

Planning and the Environment: A New Role – A New Approach ...

As many of you know, in addition to being your ward councillor, I've also been North Somerset Council's Cabinet member for climate, waste, and sustainability. At our Full Council meeting in May, I was asked to take on planning as well. So, in shorthand, I'm now the Cabinet member for **Planning and Environment**.

I didn't accept the extra responsibility lightly. North Somerset has been told it must build nearly **9,000 additional homes**. Most of our land is classified as green belt, and our existing road and social infrastructure has been pushed to its absolute limits. The challenge is clear: how do we meet our legal obligation to build, improve our roads, while protecting nature and the green spaces that matter so much to us?

I took on the role because I believe we can — and must — do both. If we get it right, building new homes and improving our natural environment don't have to be in conflict. Over the next two years, I'll be working hard to ensure our new **Local Plan** gives us the tools to balance these goals properly. I'll share more as this work develops. As always, your views really matter to me — so if you have thoughts or concerns, please do get in touch via my email: annemieke.waite@n-somerset.gov.uk.

Bat-Friendly Planning in Action

Some of North Somerset's most remarkable residents only appear after dark — the **greater and lesser horseshoe bats**. These rare, internationally protected bats rely on quiet, connected habitats — hedgerows, woodland edges and fields — to feed and move safely at night. But development, lighting and the loss of natural corridors have made life increasingly difficult for them. That's why we've launched the **North Somerset Nature Parks** initiative, in partnership with **Natural England** and the **University of Bath's Bat Conservation Research Lab**. Using cutting-edge tracking and acoustic monitoring, we've mapped bat movement across the district — and found they travel much further than expected. This means more areas are potentially affected by development than previously thought. We're updating planning guidance to reflect this, and when on-site habitat isn't feasible, we now offer a strategic alternative: buying and restoring land to create permanent bat habitats. Developers can buy "bat units" from us to meet their legal obligations — a simpler, more effective approach that benefits planners, builders, and bats alike.

Join the Great North Somerset Bat Project

Conservation isn't just about councils — it's about local people, too. If you live in North Somerset and love wildlife, why not get involved in the **Great North Somerset Bat Project**? This citizen science project, supported by the **National Lottery Heritage Fund**, helps gather vital data about our local bat populations. No experience needed — just curiosity and a few summer evenings.

How it works:

Choose a 1km² area near home

- Pick up a bat detector kit from a local hub
- Record bat activity for six nights
- Upload your results online— and discover who's flying overhead!

It's simple, fascinating, and makes a real difference.

www.batconservationresearchlab.co.uk/north-somerset-bat-survey

Let's help protect North Somerset's bats — one square kilometre at a time.

Annemieke

Annemieke Waite, Councillor Newsletter July/August 2025

Email: Annemieke.waite@n-somerset.gov.uk

Phone: 07385-010134