

An Open Letter to the Leaders of the West of England Unitary Authorities from CPRE Avonside

Dear Leaders,

You will be now be digesting the news that following the public hearings in July, the Planning Inspectors have found the most significant aspect of the ‘Joint Spatial Plan’ to be ‘unsound’, in that there is no robust and consistent rationale or strategy behind the selection of the “Strategic Development Locations”. A further letter from the Inspectors is likely to identify major problems with other key components in the JSP. CPRE Avonside expects those to include the “Duty to Cooperate”; the housing numbers; and the transport plans relating to the SDLs.

Your officers are seeking to cling on to what remains of the current plan and to amend it within the framework of the current Inquiry. The Inspectors have already made clear that they do not think this is the right way forward. CPRE strongly agrees. Many of the concerns set out by the Inspectors relate to points the CPRE has raised time and again during the long and costly consultation processes. Our constructive advice was not heeded then: we urge you to heed it now.

Trying to amend a plan that is so fundamentally flawed will not work. Moreover, it will undermine public confidence in both the planning and the political processes. We urge you not to go down that road. Instead, drawing on much of the detailed work that has been done, at considerable expense, we suggest that a new strategic plan is needed that:

- Recognises that far greater priority must now be given to environmental and climate change considerations.
- Uses up-to-date economic data to underpin calculation of housing need.
- Prioritises options for locating much more of the housing within or closer to Bristol, preferably on suitable brownfield sites.
- Is realistic about the provision of vital transport infrastructure and services, and does not propose development unless it can be fully supported by sustainable public transport.
- Includes a strategy for the region’s countryside, recognising not only its intrinsic needs but also the way in which it is integral to the success and attractiveness of the region’s cities.

CPRE Avonside has always supported the top-level vision for the region. We are as committed to building a thriving, sustainable economy as anyone. The way to achieve it is through applying these principles, not through tinkering with the deeply flawed, out of date, JSP.

Yours sincerely,

David Worskett
Chair, CPRE Avonside