

## **Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body**

### **Board Meeting**

#### **Paper D**

## **Note on revised housing figures and implications for the Western Gateway**

### **Purpose of note**

To report on the Government's National Planning Policy Framework revised figures for housing in the Western Gateway region, their implications and set out next steps.

### **Background**

On 30 July 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), that sets the overall framework for planning policy nationally. Housing is a key priority for the new government, and their targets for new homes changes the quantity and distribution of where housing will be built. Obligatory house building targets for local authorities will be reintroduced.

Every local planning authority is expected to update their Local Plans. The Government also wants to see universal coverage of strategic planning. This includes elected mayors overseeing the development of Spatial Development Strategies for their areas within the next five years.

A New Towns Taskforce is to be set up to assess potential locations for significant housing growth with potentially new large-scale communities of at least 10,000 properties being built.

Where Local Planning Authorities do not have up to date local plans or are unable to allocate sufficient sites to deliver enough housing to meet the targets for the next 5 years, their planning policies are considered out of date. Homebuilders are then able to bring forward proposals to be determined solely on the basis of the NPPF and its "presumption in favour of sustainable development." This includes applications for development on "grey belt" land, which requires redefining parts of the existing Green Belt.

### **Revised housing figures**

Nationally, the housebuilding target has been increased from 305,000 dwellings to 370,000 dwellings per year (+21.3%), in order to meet the 1.5million homes to be delivered over the next five years. The figures for the Western Gateway constituent authorities are shown in Table One below.

Local Authority	Previous method (pre-2022)	Proposed method (2024)	% difference
Bath and North East Somerset Council	717	1,466	+104.4%
Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council	2,806	2,962	+5.6%
Bristol City Council	3,378	3,057	-9.5%
Dorset Council	1,793	3,230	+80.1%
Gloucestershire County Council*	3,216	4,620	+48.1%
North Somerset Council	1,324	1,587	+19.8%
South Gloucestershire Council	1,317	1,717	+30.3%
West of England Combined Authority**	5,412	6,240	+15.3%
Wiltshire Council	1,917	3,476	+81.3%
Total Western Gateway Region	16,468	22,115	+34.3%

\* Combined figure includes Cheltenham (+52.8%), Cotswold (+94.1%), Forest of Dean (+80.8%), Gloucester (+10.3%), Stroud (+36.1%) and Tewkesbury (+14.5%).

\*\* Combined figure for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire

## Implications for the Western Gateway region

This section should be read at a regional level. It does not single out any local authority for action or specific interventions at this stage and it is not intended to prejudice the local authorities work for planning new housing. It is intended as a general guide to what lies ahead and where the Western Gateway can provide support (see also Next Steps).

Key implications are:

- Of the seven STB areas the Western Gateway has the third highest % increase in housing numbers (after Transport for the North and Peninsula Transport). Dorset, Wiltshire, Bath & North East Somerset and parts of Gloucestershire see significant increases in the numbers of housing required. This makes the case for the region needing investment commensurate with meeting this Government priority and a refocussing of funding to support infrastructure/service delivery, including with national bodies such as Network Rail/Great British Railways and National Highways.
- All local authorities will need to consider the proximity of new homes to existing transport infrastructure such as railway stations. It will be vital that new sites, especially larger and more strategic ones, are not car dependent. This is made more challenging by the rural nature of the Western Gateway as a whole. In broad terms, the Local Authorities with the greatest increases in housing requirement tend also to be those with the largest proportions of rural areas, where sustainable transport connectivity is more limited and car dependency higher. We need to embed the best sustainability in housing.
- “Green” and “Grey” belt land is furthermore likely to be on the fringe of existing settlements and suburban areas where public transport networks are less dense and so have the potential to be more reliant on car journeys.

- Having noted the above the emphasis is on creating “connected” communities, with access to local services, including where land is “Green” or “Grey” belt.”
- Emphasis on providing higher density development whilst there is a reduction of pressure on urban areas housing targets.
- Need to identify key corridors or locations that could utilise existing, well advanced or planned/ committed transport schemes to ensure new developments can make the most of public transport and active travel opportunities. Developments themselves should contribute towards the expansion of such opportunities. To note the Western Gateway already has a strong focus on North – South connectivity across the whole region.
- Reference to development around railway stations must not miss the importance of providing the services and rolling stock necessary to serve them. Equally with much of the region’s rail infrastructure heavily constrained the ability to improve services without significant investment is limited. Significant investment will be necessary to facilitate growth that is rail rather than car dependent.
- NPPF makes it clear that transport planning should have a vision-led approach, as opposed to previous approaches to “predict and provide” to determining sites for development.
- There is likely to be tension between the competing Government objectives to a) increase housing delivery in more rural authorities and b) reduce carbon emissions from transport to Net Zero by 2050.
- Link, recognise and support the importance of key well advanced, committed and planned schemes and studies to support and facilitate new housing and employment areas, including those planned by Network Rail and National Highways. Early involvement of both will be essential.
- Western Gateway tools including the Strategic Transport Model. Carbon Assessment Playbook and the DfT’s connectivity tool are available to help the local authorities (see also Next Steps below).

## **Next Steps**

Under the Regional Centre of Excellence work area the Western Gateway Business Plan for 2024/25 included proposals to provide spatial planning, interchange, active travel, social value and health guidance for the local authorities. It is now proposed that these work areas are refocused on providing direct support for the local authorities in planning for the new NPPF housing forecasts. The proposed areas of work are:

- a) High level review of the new housing requirements and their impact at a Western Gateway wide level. To include:
  - Using the DfT’s emerging Connectivity tool and results from the Western Gateway Transport Model, support the Local Authorities to undertake initial high level and regional identification of potential housing and employment areas with the best transport connectivity to key services, further identifying where improvements are required. This will be a particular challenge in rural areas so the work will need to identify the scale and types of improvements necessary. Such interventions could then be taken forward and developed for inclusion in future iterations of the SIP.
  - Demonstrate how the emerging Strategic Investment Plan including Network Rail and National Highways schemes will support the housing forecasts and

- align with strategic housing site allocations as they emerge through the new Local Plan.
- Seeing beyond local authority and STB boundaries where schemes outside the area can help facilitate development sites.
  - Identify additional assistance to b), c) and d) that the STB can provide to local authorities to help planners handle the acceleration in housing. This will be subject to available resources.
- b) Produce Regional Spatial Planning Guidance for identifying the best possible locations from a region wide transport and connectivity perspective. This approach would underpin our work in a). It will need to consider economic drivers and whether there is capacity on the transport network to accommodate the growth.
- c) Produce interchange guidance emphasising the role of interchanges in supporting new development and the NPPF emphasis on importance of proximity to railway stations.
- d) Produce Health, Physical Activity and Social Value evaluation guidance/tool for local authorities to use in assessing and capturing the benefits of potential new sites for housing and employment.

Due to the Western Gateway's existing resource being focused on the Strategic Investment Plan work it is proposed that consultants will be appointed to undertake work areas a) to d). Within the Regional Centre of Excellence budget there is funding to pay for this.

The Western Gateway will actively engage with the local authorities' transport and planning teams on shaping the proposed workstream above and will consider convening a working/advisory group to ensure the right targeted approach is taken and the outputs are of benefit.

## **Recommendation**

To approve refocusing Regional Centre of Excellence work on providing support for the local authorities in planning for the new NPPF housing forecasts.

## **Background information**

National Planning Policy Framework consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>

Revised housing forecasts by every local planning authority

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66a8d6a20808eaf43b50d9a8/outcome-of-the-proposed-revised-method.ods>

Useful summary with maps of the NPPF from Steers

[Planning Reform Story Map \(arcgis.com\)](#)

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