

## The Banwell bypass- Some questions and answers

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Cresten Boase, Sandford.

**Q: What about Sandford, Churchill, and Winscombe, who will suffer the impact of greatly increased traffic from up to 3,075 new homes built near the Bypass, plus induced traffic, from 2024?**

A: It's not looking good at the moment. The Banwell Bypass Team are refusing to hold a public consultation event for Sandford, the village which will suffer the most. The public consultation ends on 16<sup>th</sup> August.

If the Bypass goes ahead, Sandford, Churchill and Winscombe will bear the brunt of the pollution, noise, blocks to active travel, and community severance Banwell has experienced, but multiplied many more times with the traffic from the large new developments which will be built along the Bypass from 2024, around 3,075 new dwelling.

Sandford in particular badly needs a full range of mitigation, starting with average speed cameras to prevent speeding, which is already at an alarming level, with speeds of 83mph recorded in the 30 mph zone.

Sandford Neighbourhood Group is trying to arrange meetings with North Somerset Council officials, the Banwell Bypass Team, Winscombe and Sandford Parish Council during a busy holiday period, as the nation emerges from lockdown and the Bristol Airport Expansion Enquiry takes place.

£ 3 million was costed in for improvements to the A371 and A368 between Banwell and Churchill, plus cycle infrastructure improvements Banwell- Weston super Mare.

However, the Bypass Team have a let-out in how they allocate funding for those improvements, as so far they are only allowing for extra traffic diverted from Banwell, plus some induced traffic, according to the ( extremely scanty and data-free) information provided in the consultation documents online.

**Q Who is paying for the Banwell Bypass ?**

A The government, through the Housing Infrastructure Fund of £4.1 billion, for new physical infrastructure to unlock housing sites for up to 400,000 new homes.

**Q: Why did North Somerset Council apply to the Housing Infrastructure Fund ?**

A: The Joint Spatial Plan, which was turned down by the Housing Inspectors, and is now not going ahead, planned for two large housing developments near Banwell and Churchill, up to 4,575 new houses. New physical infrastructure, like a new road, flood defences and utilities, had to be funded, to enable the new housing. The corridor of land between the A38 and the M5 was designated as the Specific Development Location. The Council put in an Expression of Interest on 28 September 2017.

**Q How much Housing Infrastructure Funding did North Somerset Council apply for ?**

- (i) Banwell Bypass: Cost estimate £46.3 m. The safeguarded route alignment was decided in July 2016 by North Somerset Council

- (ii) Improvements to A371 and A368 between Banwell and Churchill, cycle infrastructure improvements Banwell- Weston super Mare £3 m
- (iii) Utilities: ( for the 4,575 new housing developments at Banwell and Churchill ) 3 m
- (iv) Flood solution: ( for the 4,575 housing developments) £3 m
- (v) Secondary school: cost estimate £24.5m

TOTAL: £79.8 m

**Q: Who decided to apply for this?** North Somerset Council, on 8 May 2018. This meeting was described as affecting Banwell Parish, and not being a Key Decision, by Council officers Alex Fear and Jenny Ford.

On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2019 North Somerset Council approved the commissioning plan, again not classed as a Key Decision, with the parish given as Banwell and Locking, referring to the Joint Spatial Plan for SDLs ( Strategic Development Locations) at Banwell and Mendip Springs, homes at Weston Villages.

**‘ 7.4 in the unlikely event of the JSP EiP not supporting SDL growth at Banwell and Mendip Springs there would not be any requirement, in the HIF context, for a Banwell Bypass and no growth opportunities at either Banwell or Mendip Springs as a result. The secondary school element of the HIF bid would still be required to support the existing allocation at Weston Villages and we would work with MHCLG to enable this part of the proposal to be progressed.’**

**Q: What happened with the Joint Spatial Plan?**

A: in September 2019 government planning inspectors turned it down, citing significant concerns that sites ( including Banwell and Churchill SDLs) were not determined on a robust consistent and objective basis, or considering reasonable alternatives.

**Q: Meanwhile, what happened with the Council’s bid for Housing Infrastructure funding?**

On 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019, the bid was approved, on condition that construction must be complete by March 2024.

**Q: What steps did the Council take next?**

A: In January 2020 North Somerset Council announced there would be better public consultation in the future on where houses should go, citing the need to find sites for up to 30,000 houses between 2026 and 2036, and withdrew from the Joint Spatial Plan

However, on 16 June 2020 the full Council voted to increase the HIF programme amount to £97,067,550, the total HIF Grant from Homes England ‘. for a total 7,557 new dwellings: 4,482 new houses at the existing Weston Villages sites. The remaining 3,075 housing will be allocated under the new Local Plan’

On 14 August 2020 a HIF Programme Board was set up to oversee the Programme Plan and Team, with a Senior Responsible Owner ( SRO ) in charge.

**Q: Now that the Joint Spatial Plan large developments (SDLs) at Banwell and Churchill are not going ahead, what is the HIF money paid out for?**

A: The Housing Infrastructure Fund is now closed. The entry under North Somerset says funding was awarded for West of England: Enabling Infrastructure for M5- A38 Strategic Development Locations £97m.

**Q: Is there any risk North Somerset Council might be asked to refund the HIF money for the Banwell Bypass, highways improvement, plus the flooding and utilities payout for the SDLs, now the Banwell and Churchill SDLs providing 4,575 new houses, are not going ahead?**

A: We don't know. Enquiries of North Somerset Council have drawn a blank. The contract work for the funding package went out for tender on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2020, and contracts have now been awarded. There is a rush to complete the work by March 2024, the government deadline.

**Q : Who will pay if there is an overspend on the Bypass project, and more money is needed to complete it?**

A : It's true that major projects like this, with flooding issues and a bridge over Riverside, environmental mitigation for rare bats and other rare species, often come in over budget. North Somerset Council have agreed to pay for all overspend on the project. This means possibly an increase in Council Tax, or striking a bargain with Homes England for more housing, in exchange for more funding.

**Q: So what happens next about the 4,575 new homes the government is expecting once the Bypass is built?**

A. We don't know. In December 2020 the majority of people responding to the Local Plan consultation voted for 'urban intensification', putting new housing next to existing larger settlements, saving the countryside and greenbelt where possible. Allocating sites for the housing comes next. The Council have not publicised any information about where the sites might be.

However, in 2024 we will have a new access road, the Banwell Bypass, intended as an access road for major housing development. The Local Plan proposals will have to take that into consideration.

**Q: By progressing the Banwell Bypass, awarding contracts for the work before consulting the public and before finalising the Local Plan, isn't North Somerset Council mainly enabling large housing development near Banwell, Sandford, and Churchill from 2024, rather than tackling congestion through Banwell?**

A: There doesn't seem to be any other conclusion, given that all other attempts over the years to get a bypass for Banwell, to relieve congestion and improve life for residents, have failed on economic grounds. In welcoming the news the bypass was to go ahead, the Chair of Banwell Parish Council clearly accepted there would be a 'payoff' in terms of increased housing development near Banwell. The funding for the secondary school is separate from the Banwell Bypass, as it was needed for the new housing development at the Weston Villages.

**Q: Why are North Somerset Council building a new road, with the very high carbon cost of construction and added traffic, in a time of climate crisis, and having declared a Climate Emergency, with no public consultation on whether or not the Bypass should be built?**

A: No information about the carbon cost of the Bypass has been given out by the Council, and it does not appear to have been part of the Council's decision-making when deciding to go ahead with the Bypass. New roads increase carbon by land clearance, construction activities and materials, increased carbon emissions from traffic and car-dependant housing estates. The carbon reduction from transport is much slower than is needed nationally and locally, and the Banwell Bypass is a serious deficit in the Council's carbon budget, which they need to explain and justify.

Anyone who drives through Banwell empathises with Banwell residents because of the congestion, pollution, and noise they have suffered so long. Very unfortunately, the environmental cost of the Bypass cannot be overlooked. Climate crisis effects like flooding, overheating, food insecurity, loss of habitat due to droughts and flooding leading to migrations and extinctions for wildlife and humans, are becoming increasingly obvious even in our temperate country. Efforts to slow global heating everywhere are essential.