

DORSET COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

MILBORNE ST ANDREW PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE

17 FEBRUARY 2021

SECTION 2: DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

DEV1: The housing requirement and the need for employment land in Dorset

It is accepted that the starting point of the housing numbers for the area is a matter dictated by the housing projections cascaded down from central Government. It is disappointing that these are using out-of-date populations projections and appear to take no account of environmental constraints at this first stage.

As worded this states that provision is made so that (a minimum number) of houses 'will be delivered'. Yet the actual delivery is not within the control of Dorset Council or local communities. It would be much better to phrase this along the lines of the provision "will enable landowners and developers to deliver this growth..." Section 2.7.3 highlights that past delivery has been below the target rate set in local plans, but provides no analysis as to why this is the case – which is critical if we are to avoid repeating this problem (and unnecessarily develop unsuitable land). There are certainly examples of development within Milborne St Andrew that have not progressed in a timely fashion, and not only does this put pressure on the further release of greenfield sites, but also their part-implementation has caused concern when the site falls into disrepair.

We would also like the Council to consider including sub-area targets for each functional area within the policy, if there is a genuine spatial strategy that seeks to direct growth in a manner that is sustainably balanced, and to minimise the risk that (for example) the failure to deliver on development on one side of the county will be seen to be remedied by further growth in a completely different area, if the housing land supply falls below 5 year's supply.

The policy should also reflect / recognise the need for housing and employment (and infrastructure) to be delivered in a timely fashion – the delivery of one without the other would be unsustainable.

Para 5.1.6 (and to a lesser extent 2.2.10) recognises that "Recent significant events such as the declaration of a climate and ecological emergency, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have the potential to profoundly impact the local and wider economy. Although some effects are already becoming apparent there is much uncertainty and it is too early to tell how places and sectors will change as a result of these issues. Further work will be necessary to fully appreciate their implications for the economy." but this is not really addressed in the strategy in any meaningful way, or any real consideration given to what impact this could have on housing (not just employment) needs.

It is also disappointing that the provision / capacity of infrastructure (highways, public transport, utilities, superfast broadband etc) is not clearly reflected in the bullet points under the heading 'achieving sustainable development'. There is no clear evidence on any assessment of this factor. Indeed, para 2.9.8 refers to the need for engagement with infrastructure providers to determine what infrastructure is needed to support growth that may be proposed in a neighbourhood plan, but that work should already have been done and included in this strategy as part of the wider Dorset needs. Similarly 6.1.5 refers to the production of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) to provide "an overview of the range of infrastructure projects required to support the growth in the local plan." And goes on to state that "An IDP will be produced for the submission stage of the local plan production, once future infrastructure needs become clearer through consultation."

Spatial strategy

There appears to be little in the way of a meaningful, considered spatial strategy that looks holistically at the county – the plan very much appears to be the result of the 'knitting together' of the previous draft plans.

The Plan makes no reference at all to the potential proposal for a National Park (not even under section 3.5 on landscape), and the implications that this may have for reviewing and potentially extending the designated nationally protected landscapes (particularly given the fact that the Dorset AONB boundary has not been reviewed in more than 50 years and potentially should include many areas that current sit outside its area). As a result places such as Milborne St Andrew, which lie outside but are arguably of equal landscape quality to the areas within the AONB, are potentially undervalued, yet our area enjoys a wealth of heritage and cultural associations as well as attractive landscapes.

The Local Plan also does not give any meaningful thought as to whether Neighbourhood Plans could play a role in identifying sites to meet the housing needs of the area through their plans. Milborne St Andrew has produced a plan that caters for a reasonable level of growth, and once this is built, we would expect to look at identifying further sites. Whilst not wanting to become a town, the village has been evolving and growing for many years and the facilities such as our school, pub, shop, sports ground etc need to be supported.

Settlement hierarchy

The plan proposes four different settlement tiers (large built-up areas, towns and main settlement, village with development boundaries and villages without development boundaries). There is a background paper that has been produced on this matter, but this does not include any detailed analysis of the base data considered, which makes it difficult to understand exactly how some settlements have ended up in the various categories.

For villages such as Milborne St Andrew, which is proposed to be a Tier 3 settlement, some of the facilities are not necessarily guaranteed as being sustained. Public transport services are one such facilities which have been and will no doubt continue to be cut back, and the fragility of such services to commercial operator withdrawal does not appear to have been tested. Similarly the provision of a doctor's surgery is not certain when the facilities from which these are based are commercially rather than publicly held – the example of the closure of the Stalbridge practice being a recent example. It would therefore be important that the underpinning evidence considers the likelihood of such changes and sets out a clear strategy for their re-provisioning if needed.

Settlement boundaries

Whilst there has been no review undertaken of the adequacy / alignment of the development boundaries, it is particularly concerning that where these have been updated through Neighbourhood Plans (as was the case in Milborne St Andrew) the revised boundaries are not shown on the draft proposals map. There is no logical reason to revert to the boundaries that were last updated in the late 1990s.

DEV3: Growth in the central Dorset functional area

The growth policies (DEV 2 - 5) set out the intended strategy in terms of growth for each functional area. Milborne St Andrew is placed within the Central Dorset area, which relates primarily to Dorchester and Weymouth. In reality, villagers look to both Dorchester and Blandford for their needs, as the travel time and connectivity between the two is fairly similar, but given the school pyramid relates to Dorchester this seems to be a reasonable fit.

The Neighbourhood Plan housing numbers, as specified in Appendix 2, are (as stated in 2.10.6) simply based on the strategic allocations (where such are proposed) plus projected growth from SHLAA sites and windfall. Whilst this enables communities to decide whether or not they wish to enable further growth, it fails to plan positively for these areas in terms of any real consideration of their needs and

their capacity to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan. Whilst undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan is not a simple or quick task, a supportive Local Planning Authority that appears to genuinely listen and implement the plans those communities produce is essential.

The policy includes reference to housing growth through windfall and infilling within existing settlements defined by local plan or neighbourhood plan development boundaries (part (v)), but does not specifically reference the local plan boundaries can be amended, that growth could also be identified through neighbourhood plan site allocations (that may not necessarily be within a defined boundary) or other Localism Act tools such as neighbourhood development orders. It is also not clear why Puddletown is reference for smaller-scale expansion and other villages with neighbourhood plans proposing some small scale growth are not. Nor does it appear to allow for employment growth to be identified through neighbourhood plan allocations or policies. It may be helpful if the policy were to be rephrased to more clearly articulate the role of Neighbourhood Plans, and distinguish between strategic growth areas (the larger scale allocations) and more local growth that may contribute to the overall strategic needs. As it stands, there is a concern that the policies could be interpreted as prohibiting housing or employment growth identified through Neighbourhood Plans.

DEV6: Development at villages with development boundaries in rural Dorset

This policy would apply to Milborne St Andrew as a Tier 3 defined settlement. The supporting text refers to development in these locations being 'at an appropriate scale to the size of a settlement', which is supported in principle – however the factors perhaps do not cover all of the issues, which we would describe as:

- keeping the villages' more rural character (in particular avoiding more urban forms of development in terms of their scale, density and layout)
- maintaining a close visual and functional connection to the countryside
- maintaining a reasonable range of local facilities to meet local needs and encourage social interaction at all age levels,
- having a population size and pace of growth where people can know or recognise each other because their paths will cross – which means avoiding major growth.

The potential to amend development boundaries to meet local needs is specifically referenced in para 2.6.19 and should be reiterated in the policy wording. There appears to be some confusion within Dorset Council over whether this is legally possible (which is why the published policies map is still showing the Local Plan boundaries even when they have been updated by Neighbourhood Plans) – but in any event national policy and legislation accept that they both have development plan status, and that any conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy which is contained in the last document to become part of the development plan. As with DEV3, there is also no reference to site allocations through Neighbourhood Plans – which could be enabled through a change to the wording, along the following lines:

DEV6: Development at villages with development boundaries in rural Dorset

In rural Dorset beyond the Green Belt and away from large built-up areas, towns and other main settlements, the 'larger villages' (in Tier 3 of the settlement hierarchy) will be the main focus for development.

Within local plan development boundaries at the 'larger villages' (as may be amended through Neighbourhood Plans) residential, employment and other development will normally be permitted provided that:

- i) *it accords with any site-specific policies for the strategic expansion of the village in this local plan, or*
- ii) *it contributes to meeting the needs of the local area and is at an appropriate scale to the size of the settlement.*

The second part of the policy appears to relate more to Tier 4 settlements, and this too could be clarified through a change along the following lines (so as to avoid confusion with Tier 3 village plans):

Local communities may also define neighbourhood plan development boundaries around villages that do not have a local plan development boundary, in order to meet local needs at an appropriate scale to the size of the settlement. Within neighbourhood plan development boundaries, residential, employment and other development will only be permitted if it accords with the relevant policies in a neighbourhood plan.

DEV7: Development outside local plan and neighbourhood plan development boundaries in rural Dorset

This policy similarly needs to be amended to enable Neighbourhood Plans to make site specific allocations to meet local needs, where this is appropriate.

DEV9: Neighbourhood plans

The housing targets are primarily based on the anticipated levels of housing identified through extant consents, infill opportunities on large sites identified within the settlements boundaries and a pro-rata projection based on a sample of past windfall over the past 7 years. These are expressed as a minimum presumably in order to ensure that the plans do not unintentionally undermine the housing land supply for the Local Plan area, and also to clarify that additional growth would be acceptable.

Whilst in theory this may seem a reasonable approach, the pro-rata windfall rate may potentially cause issues for some areas, if it is unlikely to be sustained. However the scale of growth proposed for Milborne St Andrew (80 homes) is likely to be exceeded through the extant consents and Neighbourhood Plan proposals, so the minimum target is not an issue for our parish.

Some minor amendments to the policy wording would however be useful:

DEV9: Neighbourhood plans

In preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, due regard should be had to:

- i) *how the plan positively contributes to the local plan vision and strategic priorities and the requirement to be in general conformity with its strategic policies;*
- ii) *what infrastructure may be needed to support development and how this can be provided in a timely fashion; and*
- iii) *whether there is reasonable certainty that the policies and proposals are deliverable, and the mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing the plan.*

Where provision is made for housing, the housing requirement figure for a neighbourhood plan area, set out in appendix 2, should be met and may be exceeded to meet local needs.

SECTION 3: THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

ENV7: Achieving high quality design

Whilst the aim of good design has obvious benefits, to some extent (ii) and (iii) overlaps and the inclusion of (iii) suggests that mediocre designs will be acceptable.

The draft National Design Code has now been published and it would be timely to update this section in light of the factors that covers and how this may be taken forward through the Local Plan process or in supporting Neighbourhood Plans.

ENV8: The landscape and townscape context

With the pressure to maximise profits, adequate garden size is increasingly becoming an issue in design, in terms of achieving adequate space with reference to the likely occupants. Whilst this is mentioned in the forerunner to Policy ENV8 it does not appear to be covered by the policy wording.

The policy should ensure that sufficient private garden areas. This should be proportionate to the dwelling size, ensuring these are sufficient space to meet occupiers' needs (such as for an outdoor clothes line, and to store bins, cycles and gardening equipment), space for a sitting out area without excessive shade, and, in respect of family homes, space for children to play (unless there are exceptional reasons why this is not possible). Recent experiences of planning applications show no attempt to rectify concerns raised about family homes proposed with garden areas which are small and unusable because of their size and the topography, and where the plans fail to show how these could accommodate bin stores, cycle stores, sheds etc let alone any space for children to play.

ENV9: Achieving high levels of environmental performance

Whilst this policy appears laudable, achieving standards above that required through Building Regulations does not appear to be given any meaningful consideration under existing plans - in practice to what extent has this policy been used – how has it been considered and has it ever been used as a reason for refusal? If not, then a more stringent policy is either needed, or the policy should be removed as superfluous.

ENV11: Amenity

With reference to unpleasant odours, whilst the sewerage treatment zones buffer is shown on the policies map, it would also make sense to highlight other known sources of noise and pollution (potentially linked to unrestricted B2 and waste processing uses). For example, at Milborne St Andrew permission was given for a storage lagoon for holding digestate on land west of the village (ref 2/2014/0529/PLNG).

ENV13: Flood risk

In Milborne St Andrew a key issue has been groundwater levels and sewer inundation. In September 2017 Wessex Water produced a map of areas where it asked to be consulted because development presents a high risk of contributing towards groundwater levels and consequential sewer inundation. The map basically included the whole of the village and adjoining land. Wessex Water are continuing to undertake a programme of investigations and sewer re-lining to reduce the risk of sewer flooding in the area, and are committed to working with the Local Lead Flood Authority to agree and implement a groundwater management strategy. This is likely to require higher levels of design and construction, to ensure that the proposed drainage is resilient to the impacts of groundwater infiltration when the water table rises. The approach of pumping out the sewerage system from below March Bridge In times of sustained wet weather is not a sustainable, long-term solution.

Reference to issues such as this should be made in the Local Plan to raise awareness, and the areas subject to such special measures should be specifically shown on the Policies Map. It would also be helpful to ensure that the policy clearly reflects all forms of flood risk, by amending it to read "Development should be located in areas of lowest risk from all potential sources of flooding. The council will sequential..."

SECTION 4: HOUSING

HOUS1: Housing Mix

In many of the villages, a key issue in terms of housing has been the lack of smaller open market properties (as there are usually plenty of larger properties) and 1 bedroom affordable homes. There is also the potential need / benefit of flexible accommodation to enable live-in care / annex options as part of any housing mix (with reference to section 4.5).

The policies in the adopted plans fail to secure the delivery of these most needed house types, with delivery generally focusing on larger (and presumably more profitable) traditional house types that do not provide any real flexibility. Even the consultation responses typically generated from the Housing Enabling Team appear to ignore any evidence of local need and house sizes proposed, and focus simply on the Dorset-wide totals in supporting every scheme.

In the absence of any information to define what “an appropriate mix of homes of different sizes, types and affordability” and lack of meaningful input from the Housing Enabling Team, this mismatch is likely to continue given the current wording and lack of any supporting evidence. This could be covered through supplementary guidance, but there is no reference to such guidance being prepared. Point (iii) is supported – which addresses this issue for those communities who have the resources to undertake Neighbourhood Plans.

HOUS2: Affordable housing

The provision of social rented as part of the affordable housing supply is something that is welcomed to provide a greater range of affordable units that are genuinely affordable to people on local wage levels. However it is noted that, at the current time, it is unclear how the provision of affordable housing will be viable given that the plan suggests that this has not yet been assessed.

HOUS3: Affordable housing exception sites

Whilst in principle this is a useful policy tool, under (i) there is a lack of clarity in terms of what constitutes a settlement and the use of the word ‘adjoining’ which is perhaps too rigid if applied to settlement if this is defined by the development boundary (as it would unreasonably rule out sites where there may be a small but walkable gap between the site and the settlement, or rely on boundaries that have not been reviewed in decades).

The proposal for Neighbourhood Plans to be able to include small numbers of market homes on rural exception sites is supported.

HOUS4: Specialist purpose built accommodation

Does not appear to have any locational criteria. Presumably this relates to provision within settlement boundaries or through the re-use and/or expansion of an existing building, but this is not clear from the supporting text (although 4.5.16 perhaps attempts to do so but does not refer to DEV policies).

HOUS5: Housing for complex dementia and nursing care

4.5.5 indicates that care provision should be close to town centres – but there is also a potential role for the larger (Tier 3) villages to provide care provision close to local facilities where there is a GP surgery or outreach branch. The policy references being on a public transport corridor, but this is potentially open to much wider interpretation.

HOUS6: Self-build and custom-build housing

Whilst this is identified as a non-strategic policy, it may still be useful to clarify in (ii) that self-build and custom-build housing can also be supported on sites outside of development boundaries if sought through Neighbourhood Plans.

HOUS13: Sites for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople

The proposed allocations (HOUS10 and HOUS12) make provision for around 57 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers; which is significantly in excess of the need identified in HOUS10 (which is for 20 pitches) to ensure that amount of provision meets the identified need. However Policy HOUS13 then goes on to provide a general policy that would enable further sites to come forward. This seems to be giving more flexibility for such a site than that offered to rural exception sites for affordable housing (where a specific need that cannot be otherwise met needs to be demonstrated) or self build, low impact dwellings etc... which is not fully justified in the text.

SECTION 5: ECONOMY

The section on the economy lacks a clear focus or strategy in terms of any spatial or industry-type focus, simply referring to growth across all industries (5.2.2) and the need to better understand the fall-out from Brexit and Covid-19. Para 5.2.3 appears to be the best approximation of an strategy, which is that

"The scale and type of new employment development should be appropriate to its location and focused in places where it will provide people with the opportunity to work locally, helping to promote social inclusion and reduce the need to travel." And in 5.2.4 "supporting the right types of economic development in the most appropriate locations," Yet there is no policy per se to express this, potentially relying on the suite of DEV policies which are settlement and site-specific based on the land opportunities identified.

Despite the statement that "Flexible policies for the rural area have been included instead of allocations in and around other settlements" it is unclear what this means. DEV7 (which operates outside of any development boundaries) does permit new employment, tourism, educational / training, recreational or leisure-related development. Does this therefore mean that general employment would be acceptable basically anywhere and at any scale (subject to environmental policies)?

The general economy policies simply focus on the protection of existing sites. Whilst these distinguish between key and other sites, with key sites being described (5.3.1) as those that "contribute significantly to the supply of employment land", "often provide a location for development that is not compatible with residential areas" and "of particular importance for the supply of jobs" and "important for local and inward investment" there is no clear evidence assessing the various sites.

This has led to what appears to be some obvious anomalies – for example, the key sites include some quite small sites within the towns (eg Johns Road in Wareham at 0.3ha) and villages (eg the proposal for a key employment site of 0.7ha in Bere Regis) whereas other village / rural sites (eg Milborne St Andrew business centre (1.7ha)) do not even feature as an employment area (key or not).

ECON2: Protection of other employment sites

Whilst small sites within the countryside do not necessarily support the most sustainable patterns, they are a very important source of local employment (particularly small enterprises that may not necessarily be wholly appropriate in residential areas and are not dependent on major deliveries or customer access) that supports the rural economy. Their absence from Appendix 6 should not be misinterpreted as having no value.

In terms of the policy wording, there is no guidance as to what a 'suitable period of time' may be for the marketing of any premises to show that these are not viable. Some guidance (for example, specifying at least 12 months) would be useful to avoid inconsistencies in the general approach applied.

The wording used in part (ii) of the policy is not as clear as the supporting text at 5.4.9 ie: Development which would prejudice the [ongoing] efficient and effective [employment] use of the remainder of an employment site will not be permitted.

ECON3: Hierarchy of Centres and the sequential test

ECON4: Town centre impact assessments

There are some obvious inconsistencies in the treatment of large villages and whether these should perform the role of a local centre (Figure 5.2). It is not clear on what basis the villages listed have been selected - why is Bere Regis noted, but not Alderholt, Crossways or Charmouth? Where is Marnhull's centre? What about the facilities in Milborne St Andrew? Surely in light of the settlement strategy it would be appropriate to include all villages with Tier 3 status within this list? It is accepted that in some villages these are perhaps difficult to define given that facilities may be scattered along the main thoroughfare / High Street rather in one cluster – and therefore a more bespoke approach may need to be considered.

ECON9. New agricultural buildings

Whilst it makes sense to ensure that there are no existing buildings on the unit which are capable of re-use for agricultural purposes prior to allowing new buildings, this does not prevent such buildings being converted or sold off immediately prior to the application, creating a potential loophole. Wording more similar to that used in Part 6 Class A ref A.1.a and b of the GDPO may be appropriate.

SECTION 6: COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

COM4. Recreation, sports facilities and open space

Figure 6.4: Guidance on standards for built recreation facilities does not appear to readily match with the proposed approach for such villages to be within a 15 minute car-borne trip (or 30 minute public transport) distance of the towns – and should be amended for consistency. A 30 minute car-borne trip would seem excessive.

Part (i) of the policy is not clear as to the thresholds that would be applied for the provision and would usefully reference the standards to be applied. It is disappointing to see that no reference is made to natural greenspace provision (or any relevant standards).

COM6. The provision of education and training facilities

The Parish Council is working with the Governors of the First School and the separate Pre-School in order to ensure that both of these facilities can continue to be sustained into the future. It is clear from our discussions that there has not been any real consideration of the pre-school element in terms of future planning when the Council has previously commented on education contributions that may be sought in relation to planning applications.

This is borne out by the policy and supporting text in the Local plan - again there appears to be a lack of any real understanding of the strategic coverage and functioning of these facilities and how this may be influenced through the Local Plan. Where is the evidence / strategy regarding capacity etc and what areas has this highlighted as being under threat or deficient?

The policy wording is also unclear as to when the loss of facilities will need to be re-provided, as this section is shown as a sub-bullet for considering proposed for new / replacement facilities only.

The transport network

6.7.1 appears to focus on the rural population as being the main source of car-borne trips, when in reality a significant proportion (typically over 50%) of the urban population travel to work by car, much more than those who might travel on foot or cycle. Overall there has been very limited take-up of public transport regardless of location, but there has traditionally been a much greater degree of home working in rural areas, that may increase further as this is enabled through technology.

What the Local Plan does not focus on (but should) is the adequacy of the infrastructure to cope with any increase in trip generation.

COM8. Parking standards in new development

The policy refers to parking provision being made in accordance with the council's published local parking guidance. The current guidance is based on 2001 car ownership levels projected forward to 2026, but evidence has shown that the 2026 car ownership levels have already been exceeded in many areas. The parking standards need to be updated and subject to consultation. This was a major issue raised through our Neighbourhood Plan, based on the observation (and evidence) of the problems arising from inadequate provision overflowing onto roads which do not have the capacity to safely absorb parked cars. The problems are also further exacerbated by current practice of developments placing parking in tandem (for example 2 parking places placed one in front of another in front of a garage), which severely reduces the effective use of the spaces in practice, as it requires the cars to be 'shuffled' before they can be used, and as such the 'easier' option of parking on-street (often unsafely) becomes the default choice.

Wind energy development

In the current draft the question is asked whether the Local Plan should allocate any of the areas identified in Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6. for wind turbines. The maps are derived from a desk-based constraints-based study which appears inadequate given the previous experience of wind turbine

planning applications. In particular there is a notable bias towards recognising ecology constraints (and additional consultation with the relevant bodies on that subject) that has not been echoed in the consideration of the area's heritage.

An example of this is the Tolpuddle area (to the south of Milborne St Andrew), where the previous proposals for a wind farm were shown as affecting heritage assets of international significance, notably Tolpuddle village with its association with the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and places associated with the work and life of the writer Thomas Hardy. Furthermore, Historic England's response to that application (which was withdrawn) highlighted that Weatherby Castle, a scheduled monument approx 1km distant from the proposed turbines, was an important heritage asset which would be significantly affected by the proposed development. Looking at the study, there is no clear buffer expressed for scheduled monuments (unlike the 3km buffer used for Grade I buildings) and whilst Natural England were consulted in regard to other sensitive sites, no such advice appears to have been sought from Historic England in respect of scheduled monuments or other heritage assets.

It is clear that further work on the heritage constraints is needed in order to refine the areas of search prior to making any decisions on this issue.

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