy places and supporting jobs/economic growth, there is a need for the evidence base for the new Local Plan to consider a wide range of economic development, social infrastructure and transportation issues. Work is underway on these evidence base studies and this Briefing Note intends to provide B&NES with a package of information which covers the following topic areas:

a. A review of the current background context to retail and town centre issues, including wider economic trends which have the potential to influence general market conditions and how B&NES should plan for retail and main town centre land use provision. This review has also considered the key changes which have occurred since the completion of the current development plan evidence base, along with current trends in the retail and leisure sectors. This assessment can be found in Section 2 of this report.

b. An assessment of the salient retail and town centre planning policy issues associated with the spatial strategy policy options for the new Local Plan can be found in Section 3. This includes an assessment of how the needs of planned large scale residential development can be met via existing and, potentially, planned new 'town centres'.

1.4 At the present time, B&NES is working towards an Options Document consultation in Autumn 2025 and is currently undertaking assessment work around the potential suitability of sites which may form part of the options consultation. The preparation of this Briefing Note has had access to these potential development locations, which have been used to make an assessment of the key retail and town centre land use issues.

Previous Retail & Town Centre Evidence Base Studies in Bath & North East Somerset

1.5 Over the past several years there have been two previous retail and town centre evidence base documents produced to inform plan making in the B&NES administrative area. These include a study, completed in 2018 which examined the health of the main 'town centres' (Bath, Keynsham, Midsomer Norton and Radstock), along with an assessment of need for new retail land use development and an analysis of locations to meet the identified need. In addition, a further study was prepared in 2021 which examined a focused set of specific issues, including: retail trends (including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on town centres and a review of the retail land use strategy for Midsomer Norton).

The Context for this Briefing Note

1.6 A standard element of the evidence base library for most development plan documents is an assessment of retail and main town centre land use issues, with a view to understanding matters such as: 'town centre' health, background trends

[1] And updated in March 2025

in the retail sector, the need for retail floorspace and, where appropriate, the assessment of locations to meet identified needs, along with a review of the appropriate retail and town centres planning policy framework to be included in the development plan.

1.7 Given the stage of preparation of the new B&NES Local Plan, including the decision to reset the preparation of the Plan in order to addressed the need to plan for greater levels of housing and economic land, B&NES officers and Nexus have considered how the above requirements (which are set out in part of paragraph 90 of the NPPF) should be addressed.

1.8 In particular, consideration has been given to whether key elements of the evidence base gathering process for retail and town centre issues should await further progress on the preparation of the spatial strategy. For example, this can include the optimum time for assessing, in detail, the need for retail, leisure and other main town centre land uses. In particular, it may be premature, in certain circumstances, to undertake a comprehensive assessment of 'need' prior to a preferred spatial development strategy for new residential development.

1.9 As a consequence, a decision has been taken to split the preparation of the evidence base on retail and town centre issues in B&NES for the new Local Plan into two parts. The first part, contained within this Briefing Note, examines the issues outlined in paragraph 1.3 above. A second stage, which is planned to take place after the Options Consultation in Autumn 2025 and before the consultation on the Draft Local Plan in 2026, is proposed to incorporate additional evidence base gathering and analysis. This will include: (a) updated assessments of 'town centre' health; (b) gathering new and up to date information on shopping and spending patterns across the B&NES administrative area; (c) an assessment of the quantitative and qualitative need for retail floorspace across B&NES; and (d) recommendations for the new Local Plan's retail and town centre strategy based upon the preferred overall spatial strategy.

2. Retail & Town Centre Trends

Introduction

2.1 A key part of building the background context for the evidence base library on retail and town centre issues in B&NES is an examination of retail, leisure and town centre trends. Like any land use sector, economic and commercial market trends, along with external factors, will have a key influence on how a local authority will plan for individual land uses and how it will develop strategic planning policies to guide development and other regeneration initiatives.

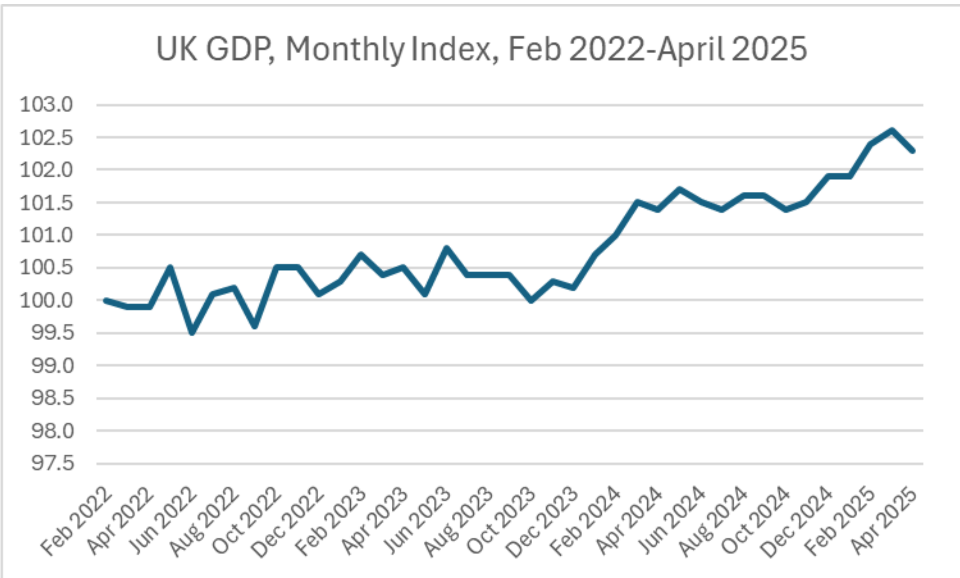
2.2 We have therefore examined national economic issues and trends, along with commercial retail sector issues. Within these topic areas, it is important to consider events which have occurred since the preparation of the previous evidence base studies on retail and town centre issues in 2018 and 2021 and also the adoption of the Local Plan Partial Update in 2023, including how actual events may have matched or diverged from previous forecasts and assessments.

National Trends

GDP

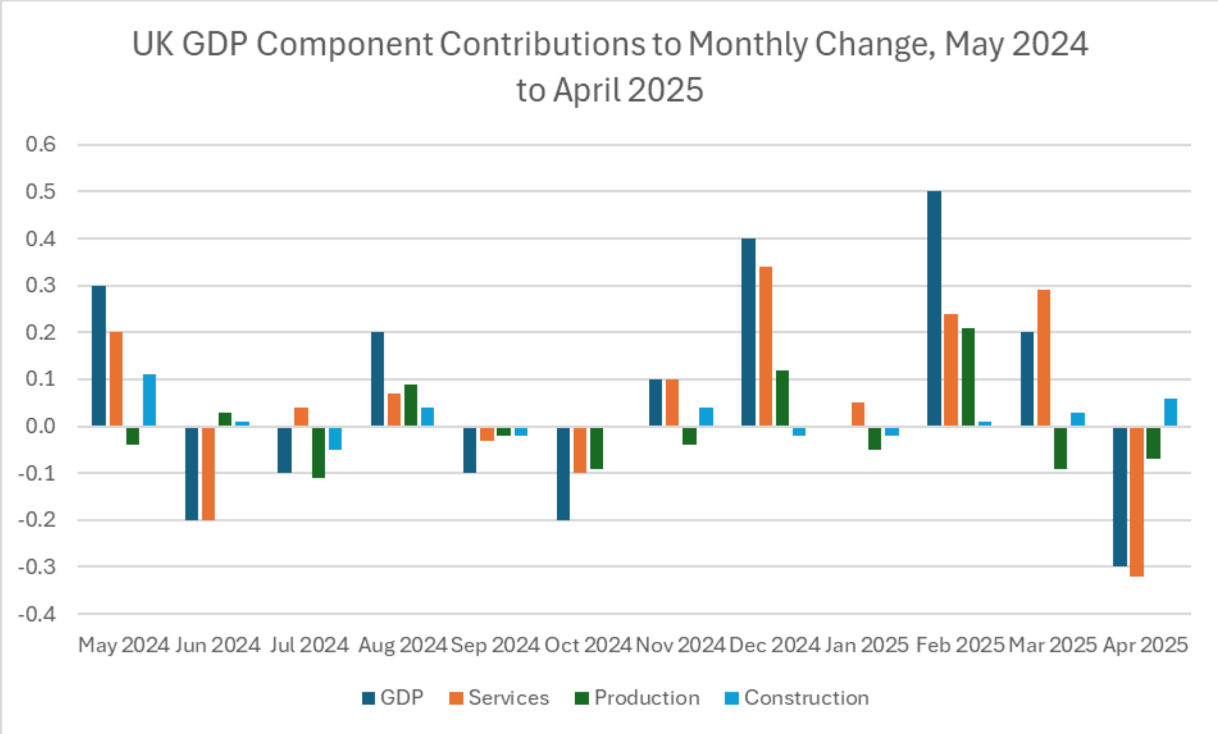
2.3 Monthly real gross domestic product ('GDP') is estimated to have grown by 0.7% in the three months to April 2025, compared with the three months to January 2025, largely driven by growth in the services sector in this period. There was growth in all three main sectors in the three months to April 2025, with a rise of 0.6% in services sector output the main contributor to the increase in GDP, whilst production and construction output grew by 1.1% and 0.5% respectively. Figure 2.1 shows the trend in UK GDP since the start of 2022, including a 0.3% fall in GDP in April 2025.

Figure 2.1: UK GDP, monthly index, January 2007 to April 2025 (source: Office for National Statistics)



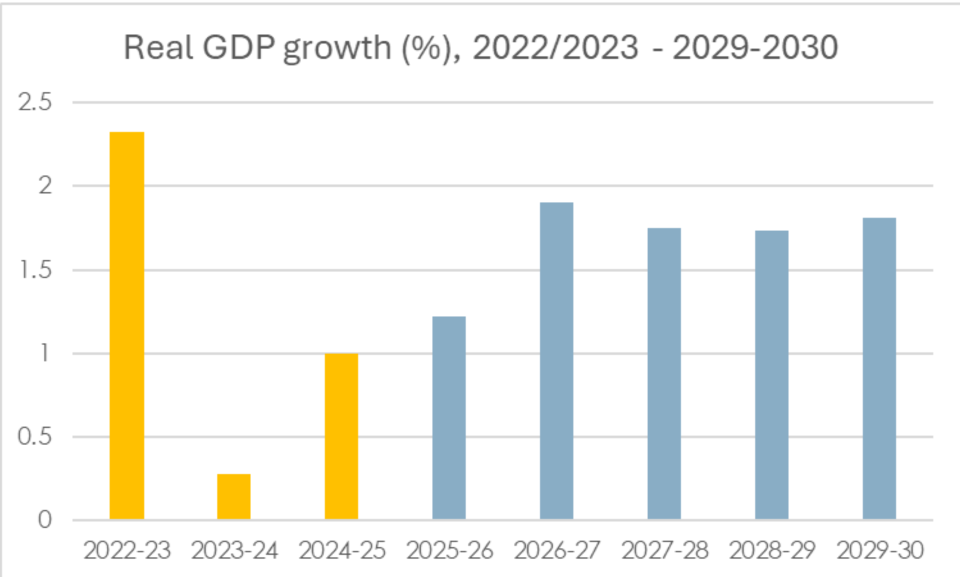
2.4 Figure 2.2 below shows the component contributions to UK GDP between May 2024 and April 2025, including the overall change in GDP, plus the contributions of the service, construction and production sectors.

Figure 2.2: UK GDP Change, 2024-2025 – Components of Change (Source: ONS)



2.5 Looking to the future, the Office of Budget Responsibility ('OBR') are predicting the economy to growth by around 1% during 2024-2025 financial year, following a poorly performing 2023-2024 (0.27%). Looking to the future, the OBR is forecasting higher levels of growth in 2025-2026 (1.2%), rising to 1.9% in 2026-2027 and 1.8% in 2029-2030.

Figure 2.3: Real GDP Growth (Source: OBR)



Consumer Spending

2.6 As consumer spending accounts for around 60% of GDP, the financial health of households and their willingness to spend are crucial factors in determining an economy's performance. Traditionally, consumer spending is the driving force behind GDP growth in the UK. In recent years, however, this has not been the case. First, the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lookdowns resulted in temporary large drops in spending and big changes to spending patterns (such as a greater share of spending on goods and less on services). Then, just as spending had recovered to its pre-pandemic level, the period of high inflation in 2022 and 2023 squeezed household budgets, resulting in stagnant spending in real (inflation-adjusted) terms.

2.7 Household incomes, on average across the country, have increased since 2023 mostly because wage growth has been higher than inflation. However, UK retail sales spending growth was minimal and below the rate of inflation in the final three months of 2024, suggesting consumers remained cautious in what is typically the busiest period of the year for shops. In the three months to December, sales were up only 0.4% from the same period in 2023, when the economy was in a technical recession, according to figures published by the British Retail Consortium.

2.8 UK consumer spending grew in April 2025, boosted by warmer weather and the late timing of Easter, despite increased uncertainty over US trade tariffs and rising costs. The value of retail sales increased at an annual rate of 7% in April, well above the 12-month average of 1.4%, according to figures published by the British Retail Consortium ('BRC').

2.9 Retail sales growth has been weaker than inflation for most of the past three years, as the UK's cost of living crisis prompted households to cut back on purchases. But sales volumes grew by 1.6% in the three months to March 2025, the fastest pace since mid-2021.

Business Investment

2.10 Companies in recent years have faced rising costs (including for staff), weak demand, a high level of uncertainty, and higher borrowing costs as interest rates rose. One consequence has been that business investment has struggled to expand. In the first quarter of 2025 business investment increased by 5.9% and is 8.1% above the level in the same quarter a year ago. Forecasts by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research think tank similarly expect annual growth of between 2% and 3% in business investment over 2025 and 2026.

2.11 However, policy measures announced at the Autumn 20204 Budget (see later in this section) will now affect businesses and their investment plans. This includes increases in National Insurance Contributions, alongside continued pressure on other costs including raw material and energy costs.

Unemployment

2.12 The unemployment rate remains low by historical standards, with the official measure produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) standing at around 4% between 2022 and 2024. However, UK unemployment rose to a four year high in the run-up to April's increases in payroll taxes and the minimum wage as pay growth cooled, underlying the mounting strains in the labour market.

2.13 Employers cut the number of payrolled staff by 55,000 between March and April 2025, leaving the headcount 0.4% per cent lower than in April 2024. Provisional figures for May, although likely to be revised to show a smaller contraction, showed a month-on-month drop of 109,000 concentrated in hospitality and retail. In recent months vacancies have fallen, the number of people claiming jobless benefit rose and the unemployment rate has edged up to a four year high of 4.6%. This is likely to be caused by businesses grappling with higher national insurance contributions and the rise in the minimum wage.

2.14 Annual growth in average weekly wages, excluding bonuses, slowed to 5.2% in the first quarter of 2025. This was caused by weak private sector pay growth (with the overall figure buoyed by recent public sector pay deals).

Inflation

2.15 The annual rate at which prices of goods and services in the UK are rising – the consumer prices index ('CPI') inflation rate – has slowed since reaching 11.1% in October 2022, a 41-year high. In September 2024, the inflation rate was 1.7%, down from 2.2% in August 2024 and the lowest since April 2021. However, UK inflation accelerated to 3.4% in May 2025 which is an indication of the persistent price pressures which have yet to recede over the past year. The May 2025 figure comes as the outlook for inflation is further complicated by the conflict in the middle east, which risks pushing oil prices higher. The UK has a target rate for inflation of 2%.

Interest Rates

2.16 In August 2024, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) cut interest rates for the first time since the pandemic. The benchmark 'bank rate' was lowered from 5.25% to 5.0%, and has continued to fall to 4.25%. Rates were held at 4.25% in June 2025, although the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee did indicate that rates remain on a downward longer term trend. Rates were held due to persistently strong inflation and the additional current uncertainty posed by the conflicts in the Middle East (and their impact upon oil prices).

A Closer Look at the Retail Sector

2.17 Taking the above factors into account, Table 2.1 below provides a summary of Experian's 'central case' forecast for retail sales growth and associated floorspace requirements at the UK level from 2024 to 2032 and 2040 (taking into account the impact of special forms of trading (i.e. internet shopping) and floorspace efficiency gains). It shows that efficiency gains in floorspace are likely to match retail sales growth minus SFT up to 2032, thus leading to a situation where there is nil / negligible growth in retail floorspace. Over the longer term, to 2040, the outlook is expected to improve slightly, although the potential for net gains in floorspace remains very low, at 0.2% per annum and 3.3% overall between 2023 and 2040.

Table 2.1: retail sales growth, efficiency gains and floorspace requirements

	% p.a. 2023 - 2032	Cumulative Growth, 2023-2032	% p.a. 2023-2040	Cumulative Growth, 2023-2040
Retail sales growth	1.6	14.8	1.8	35.6
Retail sales growth, less SFT adjusted for sales from stores	1.1	10.0	1.3	24.7
Efficiency gains	0.9	8.7	1.2	21.5
% increase in floorspace required after efficiency gains (sales growth less efficiency gains)	0.1	1.3	0.2	3.3

Source: Experian, 2025

2.18 In order to get a broader picture of floorspace requirements, the above figures should also be read alongside vacancy levels across the country. According to figures from Experian's GOAD database, the UK retail store vacancy rate has been trending upwards in recent years, and hit a peak of 19.8% in 2024. This was an increase of 0.7 percentage points compared to 2023 and 5.4 points above 2019 national average levels. This overall picture, where almost one fifth of space within the UK's main traditional retail centres (city, town and district centres) is empty, is a clear cause for concern and is a key indicator of potentially too much retail floorspace within town centres. It is also important that this national situation is compared with local circumstances in the main 'town centres' in B&NES; a topic will should be covered in the next stage of evidence base gathering for the new Local Plan.

2.19 Alongside sales growth, it is also important to examine retail spending volumes, as this type of forecast is a key input into local authority retail floorspace capacity assessments. In particular, the scale of change in retail spending will have an influence on the performance of existing retail floorspace and also help to establish whether there is a case for net additional floorspace to be provided over the course of the development plan period.

2.20 Section 3 of the 2021 Retail Study provided information on the changes in actual and forecast retail spending per head which have occurred since the 2018 Retail Study and that information has been updated for the purposes of this Briefing Note in order to bring the evidence base data up to date. Information on spending per head for comparison goods is provided in Table 2.2 below for the period 2018-2036. The forecasts used in the 2018 Retail Study are compared against the latest forecasts published by Experian in March 2025. Both sets of data exclude spending on purely internet based sales[2]. It shows that the combination of actual spending per head (between 2018 and 2023) along with forecasts (post 2023) on comparison goods will rise by circa 13% which is around one quarter of the forecast rate of growth assumed at the time of the 2018 Retail Study.

Table 2.2: forecast year-on-year change in per capita comparison goods spending between 2018 and 2036 (excluding influence of online sales)

	2018 Retail Study (% change per annum)	Retail Planner 22 (2025) % Growth p.a.
2018	0.1	-0.8
2019	1.5	1.8
2020	2.3	-19.5
2021	2.7	7.7
2022	2.9	6.4
2023	3.2	-2.2
2024	3.2	-1.7
2025	3.1	-0.4
2026	3.1	0.9
2027	3.1	1.3
2028	3.0	2.0
2029	3.1	2.2
2030	3.2	2.2
2031	3.4	2.2
2032	3.2	2.2
2033	3.3	2.2
2034	3.3	2.1
2035	3.3	2.1
2036	3.2	2.1
Change, 2018-2036	***+54.2%***	***+12.8%***

Source: Experian (2025) and 2018 Retail Study

[2] i.e. only sales which are not associated with 'bricks and mortar' stores.

2.21 The same exercise as contained in Table 2.2 is replicated for convenience goods expenditure per head in Table 2.3 below. This also shows the latest forecasts (plus actual rates of change between 2018—2023) are materially lower for the period 2018-2036. The current forecasts are show a decline of -14% in convenience goods spending per head, which can be compared with a -1.7% forecast aggregate reduction at the time of the 2018 Retail Study.

Table 2.3: forecast year-on-year change in per capita convenience goods spending between 2018 and 2036 (excluding influence of online sales)

	2018 Retail Study (% change per annum)	Retail Planner 22 (2025) % Growth p.a.
2018	-0.9	-0.3
2019	-0.4	-1.5
2020	0.0	5.4
2021	0.0	-1.8
2022	-0.1	-5.1
2023	-0.3	-3.3
2024	-0.1	-1.9
2025	0.0	-0.9
2026	-0.1	-0.7
2027	0.0	-0.6
2028	0.0	-0.4
2029	-0.1	-0.4
2030	-0.1	-0.4
2031	0.1	-0.4
2032	0.0	-0.3
2033	0.1	-0.3
2034	0.1	-0.3
2035	0.2	-0.3
2036	-0.1	-0.3
Change, 2018-2036	***-1.7%***	***-13.8%***

Source: Experian (2025) and 2018 Retail Study

The Retail & Leisure Sectors

2.22 Alongside data on retail and leisure expenditure, it is also important to examine trends in retail sector in terms of the presence of retailers and leisure uses in high streets and out of centre locations as this can also help to understand the wider aspects of 'need' from a commercial viewpoint.

The retail sector

2.23 It is a well-established fact that the retail and leisure sectors, which have been a mainstay in all UK high streets and, more latterly, out of centre retail/leisure parks, have fast-moving trends. Over the latter half of the 2010s and the early 2020s there have been a number of high-profile business casualties. Within the non-food sector businesses such as Paperchase, Debenhams, Topshop (and other parts of the Arcadia Group), Carpetright, Ted Baker and Poundworld have all failed. In addition, there have been a significant number of store closers by other high profile national multiple retailers such as House of Fraser (now trading as Frasers) and Argos (with the brand moving into Sainsburys stores).

2.24 For many years, the DIY and homewares retailer Homebase has faced a number of difficulties, and has changed hands on a number of occasions. In November 2024, Homebase entered into administration, with CDS (owner of The Range) buying a number of existing stores, although uncertainty currently surrounds the future of around 50 other Homebase units. Sainsburys are also planning to open new supermarkets in a small number of former Homebase stores, whilst Marks & Spencer has recently announced that it will open 13 Foodhall format stores in former Homebase premises.

2.25 In Spring 2025, a number of other national multiple retailers announced restructuring plans. These include:

a. Poundland: following the takeover by Gordon Brothers, it was announced in June 2025 that around 150 Poundland stores across the UK would be closing, whilst the product range in the remaining stores would be restructured to remove the sale of frozen food goods. Details of which stores are to close have not yet been announced, although it is to be noted that Poundland occupy both high street and retail park locations.

b. River Island: in June 2025 it was announced that 33 River Island stores would be closing by January 2026.

c. WH Smith: the change in ownership of the 233-year old iconic high street chain was also concluded in June 2025. The name of the business will be changed to TG Jones and it remains, at the present time, unclear what the future holds for the existing WH Smith high street stores. The new owners, Modella, also own Hobbycraft and The Original Factor Shop, both of which have announced store closures.

2.26 The closure of these stores has and will create significant vacancies and available retail floorspace in many town and city centres. In the recent past, some stores, such as those in high-profile locations and/or in modern format premises, have been re-occupied by other comparison goods retailers, although this has not been universal. For example, former department store units occupy large multi-level premises, many of which were built in the post-war period specifically for that particular purpose. As a result, their attractiveness to alternative uses, even other comparison goods uses, is limited, which has resulted in many long-term vacancies. In some cases, alternative non-retail uses are being promoted as landlords and local authorities have reached the realisation that continued retail use is simply not an option.

2.27 It should also be noted that the failure and restructuring of national retail businesses has the potential to affect town centres in a number of different ways. The direct impacts – i.e. high street store closures – have been outlined above, although closures and reorganisation at out of centre retail parks / retail warehouses could also have indirect impacts. For example, the closure of stores such as Homebase allows for space to be come available which could, in turn, lead to either/both: (a) retail relocations from town centres; (b) additional trade diversion from defined 'town centres'. The effects of this phenomenon are currently being worked through in relation to the Homebase store closures.

2.28 One interesting counterpoint to the competition posed by large out of centre retail warehouse stores is the change in the format of a well-known national comparison goods retailer: Ikea. Known for its large format out-of-centre stores, Ikea has in recent years decided to branch out into smaller city centre stores which display a smaller range of goods. The first stores for this format include Hammersmith (which will soon also be accompanied by its first stand-alone restaurant), the forthcoming Oxford Street store[3] and Brighton[4].

2.29 Table 2.4 below provides data, published by Green Street and PwC, on store openings and closures across the UK. It shows that there has been a consistent net loss in store numbers, with circa 5,000 premises lost in 2023 and 3,800 in 2024. The number of store openings has been consistency lower in recent years (2023-2024) than the period 2015-

[3] Due to open in Spring 2025 in the former TopShop flagship store
[4] Due to open in Spring 2025

2019, following the Covid pandemic. It is also notable that the net change in stores, as a proportion of store openings has been much higher since 2018.

Table 2.4: retail store openings and closures, 2015-2024

	Store Closures	Store Openings	Net Change
2015	13,268	12,121	-1,147
2016	14,439	11,806	-2,633
2017	16,274	12,264	-4,010
2018	15,304	8,767	-6,537
2019	17,338	9,690	-7,648
2020	17,532	7,655	-9,877
2021	17.219	7,160	-10,059
2022	11,530	7,903	-3,627
2023	14,081	9,138	-4,943
2024	12,804	9,002	-3,802

Source: Green Street and PwC

2.30 Table 2.5 concentrates upon net closures over the period 2015-2024 and breaks down the available data into separate locations. It shows the rate of change over the past decade and is based upon an indexation of 100 at 2014.

Table 2.5: outlet net closures by location, 2015-2024 (2014 = 100)

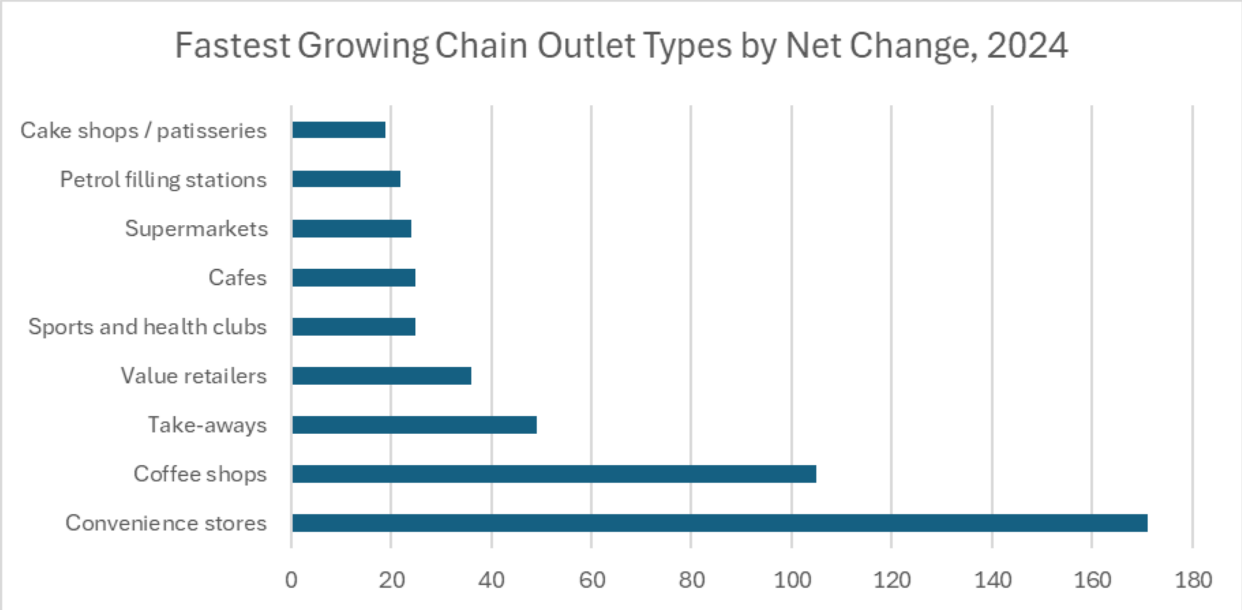
	UK Average	Retail Park	Stand Alone Stores	Shopping Centre	High Street
2014	100	100	100	100	100
2015	99	105	99	101	99
2016	99	103	98	100	98
2017	97	103	97	98	96
2018	94	102	95	95	92
2019	91	100	91	91	88
2020	86	97	88	85	83
2021	82	92	85	79	79
2022	81	92	84	78	77
2023	79	93	82	76	74
2024	78	93	81	75	73

Source: Green Street and PwC

2.31 Again, a backdrop of a net loss of stores between 2015 and 2024 across all locations, it is noticeable that a net loss in stores in retail park locations has only occurred since 2020. This is not matched by the other locations, with high street and shopping centre locations losing around one quarter of stores. Given the location of individual stores in shopping centre and high street locations, this is significantly affected the national average, which has been a 22 point net loss up to 2024.

2.32 Figures 2.4 and 2.5 below show the net change in different types of shops and service uses across the UK in 2024. Figure 2.4 shows the fasted growing chain outlets, by use type, in 2024 and indicates that the only two types of outlet which were able to add a net additional store per week were convenience stores and coffee shops. However, despite lower levels of growth, the other types of businesses shown below are those which have also been able to make a positive contribution. Unsurprisingly, these include: cafes, sports and health club uses, supermarkets[5], value retailers and take-aways.

Figure 2.4: fastest growing chain outlet types by net change, 2024

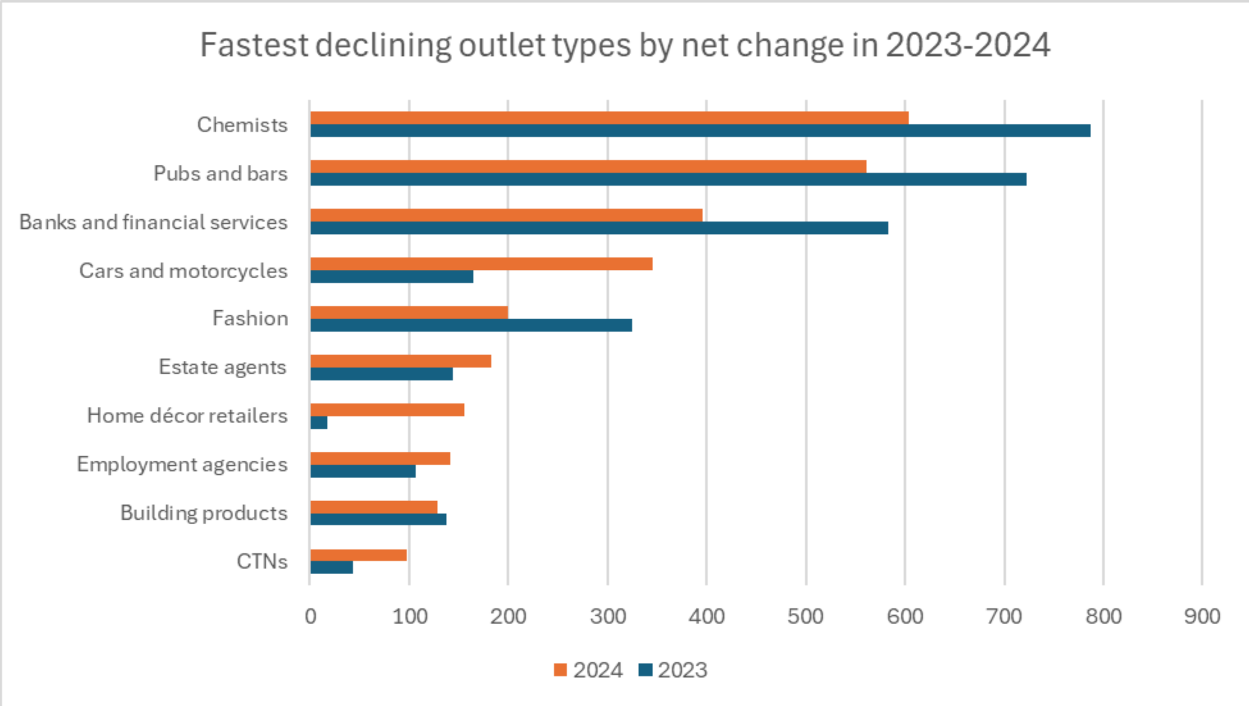


Source: Green Street

2.33 In contrast, the types of businesses shown in Figure 2.5 below are the ones showing the largest levels of decline over the past year. The most notable, but probably not unsurprising ones, are chemists, pubs and bars and banks/financial services.

[5] Driven by the expansion programmes of ALDI and Lidl

Figure 2.5: fastest declining outlet types by net change, 2023-2024



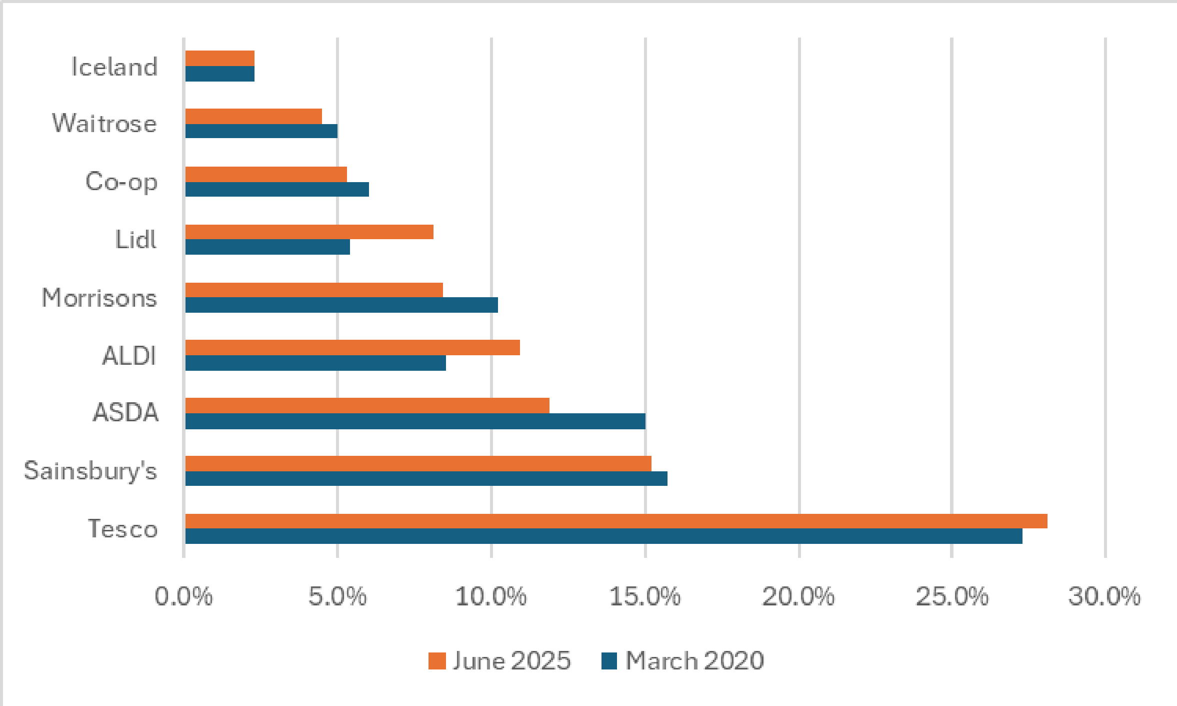
Source: Green Street

The grocery sector

2.34 Within the grocery retail sector, the headline trend over the past five years has been the continued rise of discount stores such as ALDI and Lidl. These operators are now a well-established part of the UK grocery sector and, in combination now (in 2025) control around 19% of the UK grocery market. Indeed, ALDI overtook Morrisons in 2022 to become the UK's fourth-largest grocer by market share.

2.35 Figure 2.6 below outlines the market share of the main grocery retailers in the UK in 2020 and 2025. The growth in market share for Lidl and ALDI is clear, which has largely been at the expense of ASDA and Morrisons. Tesco remains, by far, the largest grocer by market share, with 28.1% of spending in June 2025.

Figure 2.6: individual retailer market shares, 2023 (Source: Financial Times)



Source: Kantar

2.36 Looking forward, both ALDI and Lidl have significant continuing expansion plans, with ALDI's longer term goal of 1,500 stores in the UK (following the opening of its 1,000th store in the UK earlier in 2024) and previously stating a target of Lidl 1,100 stores by the end of 2025 (Lidl currently has around 960 stores in the UK).

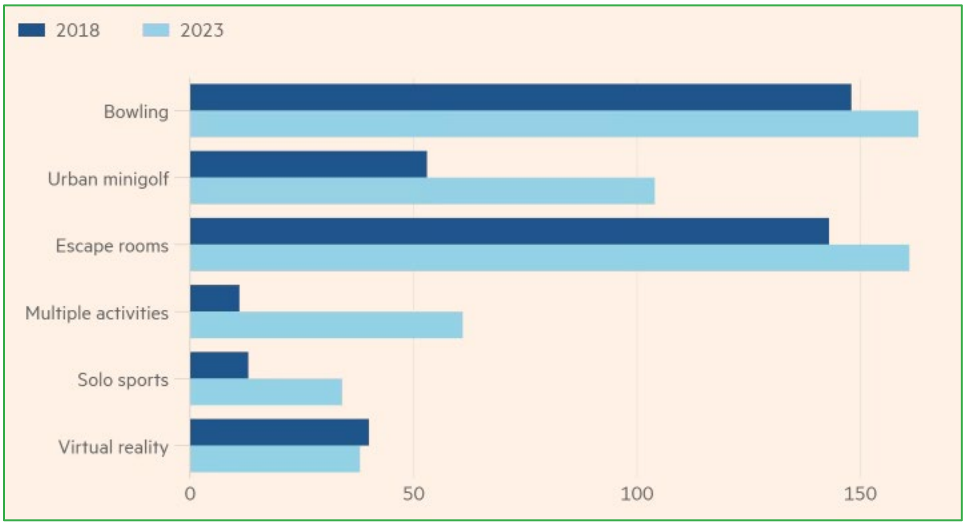
The leisure sector

2.37 Turning to the leisure sector, the available market data shows a complex picture. The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge effect on the performance of this sector, which led to significant business closures and loss of employment opportunities. The sector has bounced back and, according to research published by Deloitte, confidence reached a two year high in the first quarter of 2024. Since that time, however, recent research published by Deloitte has found that sentiment in 'eating out' and 'drinking in pubs and bars' has declined by about 6 percentage points since the start of 2024. This has been driven by the cost of living and increasing prices in the leisure sector particularly in the food and beverage sector. In recent years, costs for leisure and hospitality businesses have increased significantly, driven by higher energy and food costs, along with rising wages.

2.38 Data shown earlier in this section indicates the impact of cafes and coffee shops on the occupation of premises on the high street, which is part of a longer term trend in most city, town and district centres towards more of a service-based offer. Cafes have also been a big part of the evolution of out of town retail and leisure parks, which have traditionally focused upon comparison goods retailing and 'big box' leisure facilities. With car parking areas under-utilised, and landlords looking for additional sources of income, proposals for stand-alone cafes (sometimes with drive-through elements) are now a common feature at out of town facilities; a trend which is also occurring as part of the expansion of discount foodstore operator sites.

2.39 Within the leisure sector, the post-pandemic period has seen some changes within key categories and their demand for space in town centres and out of town locations. In particular, there has been a shift in the types of venue being visited. In October 2024, Hollywood Bowl, the UK's largest ten-pin bowling operator indicates that like-for-like sales were a product of intensifying competition from new emerging leisure sectors, from axe-throwing to mini golf. Whilst 'active family' venues, such as ten-pin bowling, remain popular, there has been a growth in other activity-focused venues such as darts, cricket, escape rooms, axe-throwing and shuffleboard. According to the real estate adviser Savills the number of UK activity-focused venues has increased by around 40% since 2018 to 600 in 2024. Savills expect that the number of sites will increase further to 800 by 2029. The increase in the types of venue, by activity between 2018 and 2023, is shown in Figure 2.7 below.

Figure 2.7: UK socialising venues, number by segment, between 2018 and 2023 (Source: Savills)



3. The Retail & Town Centre Issues Associated with the Local Plan Options

Introduction

3.1 The main focus of this Briefing Note is to provide an analysis of the main retail and main town centre land use implications of the various potential options for residential development allocations in the new B&NES Local Plan. The current stage of preparation of the new Local Plan is focusing upon how sites and areas, on both an individual and collective basis, can contribute to the requirement to plan for circa 27,000 new homes over an eighteen year period. This is being undertaken alongside an updated spatial strategy, which includes land and premises for business, main town centre uses, social infrastructure, green spaces and other physical infrastructure.

3.2 Given that the spatial strategy and the distribution of proposed allocations for residential development has not yet been set, the main purpose of the assessment contained within this Briefing Note is to help B&NES understand how a particular spatial strategy option for new residential development will impact upon the needs associated with retail and main town centre land use provision.

3.3 As a consequence, the following methodology has been adopted:

a. Identification of the main sites and locations for residential development which will help contribute to the overall housing requirement set for the new Local Plan.

b. Organise these sites / locations into a collection of key locations which can be assessed in relation to retail and main town centre land use needs.

c. Provide an assessment of each location with a focus upon:

1. The potential retail and food/beverage floorspace needs generated by each potential option.
2. How each potential option relates to existing defined 'town centres' in the current development plan and other out of centre retail land use provision.
3. An assessment of whether the needs generated by each potential option can be met by existing defined 'town centres' or, as an alternative, whether there is the potential to identify a planned new centre to meet the needs arising out of a specific option / set of circumstances.

3.4 The analysis, observations and conclusions which are reached as part of this analysis will provide an important contribution to the wider overall assessment of how specific locations meet the objectives for a sustainable spatial strategy for the new Local Plan. This includes providing guidance on specific main town centre land use requirements / issues for specific options. Given that a preferred spatial strategy has not yet been chosen, it is possible that some options are mutually exclusive and, as a consequence, the observations and conclusions of our assessment should be seen in that context.

3.5 Given that a preferred spatial strategy has not yet been set, our analysis has been organised to concentrate upon the following geographic areas, which have been chosen on the basis of their size/scale and current role in the current 'town centre' hierarchy in the B&NES development plan:

a. Bath

b. Keynsham / Saltford

c. Whitchurch

d. Hicks Gate

e. Somer Valley

f. The larger of the villages across the B&NES administrative area (including Timsbury, Clutton and Temple Cloud)

3.6 When choosing and assessing these six areas, two factors have been acknowledged:

a. First, there is an inter-relationship between some of the above areas. Examples of this will be Keynsham and Saltford, along with Keynsham, Hicks Gate and Whitchurch. These inter-relationships will be due to proximity between these areas and / or existing shopping patterns / scale of retail and town centre land use provision. These characteristics have been taken into account in our analysis.

b. Second, the inter-relationship between the various individual settlements in the Somer Valley is such that our assessment has considered both the area as a whole and also in terms of its individual elements (Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Westfield, Peasedown St John, Paulton and Farrington Gurney).

3.7 In relation to Bath, it should be acknowledged that this analysis concentrates upon those development strategy options which lie on the edge of the city (specifically the western edge). Whilst the spatial strategy for Bath has the potential to include a number of development locations within the existing urban area of the city, existing defined 'town centres' are very likely to meet the retail and other main town centre land use needs of local residents. Therefore, our focus has been on those parts of the potential development strategy for Bath which lie on the edge of the city and may require the provision of additional retail and main town centre land use provision in order to provide sustainable new communities.

3.8 It is also important to acknowledge that the preparation of a spatial land use strategy for B&NES and its new Local Plan will have a relationship with surrounding administrative areas. The two most closely associated areas are Bristol and South Gloucestershire, particularly Bristol. Previous evidence base studies on retail and town centre issues in B&NES have shown that there is an inter-relationship between these three administrative areas and this will also be the case for our assessment of retail issues in this Briefing Note (particularly for areas such as Whitchurch and Hicks Gate). Therefore, within our assessment, reference is made to plan-making and development management issues within adjacent areas (such as Bristol) where they are considered relevant to our analysis.

Assessment Methodology & Key Data Inputs

3.9 In order to assess each of the main areas listed in paragraph 3.5 above, along with the sub-areas suggested by paragraph 3.6(b), we have adopted a standardised assessment methodology. This methodology has been enshrined in a series of assessment proformas which are attached to this Briefing Note and based upon the following structure:

Table 3.1: methodology and key inputs into the assessment of retail and town centre issues

Topic	Scope of Assessment
Potential development sites	In order to inform our assessment, B&NES officers have provided a list of potential development sites across the B&NES administrative area. These have been identified via the 'call for sites' and Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) process and represent a 'long list' of potential sites which are being considered (by B&NES) for potential inclusion in the forthcoming Options Consultation in Autumn 2025. The sites have been organised in the six broad geographic areas outlined in paragraph 3.5 above. The list of potential development sites for each area include lower and upper housing density numbers, along with their potential development area.
Retail & food/beverage expenditure capacity	Using the lower and upper housing numbers, our assessment calculates the potential retail and food/beverage expenditure capacity of the potential residential development sites in each area. In order to provide this calculation, up to date locally-based per capita expenditure estimates have been sought from Experian. This broad-brush assessment calculates expenditure capacity based upon base 2023 spending levels (minus an allowance for spending on purely internet based shopping). The assessment also bases its floorspace capacity calculations on an indicative sales density level (which is reflective of national multiple operator average performance levels. The floorspace capacity estimates presented in the attached proformas are based upon the total amount of expenditure capacity generated by the selected development sites. This, therefore, does not reflect the amount of retail and food/beverage expenditure which could be genuinely available to existing/new retail and F&B facilities in the immediate local area, but nevertheless provides a consistent guide/comparison between the different broad areas.
Existing retail / defined 'town centre' provision in the local area	In order to assist with the locational analysis, the attached proformas provide a review of a suite of characteristic of the local area, including: (a) the size, in resident population, of the existing settlement / local area; (b) existing grocery provision; (c) existing town centre provision; (d) evidence of existing shopping patterns.

Location / site assessment	Having established the baseline information for each of the chosen geographic areas, along with the aggregate spending potential of all potential residential development sites, we set out our assessment of each area in terms of its potential requirements for retail / main town centre land uses. Based upon the extent of available information, the location assessment adopts the following criteria: ▪ Site / area expenditure capacity ▪ Defined 'town centre' provision in the surrounding area ▪ Retail provision in the surrounding area ▪ Expenditure / shopping trip inflow and outflow considerations ▪ Commercial market attractiveness considerations ▪ Other salient issues

3.10 The assessment is primarily focused upon the provision of convenience goods retail floorspace (rather than comparison goods floorspace) due to the day-to-day nature of local shopping facilities. However, this assessment is within the context of wider main town centre land use provision within existing defined 'town centres' in the B&NES formal town centre hierarchy.

3.11 Based upon the above methodology, our assessment of the retail and town centre land use issues associated with each area is set out in turn below.

Bath

3.12 Our assessment has considered one specific area of potential residential development on the western edge of the Bath urban area, adjacent to the A4 Bristol Road and close to the junction with Newbridge Road and Lower Bristol Road. Based upon the information provided by B&NES, this area has the potential to provide between 900 and 1,950 new residential units.

3.13 Based upon this size of potential residential development, a modest amount of retail expenditure capacity could be created, which is equivalent to one large convenience style store or two modest sized convenience stores. This is on a 'ring fenced' basis and a large scale residential development in this location would clearly be subject to potentially significant levels of outflow to foodstores in west and central Bath.

3.14 However, there are two further factors to consider. First, there is the possibility that new retail / main town centre land use provision on the western edge of Bath (within this development area) could attract a reasonably large level of expenditure inflow. The scale of this inflow would be dependent upon type and scale of provision, along with its location in relation to the A4, Lower Bristol Road and Newbridge Road. However, these routes provide the main road transport links into western Bath and, as a consequence, there is the clear possibility that new provision could become attractive to a catchment which is wider than just the development area. This will, of course, depend upon the location of provision, but close proximity to the A4 will enhance commercial attractiveness.

3.15 It is also possible that the scale of quantitative capacity for convenience goods retail provision, and the demand for wider main town centre land uses, could be enhanced/supported by any under-provision within the western side of Bath. There are M&S and Lidl stores on Lower Bristol Road, along with a reasonably large Sainsburys store in south-west Bath. There are also four modest sized local centres within 2-3km of the potential development area.

3.16 Therefore, a 1,950 residential unit allocation in the new Local Plan would, in our opinion, prompt active consideration for a single planned new local centre. This level of provision would provide an even distribution local centre provision across the western side of Bath. The scale of convenience goods floorspace provision within this area has the potential to vary depending upon three factors:

a. The baseline position is that a small local centre should be provided if B&NES are minded to allocate land for up to 1,950 homes on the western edge of Bath. The baseline position would include a small convenience store within the local centre, along with a modest amount of other main town centre land uses.

b. The scale of convenience goods floorspace could grow if wider needs across western Bath are, in part, to be met in this location. A conclusion on this issue will need to take account of any further planning permissions for retail floorspace which may be granted during the course of preparing the new Local Plan.

c. The location of a new local centre within this wider western Bath potential development area. Should the location be close to the A4 then this would increase attractiveness and potentially the size of main town centre land use provision.

3.17 In light of the above we would recommend that further consideration will need to be given to scale and form of any local centre provision in this area within both: (a) future consultation stages of the Local Plan; and (b) within any second stage to the retail and town centres evidence base library. This will include confirmation of the up to date level of quantitative need for net additional convenience goods floorspace in B&NES and further consideration given to the location of the local centre within the planned development area.

Keynsham & Saltford

3.18 The residential development sites being considered by B&NES for inclusion in the Options consultation have the potential to provide significant levels of growth in different parts of the Keynsham and Saltford areas. This growth is between one fifth and one sixth of the size of the combined current Keynsham and Saltford urban areas. These sites are distributed in three main broad areas: (a) west and south Keynsham; (b) north Keynsham and around the A4; and (c) to the west of Saltford. For the purposes of this assessment, Keynsham and Saltford has been acknowledged as separate but closely inter-related areas, in order to understand how the needs of each area may be met within the new Local Plan. This has included an assessment which starts with the combined expenditure capacity of both areas and then seeks to break these capacity estimates and key characteristics down into the two component parts.

3.19 Overall, the scale of residential development provision being considered by B&NES is, in itself, capable of supporting a medium sized foodstore, although that does not allow for any retail expenditure which is genuinely unavailable to stores in the local area and does not allow for any expenditure growth being assigned to existing retail provision. The latter point may well be an important one, bearing in mind the apparent under-performance of some stores within Keynsham[6].

3.20 The distribution of potential residential development sites around Keynsham and Saltford, along with the current structure of defined 'town centres' is such that planning for the provision of new retail and town centre uses is a complex exercise. The starting point for the preferred strategy for retail / main town centre uses is very dependent upon the scale and location of residential development sites / areas. The road map to progress this issue is likely to be based upon:

[6] Based upon the contents of the 2018 Retail Study.

a. the preferred strategy for residential development (including its scale and phasing);

b. the outcome of the current planning application for an ALDI store[7] on the A4 (which, if approved, would soak up significant expenditure capacity); and

c. the weight which is to be given to the need to protect and enhance existing defined 'town centres' (particularly Keynsham town centre).

3.21 If the entirety of the potential residential sites are to be taken forward as allocations then a potentially preferred candidate for appropriately sized retail/main town centre land use provision would be the area to the north of the A4 in the North Keynsham area. Additional appropriately-sized provision in this area would be within the largest residential area and also provide a useful distribution of provision. Bearing in mind the factors outlined in paragraph 3.19 above, any new provision would be modest in scale and be designed to only serve the day-to-day needs of the new community to the north of the A4.

3.22 Should a reduced amount of new residential accommodation to the north of the A4 (at North Keynsham) come forward, then there would merit in exploring the potential for expansion of the existing local centre at Bath Road in Saltford and also a modest amount of provision to the west of Saltford. Within the residential development options considered by our analysis, Saltford has the potential to accommodate a reasonably large amount of growth and, on the basis of it being considered separately to Keynsham, then it should be considered for enhanced provision.

3.23 However, the scale of plan-led new retail floorspace will be influenced by the outcome of the current ALDI foodstore planning application. This proposal, if approved, will soak up a significant amount of the convenience goods retail expenditure which will be generated by the potential residential allocations. Whilst the provision of new retail and main town centre land uses (to serve the day to day needs of the growing local population) can equally be justified on a qualitative basis, the proposed ALDI store would lie in an out of centre location and place pressure on the health of Keynsham town centre without the benefits associated with a range of planned new local facilities.

3.24 In relation to other areas of potential residential development, we do not consider that there is a strong case for additional retail and main town centre land use provision within the potential areas to the south-west and south of Keynsham. We consider that existing provision across the three defined centres in Keynsham remains an appropriate focus for retail/main town centre land use provision and should, therefore, be confirmed as being the main focus for day to day shopping and service needs, bearing in mind the accessibility of these facilities and the need to protect their health, role and function.

Whitchurch

3.25 The assessment of potential residential development sites in the Whitchurch area is concentrated upon several sites which surround the existing village. These potential development sites lie to the north, south and east, with the largest areas lying to the east. Existing defined ‘town centres’ are defined by the B&NES and Bristol City Council (‘BCC’) development plans and include: Whitchurch Village (B&NES), Oatlands Avenue (BCC), Gilda Parade (BCC) and Stockwood (BCC).

3.26 In relation to local shopping patterns, the household survey commissioned to support the Bristol Local Centres Study[8] provides useful information regarding local convenience goods in south-east Bristol and the western part of the B&NES administrative area. Whitchurch lies within Zone 17 of the household survey area, with the survey results showing that the most popular main food shopping destinations in the area around Whitchurch are the ALDI at Imperial Park (15%

[7] Planning Application Reference: 24/02029/FUL
[8] Dated October 2022, Nexus Planning

market share), Morrisons at Symes Avenue (4%,) Tesco Extra, Brislington (19%), with the most popular first choice main food destination being ASDA at Oatlands Avenue (with a 40% market share).

3.27 The same stores are also popular top-up food shopping destinations, although a number of local smaller stores are also particularly popular for this type of shopping, including the Co-op in Stockwood (21% market share) and the Tesco Express store at Gilda Parade 9%.

3.28 The attached assessment proforma indicates that, in totality, and assuming that all expenditure is available to support new provision, the scale of potential residential development could support a medium sized foodstore. Whilst this is a high level assessment, it demonstrates the significant scale of retail provision which could be supported by this additional residential accommodation. In order to refine this assessment further, the following factors should be taken into account:

a. It is very likely that outflow of spending on groceries will continue in most circumstances, given strength of surrounding supermarkets such as ASDA and Tesco.

b. There is, however, also the clear potential for expenditure inflow, given that there are no clear and obvious defined catchment area boundaries in south-east Bristol.

c. As part of the 'expenditure inflow' characteristics, there is the potential for planned new provision in Whitchurch to provide additional choice for existing residents of Whitchurch (to the west of the A37) and Stockwood, which may boost available expenditure capacity.

3.29 The potential for new provision (in the Whitchurch area) to be both attractive to the commercial property/occupier market and also attractive to residents of other parts of south-east Bristol will, in part, be influenced by the location of new provision. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this Briefing Note to indicate a preferred location for any planned new centre, it should be noted that a location which is separated from the A37 may decrease commercial attractiveness in the short term (although there is likely to be more/ better scope for a sufficiently sized and well-planned centre). Conversely, locations immediately adjacent to the A37 are likely to be attractive in the short term (given the importance and popularity of this route) although opportunities to provide a properly planned new centre may be limited.

3.30 Overall, should the preferred spatial strategy for the Whitchurch area promote a large level of new residential development, then we consider that there is merit in that strategy including provision for a planned new centre. The scale of the centre will, of course, be dependent upon the scale of planned residential development, but the case for any new centre is supported by the existing network of centres not being able to adequately serve large-scale new communities in the Whitchurch area. The scale of residential development will dictate the scale of new centre, with the potential for grocery retail provision to range of a standard convenience store of between 300-500sq m gross to a medium-sized foodstore of circa 2,000sq m gross.

Hicks Gate

3.31 For the purposes of the analysis within this Briefing Note, we have concentrated upon the land highlighted for residential development within the B&NES administrative area. This area has the potential to accommodate between 1,200 and 1,550 residential units and lies adjacent to the A4 Bath Road and A4174 Bristol Ring Road. However, it should be noted that there are further adjacent areas of land, lying within the Bristol City Council ('BCC') administrative area, which has been identified for residential development. This is proposed to be allocated for mixed use development in the draft Bristol Local Plan (which is currently subject to an ongoing Examination in Public). The majority of land which is subject to the proposed allocation is also subject to an undetermined outline planning application[9] for circa 550 residential units and a 1,000sq m local centre (for Class E and F2 land uses).

3.32 The full scale of residential development which could be achieved across both the B&NES and BCC areas could generate a 'ring fenced' capacity capable of supporting a small to medium-sized foodstore or 2-3 small convenience style stores. This indicative capacity would be influenced by likely significant inflows and outflows of expenditure and the attractiveness of large supermarkets at Brislington and Longwell Green. This level of capacity would be reduced should BCC decide to grant outline planning permission for the Bellway Homes proposal on land to the south of the A4.

3.33 The attached capacity assessment indicates that, for the B&NES land area alone, the 'ring fenced' expenditure capacity is equivalent to a large convenience store, along with a modest amount of food/beverage floorspace provision.

3.34 Leaving aside the status of the current Bellway Homes application, we consider that there is a good case for the provision of a new local centre within this wider strategic development area, due to the lack of existing easily accessible local centres. However, the need for the provision of a new local centre would be influenced by the scale of residential development to be allocated in the BCC and B&NES Local Plan documents, although we consider that this should be a key land use element should allocations in both administrative areas proceed.

3.35 Should the Bellway Homes proposal proceed to gain planning permission, we consider that the need for B&NES to include provision for a new local centre in their own Local Plan would be significantly reduced. Therefore, we recommend that the main town centre B&NES land use strategy for the allocates at Hicks Gate is kept under review as the Bristol development plan and planning application initiatives progress through the system.

Somer Valley

3.36 The final spatial strategy area for consideration is the Somer Valley. This covers a wide area and encompasses a number of individual settlements and identifiable areas, including: Midsomer Norton, Radstock, Peasedown St John, Paulton, Westfield and Farrington Gurney. It has been agreed with B&NES officers that the locational assessment contained within this Briefing Note would consider the Somer Valley area as a whole and also these six component parts.

3.37 In relation to existing situation across the Somer Valley area, the following key aspects are to be noted:

a. The Somer Valley has a collection of five defined 'town centres'. Radstock and Midsomer North are defined as town centres in the hierarchy (alongside Keynsham), whilst Paulton, Westfield and Peasedown St John all attract local centre status.

b. At the present time, the main foodstore provision across the area is concentrated within Midsomer Norton, including Lidl and Sainsburys stores within the defined town centre, along with a large out of centre Tesco supermarket. There are smaller convenience style stores in Westfield (Co-op), Peasedown St John (Tesco Express, and Co-op), Paulton (Co-op), all of which are located in the defined local centre boundaries in their settlements. In addition there is a Co-op store in Farrington Gurney.

c. In relation to recent changes in retail floorspace provision, the Radco foodstore in Radstock town centre was demolished a few years ago and plans to redevelop the site for a mixture of residential and commercial/retail uses have not yet come to fruition.

[9] Bristol City Council planning application reference: 24/03186/P

d. The adopted Local Plan allocates the former Welton Manufacturing site on the northern edge of Midsomer Norton town centre for mixed use development, including the potential for a medium scale retail store of up to 1,300sq m. There have not been any formal redevelopment proposals for this site in recent years.

e. In relation to the relative size of these areas, Midsomer North has a population of around 12,200, whilst Radstock's population is circa 6,100. Peasedown St John, Westfield and Paulton each have resident populations of around 6,600 people. Farrington Gurney's population is around 3,100.

3.38 In totality, 6 large potential residential development sites have been identified for this assessment which are spread across the areas identified above. The main areas which have been identified as:

a. A large area on the northern edge of Midsomer Norton (with potential for up to 1,000 residential units)

b. A large area on the northern edge of Radstock (between 1,250 and 1,550 units)

c. An area adjacent to the eastern Radstock capable of accommodating between 950-1,150 units

d. Two areas of land on the southern and south-western edges of Peasedown St John, capable of accommodating between 800-1,000 units.

e. A large area of land on the southern edge of Farrington Gurney capable of accommodating 400-500 residential units.

[N.B. In addition, non-strategic sites have the potential to accommodate between 950-1,200 units]

3.39 Overall, when combined, these residential development sites have the potential to generate a significant level of quantitative capacity of between 2,400-2,900sq m net sales area. If it were to be ring-fenced, this level of quantitative capacity could support a range of alternative scenarios in terms of convenience goods retail provision. This could include: (a) one large supermarket; (b) two medium sized foodstores; and (c) a combination of a medium sized foodstore and smaller convenience store provision.

3.40 From the outset it is important to note that detailed recommendations cannot yet be made regarding the precise scale and distribution of new retail provision and the requirement for planned new centres, given the need for B&NES to reach a conclusion on its preferred spatial strategy. However, a number of guiding principles can be established for the potential distribution of new retail / main town centre land use provision.

3.41 As a starting point it is important to note that Midsomer Norton and Radstock are currently at the top of the centre hierarchy in the local area, which is reflective of their current role/function and scale of main town centre land use provision. Therefore, these centres can be afforded preference in terms of the provision of new or replacement retail and main town centre land uses.

3.42 Midsomer Norton is by far the largest defined centre in the local area and provides a reasonably wide range of uses. The defined 'town centre' area has two medium sized foodstores which arguably provide an anchor function for the centre and allow the centre to have a good qualitative range of provision. Therefore, whilst it is important to continue to maintain and enhance the health of Midsomer Norton town centre, we do not consider that there is a clear qualitative deficiency to be addressed by the Council when considering how to provide for net additional retail floorspace provision.

3.43 Radstock is the smaller of the defined town centres and up until recently the centre was dominated by a large Radco store. Based upon assessment work undertaken as part of previous development plan evidence base studies, the former Radco store, which has now been demolished, had a moderate to poor trading performance, but nevertheless had a key role in the overall health and attractiveness of Radstock town centre. Its closure leaves a void which should, ideally, be replaced by new retail provision which can benefit from the potentially large levels of growth in the wider area.

3.44 Westfield, which lies to the south-east of Midsomer Norton and south-west of Radstock, can be seen as an identifiable area in its own right and it is unsurprising that it has a small local centre (given the close proximity to these two other areas). None of the potential residential development sites included within this analysis are located in or around Westfield and it is unlikely that there will be any significant changes required in term of retail floorspace provision (in relation to either scale or distribution of floorspace in Westfield).

3.45 A similar situation, in terms of potential residential growth, exists for Paulton. The village has experience significant growth in recent years, with its residents supported by a local centre which includes a Co-op convenience store. Based upon the low level of potential residential growth, we do not consider that Paulton is an obvious candidate for the location of new retail floorspace provision.

3.46 Peasedown St John has a similar level of population to Paulton although the scale of potential new residential development could increase the population of the village by 2,300 people, thus an increase of around one third. If this level of growth forms part of the preferred spatial strategy for the Local Plan, we consider that Peasedown St John should be a preferred location for net additional retail and main town centre land uses.

3.47 The final location within the Somer Valley area is Farrington Gurney. This village, with a resident population of just over 3,000 people, lies a short distance to the west of Midsomer Norton. A large site, on the southern edge of the village, is being considered for potential allocation in the new Local Plan. It could provide 400-500 new resident units which would increase the population of the village by up to one third. At the present time, the local community within the village is served by a Co-op convenience store which lies on the edge of the village, adjacent to the A37.

3.48 Despite the large potential proportionate increase in the size of the village, it appears unlikely that Farrington Gurney could be a location for a large element of any net additional retail floorspace provision. The size of the village, even in expanded form, along with the close proximity of Midsomer Norton, suggests that the existing Co-op convenience store already provides an important and beneficial facility. If main town centre land use provision were to be improved in order to better meet the needs of an expanded local community, we consider that the focus should be on a wider mix of main town centre uses in a single accessible location. Consideration will therefore need to be given as to how the existing Co-op store and the new substantial development area could work together to meet this objective.

3.49 In light of the foregoing analysis, we consider that there are a number of key retail and main town centre land use principles which should inform the spatial strategy for the Somer Valley. These are:

a. Midsomer Norton will remain the key destination for retail and main town centre land uses in Somer Valley. It is well established as the destination which is able to offer the wider range of retail, service, food/beverage and other community uses and, as a consequence, the need to maintain and enhance the health of the centre should be a central theme/consideration within a decision on the preferred spatial strategy. Notwithstanding the recommendations below (which deal with opportunities for new retail / main town centre land use provision) Midsomer Norton town centre has the potential to benefit from substantial residential growth on the northern edge of the town, along with wider growth in the Somer Valley area.

b. The opportunities for Radstock town centre are, in our opinion, less sensitive to the spatial strategy options as the key opportunity lies with improvements and regeneration of the existing town centre. The contribution of the redevelopment of the former Radco site is a key consideration and outweighs any potential requirement to plan for new provision / defined centres elsewhere in the local area. In particular, it will be important to recognise that the level of retail provision on the former Radco site has the potential to dictate the direction of travel for the remainder of the area and, therefore, a clear strategy for Radstock should be treated as a priority.

c. Of the four other sub-areas covered by this analysis, it is our view that Peasedown St John is may well provide the most appropriate opportunity for the provision. This area has a comparatively large population, with a limited level of provision within the defined local centre. These characteristics, coupled within a potentially large level of growth, suggest that Peasedown St John should be a preferred location within the spatial strategy to accommodate a reasonably large element of any retail / main town centre land use needs arising. Should this be the chosen direction of travel, consideration will need to be given to how growth should be accommodated within or alongside the existing formal 'town centre' hierarchy.

Rural Settlements

3.50 In addition to the main areas of focus for new residential development, our instructions for this Briefing Note also cover the consideration of retail land use issues for a handful of the larger villages within the rural areas across the B&NES administrative area. The villages which have been identified are Temple Cloud, Clutton and Timsbury. Our assessment of each location is provided in turn below.

Timsbury

3.51 Timsbury is located to the north-west of Peasedown St John (5km) and north-east of Paulton (4km). The village and immediate surrounding area has a local population of circa 2,700[10] people, whilst the village contains two convenience stores (located on North Road). It is considered that this level of provision is disproportionately large for Timsbury itself and is a sign that the village is also likely to serve the day to day needs of the surrounding area. However, this role will be limited by the role and influence of Peasedown St John and Paulton.

3.52 At the present time, B&NES is considering the potential of two residential development sites on the edge of the village which could add up to 215-287 new homes. This would be the equivalent of a population increase of 500-660 people (or a 20-25% increase in the local population). Whilst this level of population increase, on a ring fenced basis, would provide a level of convenience goods expenditure (£1.7m) which would be equivalent to 120sq m net sales convenience goods floorspace, there are three reasons why this growth would not prompt more detailed consideration for the need to plan for additional retail uses. First, part of this expenditure would not be genuinely available to local convenience stores, as it would naturally be directly towards larger foodstores/supermarkets in the Somer Valley and Bath. Second, the existence of two convenience stores in the village. Third, the proximity of Peasedown St John and Paulton which also have their own convenience store / retail provision.

Temple Cloud

3.53 Temple Cloud lies on the A37, a short distance to the south of Clutton (1.2km) and to the north-west of Paulton (4km). The village and immediate surrounding area has a resident population of circa 1,500[11] people, with the petrol filling

[10] Lower Super Output Areas: E01014459 & E01014460
[11] Lower Super Output Area: E01014419

station shop on the A37 providing the function of a small-scale local convenience store. A significant part of trade for this store will therefore also be pass-by trade.

3.54 At the present time, consideration is being given to the potential of a large site, adjacent to the A37 and northern edge of the village, to accommodate either 90-120 or 231-308 residential units. Based upon an average persons per dwelling ratio of 2.3, these options provide for up 280 or 700 new residents for Temple Cloud. That is equivalent to an increase of either one fifth or just under a half. On a ring-fenced basis this level of population has the ability to support around 60-140sq m of convenience goods sales floorspace, although not all of this capacity would be available to support new provision for some of the reasons outlined above. However, we consider that there is the potential for B&NES to make an allowance for a modest amount of new retail floorspace provision within Temple Cloud if a sizeable residential development allocation is to be pursued in the new Local Plan. This is on the basis of: (a) the scale of potential growth within the village; (b) the relatively small scale level of current provision; (c) the potential for new provision to be supported (in part) by pass-by trade.

3.55 Therefore, we would recommend that Temple Cloud is considered for inclusion in the schedule of requirements for retail floorspace should the new Local Plan's preferred strategy include a sizable residential land use allocation in the spatial strategy. However, this would need to be coordinated with the strategy for Clutton, in light of our analysis and recommendations contained below.

Clutton

3.56 Clutton lies on the A37, a short distance to the north of Temple Cloud, The local population of the village and surrounding area is circa 1,100[12] people. The village has a number of local facilities, including two public houses, a village hall and a primary school, but it does not currently posses a village / convenience store. The characteristic suggests, from the outset, that there is a need to consider the potential provision of a modest local retail store which is able to serve the day to day needs of the local population. The ability to accommodate a local retail store will be influenced by the close proximity of other villages in the local area, such as Temple Cloud and High Littleton (along with the wider influence of Paulton, Farrington Gurney and Midsomer Norton).

3.57 In addition to the current perceived level of under-provision, it is to be noted that B&NES are currently considering the potential to allocate land for between 324 and 432 new homes in Clutton[13]. The area for this potential new provision is located on the western side of the village, to the west of the A37. Given the characteristics associated with the A37, this new development area would create a relatively distinct extension to the village and posses good access / frontage on to the A37.

3.58 Importantly, it is also to be noted that the potential new residential development area being considered by B&NES for the northern edge of Temple Cloud would bring both settlements into close proximity. Therefore, as noted in the previous sub-section, there is a need to coordinate the assessments of Clutton and Temple Cloud, in light of the potential need to consider the possibility that both villages might share new retail floorspace provision.

3.59 The scale of new residential accommodation within the larger of the two development options for land to the west of the A37, there is a potential 'ring fenced' convenience goods floorspace capacity of up 100sq m (net). As with the Temple Cloud analysis, there are reasons why not all of this potential capacity would be genuinely available to support new convenience goods floorspace in Clutton, although the potential for pass-by trade may assist in boosting commercial attractiveness.

[12] Lower Super Output Area: E01014386
[13] This range of potential new homes in Clutton is based upon the larger of the two residential development options for land to the west of the A37.

3.60 Therefore, similar conclusions to those reached in relation to Temple Cloud are also applicable to Clutton. It is also important to reinforce the need for potential new retail / main town centre land use provision to be considered jointly between these two villages, taking into account the size/location of residential development areas.

4. Summary and Conclusions

4.1 This Briefing Note has been prepared by Nexus Planning for Bath & North East Somerset Council in order to provide information, analysis and advice on retail and main town centre land use issues associated with the preparation of the new Local Plan for Bath & North East Somerset.

4.2 The new Local Plan is required to plan for the provision of a significant amount of new homes across the B&NES administrative area over the next 18 years. Given that the provision of new homes will be within the context of creating sustainable healthy places and supporting jobs/economic growth, there is a need for the evidence base for the new Local Plan to consider a wide range of issues, including those related to retail and town centre land use provision. This Briefing Note intends to provide B&NES with a package of information which covers the following topic areas:

a. A review of the current background context to retail and town centre issues, including wider economic trends which have the potential to influence general market conditions and how B&NES should plan for retail and main town centre land use provision. This review has also considered the key changes which have occurred since the completion of the current development plan evidence base, along with current trends in the retail and leisure sectors.

b. An assessment of the salient retail and town centre planning policy issues associated with the spatial strategy policy options for the new Local Plan, specifically associated with residential uses. This includes an assessment of how the needs of planned large scale residential development can be met via existing and, potentially, planned new 'town centres'.

4.3 At the present time, B&NES is working towards an Options Document consultation in Autumn 2025 and, at the present time, is undertaking assessment work around the potential suitability of sites which may form part of the options consultation. The preparation of this Briefing Note has had access to these potential development locations, which have been used to make an assessment of the key retail and town centre land use issues.

4.4 In order to inform the analysis of spatial strategy options, the content of this Briefing Note has split the B&NES administrative area into six geographic and functional areas: West Bath, the Somer Valley, Hicks Gate, Keynsham/Saltford, Whitchurch and a handful of larger villages. These areas have been considered in terms of the contribution of new residential development to retail floorspace requirements and the current pattern of defined 'town centres' in the development plan hierarchy. This has included broad-brush assessments of retail expenditure capacity, the pattern and scale of existing provision in each chosen area, along with the characteristics which may affect the need to provide additional retail floorspace within each area.

4.5 The conclusions which have been reached as part of this analysis should be seen in the context of a stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan where a preferred spatial strategy has yet to be chosen and there is not yet a clearly defined schedule of proposed residential development sites / areas. The conclusions which have been reached focus upon the potential retail land use requirements of each area should most / all of the current range of potential residential development sites be proposed for allocation, including potential inter-related issues between specific areas. Our analysis has identified the following issues, opportunities and requirements:

a. West of Bath. Our analysis has concluded that an allocation for a significant level of new residential development on the western edge of the Bath urban area would prompt the need for a new planned local centre. This would enable the day to day needs of this new and expanding wider community to be met in an accessible location. The 'core' type of need in this location is for a modest-sized local centre, although consideration should also be given to a centre with a larger foodstore (depending on the scale of the residential allocation, the location of the planned new local centre, and the grant of planning permission for other foodstores in Bath whilst the new Local Plan is in preparation).

b. Keynsham / Saltford. The potential development options for the Keynsham and Saltford areas are distributed across different parts of this local area. With one main town centre and three local centres, the local area is well provided for in terms of 'town centre' provision. Therefore, the starting point for retail / main town centre land use provision with most potential residential development options is for the additional retail and other expenditure generated by new residents to be directed towards existing centres (rather than plan for new centres). It is also important to note that the current planning application for an ALDI foodstore adjacent to the A4 will also have a key influence on the level of additional retail floorspace to be planned for via the new Local Plan. In our view, the one geographic area where a new planned local centre should be considered is in the spatial scenario where a large amount of new residential development is planned for the northern edge of Keynsham. This would be on the basis of the scale of this new residential development area and for reasons of accessibility / sustainable land use development patterns.

c. Hicks Gate. This area has the potential for a reasonably large level of new residential development, which would be split between sites in the B&NES and Bristol City Council administrative areas. Overall, and taking into account all potential development sites, along with the current distribution of defined 'town centres', we consider that there is a clear opportunity for a new planned local centre in the Hicks Gate area. The 'core' type of need in this location will be for a modest sized local centre, although the location of the potential development sites adjacent to the A4 Bath Road means that commercial market interest for a large foodstore cannot be ruled out at this stage. In to further the assessment of land use needs for the two sites in B&NES in this area, we recommend that the progress of the current Bellway Homes outline planning application, which includes provision for a new local centre, is closely monitored. If the Bellway Homes application is successful, then this is likely to reduce the need to identified retail / main town centre land use provision on the parcels of land in the B&NES administrative area.

d. Whitchurch. The potential scale of new residential development in the Whitchurch area is significant and, in principle, warrants the support of an appropriately sized local centre. Further consideration will need to be given to whether an expanded existing Whitchurch Village centre can fulfil that role, or whether it is more appropriate to plan for a new centre within one of the major development areas. However, the in principle recommendation of this Briefing Note is that new/improved local centre provision is required if the spatial strategy in the new Local Plan includes significant new residential development in the Whitchurch area.

e. Somer Valley. Alongside consideration of the Somer Valley area as a whole, we have also considered the characteristics and needs of the component parts of this area (Radstock, Midsomer Norton, Peasedown St John, Paulton, Westfield and Farrington Gurney). Given that there are a number of different spatial strategy and residential development options for these areas (with inter-linked issues), it is not possible for this Briefing Note to provide a detailed recommended strategy, although we recommend the following retail / town centre characteristics:

    1. Midsomer Norton will remain the key destination for retail and main town centre land uses in Somer Valley. It is well established as the destination which is able to offer the wider range of retail, service, food/beverage and other community uses and, as a consequence, the need to maintain and enhance the health of the centre should be a central theme/consideration within a decision on the preferred spatial strategy. Notwithstanding the recommendations below (which deal with opportunities for new retail / main town centre land use provision) Midsomer Norton town centre has the potential to

benefit from substantial residential growth on the northern edge of the town, along with wider growth in the Somer Valley area.

2. The opportunities for Radstock town centre are, in our opinion, less sensitive to the spatial strategy options as the key opportunity lies with improvements and regeneration of the existing town centre. The contribution of the redevelopment of the former Radco site is a key consideration and outweighs any potential requirement to plan for new provision / defined centres elsewhere in the local area. In particular, it will be important to recognise that the level of retail provision on the former Radco site has the potential to dictate the direction of travel for the remainder of the area and, therefore, a clear strategy for Radstock should be treated as a priority.
3. Of the four other sub-areas covered by this analysis, it is our view that Peasedown St John is may well provide the most appropriate opportunity for the provision. This area has a comparatively large population, with a limited level of provision within the defined local centre. These characteristics, coupled within a potentially large level of growth, suggest that Peasedown St John should be a preferred location within the spatial strategy to accommodate a reasonably large element of any retail / main town centre land use needs arising. Should this be the chosen direction of travel, consideration will need to be given to how growth should be accommodated within or alongside the existing formal 'town centre' hierarchy.

f. Rural Villages. Three of the larger villages (Clutton, Temple Cloud and Timsbury) have been considered as part of this Briefing Note and recommendations have been made in relation to the potential need to provide for new small scale retail and other day to day retail/service provision the Clutton and Temple Cloud area. The location and scale of new provision will be dependent on the preferred residential development strategy for this area.

Appendix A: Locational Assessment Proformas

Nexus Planning
Suite B
Beacon Tower
Colston Street
Bristol
BS1 4XE

nexusplanning.co.uk