



NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 17 MARCH 2026

Present: Cllrs Richard Crabb (Chair), David Taylor (Vice-Chair), Alex Brenton, Barrie Cooper, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones and Val Potheary

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Lara Altree (Senior Lawyer - Regulatory), Hannah Smith (Development Management Area Manager (North), Rob McDonald (Senior Planning Officer) and Penny Canning (Lead Project Officer).

118. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Fry, Vitali, Major, Woode and Ridout.

119. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

120. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2026 were confirmed and signed.

121. Registration for public speaking and statements

Representations by the public to the Committee on individual planning applications are detailed below. There were no questions, petitions or deputations received on other items on this occasion.

122. P/FUL/2025/03574, Land North of Castle Avenue, Okeford Fitzpaine.

With the aid of a visual presentation including plans and aerial photographs, the Case Officer identified the site and explained the proposal and relevant planning policies to members. Photographs of the site context, heritage assets, flood risks, landscape setting, proposed development site plan were shown. The location of the development was beyond the settlement boundary of Okeford Fitzpaine. The development was a 10-minute walk to facilities such as the village shop and post office. The application was regarded as sustainable village growth and an opportunity to enhance the village. There would be footway links suitably connected as well as recreation ground links which would support the services in Okeford Fitzpaine. The heritage impact was less than substantial harm that would be outweighed by public benefits. Castle Cottage was of architectural interest, and the setting contributes to significance of the village and the historic agriculture setting. However, the rural setting had been eroded by modern development. The

less than substantial harm to the cottage would be reduced by a green buffer and landscaping. In terms of ecology, the foraging habitat would be retained and enhanced, and trees would be protected by a tree protection condition. The separation between neighbouring properties would be acceptable at 20-30 meters and there was no flood risk or drainage issues.

Public Participation

Simon Wheeler

Mr Wheeler explained that there was already planning permission for over 70 new dwellings, adding to the 75 completed in the last two years. This application was for a further 78 dwellings. He added that cumulatively and compared to the size of the village, this was significant development. He quoted paragraph 110 of the NPPF – significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made, sustainable. Okeford may have once been considered a sustainable location, but it was no longer. Nor did this development make it sustainable. He concluded that the proposal therefore failed the test. He also explained that the report also claimed the village offered a reasonable level of facilities to meet day-to-day needs. This was no longer true as the school had closed, the shop had been for sale for 2 years, the pub operated on restricted hours, and public transports had been cut back. The report wrongly suggested that this development would support local jobs. Houses were already built on former employment sites. Once the construction jobs had gone, local jobs would depend on tourism, farming and equestrian businesses – which depended on rural charm – the very thing that this scheme would damage.

Mr Wheeler went through transport, highways and safety informing that Okeford was not on any main road or transport corridor. It could not be compared to larger, more connected settlements. The already limited bus service was vulnerable to being reduced further as the 'Okeford loop' takes time. The 'Marnhull loop' was cut in similar circumstances. This scheme was expected to support the services in Shillingstone as a '*cluster*'? He asked if any of the Committee had tried to walk or cycle the two miles from this site? There was no bus on the weekend, and a 2 hour wait on weekdays. He added that the report admitted there were issues with pavement safety and a lack of pedestrian crossings and that even with improvements, routes could still not be safe. There concerns were known and acknowledged, so why was no funding proposed for better public transport roads or safe pedestrian routes? He moved onto design and landscape impact. He explained that Dorset Council's urban design officer recognised what many villagers already see: Successive development had eroded the character and rurality of Okeford Fitzpaine. The use of harsh red tiles and suburban layouts was completely out of keeping with the traditional village form. The officer's professional advice was clear – the proposed design detracted from the historical scale and pattern of development and would cause harm to the sensitive rural edge of the village. This echoed the sentiments of everyone he had spoken to. The proposal conflicted with the National Design Guide, the NPPF, and Policy 24 of the North Dorset Local Plan – all of which required development to enhance, not undermine, local character. He asked the Committee to consider whether its approach to planning in villages such as, Okeford Fitzpaine was really working. It

was not delivering better infrastructure, it was creating dormitory, car dependent settlements. The local need for affordable housing was already being met by existing developments. The school drop-off point that was planned was now pointless. He asked why the Council was not re-thinking its approach rather than ploughing on regardless. He concluded that the village was already contributing to the housing need. Further expansion would not make it sustainable, as required by national policy. Do not use Okeford to meet wider housing targets at the expense of its rural integrity and community wellbeing.

Alison Roberts

Ms Roberts lived in the centre of Okeford Fitzpaine within the conservation area. She explained that her objections to planning being granted for this development was regarding her grave concerns relating to road safety for all users. The village was surrounded by stables and horses being ridden around the village and was a part of the culture, part of the conservation we were meant to be protecting. The village had several families with school age children, all of whom, due to the lack of local facilities, were required to catch buses and coaches to take them to school.

Due to the historical nature of the area, there was a lack of appropriate infrastructure around the village, with very little footpaths, or footpaths allowing more than one person to walk. Even in the developments that had been recently built there was no safe passage from the houses to the centre of the village, despite this being in the planning of Shillingstone Fields, the footpath promised had never been built. Pedestrians have to walk in the road.

Shillingstone Lane had at least two blind corners as you leave the village and there was another blind corner by the pub where The Cross meets Castle Lane. Despite a recent reduction in speed limit in the village, speeding still occurred.

There was very limited public transportation meaning the majority of villagers relied on cars, she worked in Poole and when she leaves for work at 7.30 in the morning, she regularly came across school children walking in the road (as they have to) from the Shillingstone Fields development to the bus stop opposite the old school. Often this was on the blind corner. Timed wrongly this could result in a serious accident.

The same issue occurs from the Comerwicke side of the village and the area of this proposed development. There was very little footpath from Comerwicke up to The Cross, again the road narrows and having recently walked to the Parish Council meeting at the Pavillion this month, she felt very unsafe and had the impression at least three cars were going to hit her as they sped along Castle Lane. She requested that the Committee should visit in rush hour to see what it was like.

If all the homes with proposed planning permission were granted and built, this would result in around a 40% increase in houses in the parish with each house having at least one if not two cars or more. Having already noticed an increase in cars within the village from the developments that were occupied, the increase in houses and therefore cars would mean it would be dangerous to walk around the village. Horses, tractors, cars, walkers, dogs, cyclists, children – everyone would be at risk. This won't just impact Okeford Fitzpaine, it would also impact surrounding villages such as Shillingstone, Turnworth and Belchalwell.

Turnworth in particular was a regular route taken over Okeford Hill for those travelling to Blandford and Poole and did not even have a 30-mph limit and disrespectful drivers approach this village at speeds far higher than it should have to suffer. Increasing the number of cars would increase the risks here too and at much higher speeds than Okeford Fitzpaine

If these properties go ahead and result in a serious accident where someone has life changing injuries or loses a life, that cannot be undone.

Ken Parke (Agent)

The applicant has successfully delivered their adjoining development at Commerwick and which provided 100% affordable housing and was fully occupied and a successful development. The applicant wished to add to that success by providing more affordable homes within this area where there was a housing need and where the housing cost was 13 times the average salary. The Council's critical land supply issue means that proposals for additional housing in sustainable locations must be approved unless there are strong reasons for refusal. Dorset policies identify Okeford as a sustainable location. The presumption in favour was set is set out in national policy and applies in this instance with full weight. The applicants wished to present the proposal to the Committee as an extremely well-designed development which would provide a high-quality residential environment appropriate to the immediate and wider setting of the site and was acceptable in all regards.

Mr Parke explained that the layout and design had evolved through several rounds of full consultation with Dorset Council officers who granted it to be appropriate to the rural location, appropriate to the landscape setting, to the edge of the village and to the village itself. The proposals represented a spacious development within the landscape, creating a place with its own identity but very much referenced and linked to the main settlement. The proposals provided a good mix of homes to meet the local needs, including policy compliant levels of affordable housing, mostly family housing, on good sized generous plots, providing good living conditions for future occupiers. The majority of properties present towards the newly created areas of public open space, and the edges of the site and within the core, a planted streetscape with pedestrian priority and views through to the public open spaces, a high-quality residential environment and overall, scale, design, and use of materials reflect the village vernacular and character. The proposals were of the highest quality in terms of design and layout, and this was not a matter of a fine balancing exercise as such, because the land was suitable and could be developed and the scheme represented the creation of a quality, residential environment against which there are no adverse impacts to be balanced. A fully detailed transport assessment demonstrated that there were no primary safety or capacity issues and one of the benefits, was enhanced connectivity to the village and safer connectivity to the village to allay concerns heard. The public benefits from the scheme were significant, for the wider community, including the additional supporting services within Okeford Fitzpaine, and the neighbouring villages. Rural services decline, when they are not fully supported, and planning over the last decades resulted in no additional housing in rural areas to support rural services. The current policy was to reverse that and to provide additional housing to support

the rural economy for the benefit of rural communities. He asked members to support the officers' recommendations.

Rachael Rowe spoke on behalf of Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council.

She made the Committee aware that Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council strongly opposed this additional 78 home development on the northern edge of the village. Since 2018, the village had seen three developments - at Old Dairy, Shillingstone Fields, and Comerwicke. This had added 110 homes to a village of about 400 properties. Homes remained unsold on Shillingstone Fields, and the affordable housing had been slow to take up. Construction of 27 homes had now started on Pleydells. A further 48 houses had been granted on the Wessex Park site in 2024, which has recently been put up for sale. This level of growth was disproportionate to the village, local needs, and does nothing to reverse the decline in local employment or infrastructure. It further suburbanised the rural village – and set an unhelpful precedent for more of the same.

Since 2016, Okeford Fitzpaine had lost its industrial units, the bus services had been cut, and the primary school was closed. Unlike Shillingstone or Marnhull, to which the village had been compared, Okeford Fitzpaine was not on the main road. It was therefore less attractive for employment opportunities and was car dependent. There was no safe walking or cycling route to Shillingstone – which this proposal is said to support - because of the lack of pavements, usable footpaths, and speed of traffic. Bus services run two hourly during daytime and not at weekends limiting employment opportunities and access to key services for people who do not drive – including those in the affordable housing.

There was no response from Dorset Council's public transport team, so no assurance this would be improved. Half-hourly, 7-day service, was not on the cards.

There was a lot of concerns from the local families about school places, and the Parish Council was disappointed to see that the Education Authority had not submitted a report on capacity in local schools to assess the rising demand due to developments as this gave no assurance of guaranteed places at Shillingstone school.

It was concerning that despite more houses, infrastructure in Okeford Fitzpaine had deteriorated significantly.

As the village was car dependent a large development like this would result in increased traffic. A narrow pinch point at the new Cross junction on the A357 would become congested with queuing, risking collisions.

The Parish Council requested an update on the affordable housing register from Dorset Council. This was received on 10th March. In August, there were 61 households with either a local connection or stating a preference to be housed in Okeford Fitzpaine. This figure was just 21 households – so a drop from 61 to 21. This remaining need would be met by the housing already being built.

The Parish Council had already seen evidence that some of the affordable housing was being allocated to people who do not have a local connection to the area, and who are not in employment. These are vulnerable people with no social support network, placed in a rural area with poor transport and a lack of infrastructure. While people have to live somewhere, there was a lack of support for these people who will become part of our community. This had already caused social issues, involving the police and others, so much so that we have attempted to get a parish-based support worker, but are told that the S106 money is for general NHS funding and cannot be used for this. This situation would only get much worse as more vulnerable people are placed in this out-of-the way rural village.

The Parish Council had tried to engage with Dorset Council several times to discuss a strategic managed approach to developments and supporting infrastructure and has not received a response. The Parish Council had requested that our 'larger village' or Tier three status be downgraded and have not received a response or update. Dorset Council was failing to plan positively for its rural areas – it seemed to have no plan for villages such as Okeford Fitzpaine. This issue was too important to ignore.

Cllr Steve Murcer

Cllr Murcer objected to the planning application, and he built on the points made by the speakers before him. The committee had already heard that development should be focused on where they are sustainable or capable of being sustainable. Okeford Fitzpaine is currently classed as a tier 3 settlement or larger village capable of providing sustainable development to meet its own and housing needs of the wider community. He thought that this statement was out of date as facilities in the village had declined and whilst it was still a lovely place to live, it had no school, no doctor's surgery, little or no employment, and unreliable public transport. Okeford Fitzpaine is a dormitory village and looked outwards for its educational employment and welfare needs. In planning terms, it was not a sustainable community. By building new homes in this place, it will not change. The school would not reopen, a new doctor's surgery would not be built, and businesses were more likely to locate to towns which were more commercially favourable. He had challenged the tier 3 status, but Okeford Fitzpaine was still growing, faster than the rest of Dorset and that was unlikely to change. But this was not sustainable. He asked what was the cumulative effect of development on this scale, in this village? At what stage would the tipping point be reached? Would it be the 12000 extra car journeys per week if development went ahead, or the impact of doubling the size of this village if the houses proposed in this application and the local plan go ahead or would it be the impact on the landscape? Large scale development of this type should take place in close proximity to settlements where this infrastructure already exists or was capable of being developed further. In communities where people can live, work and educate their children. This Parish Council and this community do not oppose or object to every application but were concerned about the effect of inappropriate development on their community. They are important stakeholders in the planning process and do not

want to leave site selection to landowners and development. They had reached out to Dorset Council, and he thought it was unacceptable that they were not responded to.

Members questions and comments

- **Members questioned how the development would support village viability, given the lack of key services such as a school, shop, medical facilities and bus services.**
- **Concerns were raised about whether the village had the infrastructure to support a significant population increase and about primary school capacity, especially with 40% affordable housing potentially attracting young families.**
- **Members highlighted that there could be a risk of up to 150 pupils having no local school places, undermining sustainability and there could not be enough GP facilities, with s106 contributions arriving too late to address immediate needs.**
- **Members commented that there was poor connectivity as residents would need to walk along narrow roads to reach village facilities. The village was said to no longer meet Tier 3 settlement criteria, weakening the case for major development. The village had limited bus services and reliance on cars were raised as sustainability issues. Safety concerns were raised and included: Narrow one-person footpaths, unsafe routes for children walking to school or bus stops, road widths, adoption, and management uncertainties, the need for warning lines, crossings, and signage**
- **Members felt that the development would cause harm to the village's character, being outside the settlement boundary and on a greenfield site. The quantum of development was seen as excessive, effectively doubling the size of the village. Visual impact concerns included high roof heights and the impression of a significantly enlarged settlement.**
- **Comments noted that the proposal appeared to meet government targets rather than local needs.**
- **Comments were made about small house sizes and limited storage.**
- **Questions asked about traffic levels during peak/school hours and the safety of the play area.**
- **Questions raised about the type of residents likely to move in and whether they would be familiar with rural conditions.**
- **Members noted s106 contributions for education and healthcare would benefit facilities outside the village, providing little local gain.**
- **The surgery in Sturminster was said not to need more capital funding but more doctors—something s106 cannot fund.**

- **Overall financial benefits were considered limited and not locally targeted.**
- **Members raised concerns about social changes, pressure on schools, and impacts on community cohesion due to the village expanding so rapidly.**

The Development Area Manager, Hannah Smith and Planning Officer, Rob McDonald responded to members questions addressing matters of policy context, village sustainability, design considerations, infrastructure, and the planning balance.

The village remains identified as a larger village within the Local Plan's spatial strategy. Although local services have reduced over time, recent appeal decisions—particularly at Okeford Fitzpaine—reinforced that such changes do not render the location unacceptable for development. It was noted that appeal Inspectors have confirmed there is no upper limit on development in rural settlements and that sites outside settlement boundaries may be permissible where housing need exists.

The closure of the village primary school was recognised but the settlement falls within the catchment of other nearby primary schools, where contributions would be directed. Children in the village already travel to school by bus, and this arrangement would continue. A full package of Section 106 obligations would be secured, including: NHS contributions, Primary, pre-school, and SEND education contributions, Local Area for Play (LAP), destination play, and sports facilities funding. There were no current proposals to reopen the former village school. Pavements existed connecting Commerwicke into the village, meaning pedestrians would not be required to walk in the carriageway. While bus services were limited, this was described as characteristic of rural Dorset, with a weekday service running between 7:00 and 19:00. Highways officers had been fully consulted and raised no objections regarding safety, access, layout, parking, or road widths. A condition requiring households to own a car would not be lawful; however, adequate parking provision was included within the scheme. All dwellings meet national minimum space standards. The site was not within a National Landscape or area covered by the Dark Skies initiative, and therefore a condition prohibiting roof lights would not be justified. It was acknowledged that the development would result in a localised change in character at the village edge. The harm to heritage assets was assessed as “less than substantial” and at the lower end of the scale. The site was not within a protected landscape, which limits the weight that can be applied to landscape harm. While the development would visibly alter the village approach, appeal decisions indicate such impacts were rarely sufficient grounds for refusal when considered in isolation. It was accepted that the location was not fully sustainable in all respects; however, this was typical of rural settlements identified for growth. Challenges such as school transport and reliance on cars were acknowledged, and it was emphasised that multiple weak reasons did not collectively amount to a strong or defensible reason for refusal. Given the housing shortfall and recent

appeal outcomes, the Officer advised that reasons relating to settlement hierarchy, sustainability, or character would carry limited weight and would likely prove difficult to defend at appeal. There were no known issues with the uptake of housing in the area. Lack of local take-up would not be a defensible reason to refuse permission.

Having had the opportunity to discuss the merits of the application and an understanding of all this entailed; having considered the officer's report and presentation; the written representations; and what they had heard at the meeting, a motion to **REFUSE** the officer's recommendation to **Grant** planning permission as recommended, was proposed by Cllr Jespersen, and seconded by Cllr Potheary.

Decision: To refuse planning permission for the reasons set out below:

1. The site lies outside the settlement boundary for Okeford Fitzpaine and as such is located within the open countryside. The proposed development would not represent a type of development that would be appropriate in the countryside or otherwise have a demonstrable overriding need for a countryside location and would lack safe and convenient access to a sufficient range of services to meet the day-to-day needs of the occupiers of the dwellings. The development of the site would therefore represent an unsustainable form of development, contrary to the spatial strategy of the adopted development plan, specifically Policies 2, 6, and 20 of the adopted North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016), and the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area through the quantum of development proposed and its urbanising effect on this edge of settlement location. This would be contrary to Policies 4 and 24 of the adopted North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016), and the National Planning Policy Framework.

123. **WD/D/19/002710, Land at The George Albert Hotel and Southern Counties Leisure, Long Ash Lane, Wardon Hill, Dorchester, DT2 9PW.**

Item deferred to a future meeting.

124. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

125. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.56 pm

Chairman

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Northern Area Planning Committee
17 March 2026
Decision List

Application Reference: P/FUL/2025/03574

Application Site: Land North Of Castle Avenue Okeford Fitzpaine

Proposal: Erect 78 No. dwellings, form vehicular and pedestrian access, landscaping, open space and drainage attenuation.

Recommendation: To delegate authority to the Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement and Development Management Northern Area Manager to either:

A) GRANT planning permission following completion of a S106 Planning Obligation to secure:

- Affordable housing on site
- NHS infrastructure financial contribution
- Education (primary and SEN provision) financial contribution
- Pre-school provision financial contribution
- Community, leisure and sports facilities financial contribution
- Informal open space on site • Informal open space maintenance financial contribution
- Destination play facilities financial contribution
- LAP (Local Area of Play) on site
- LAP maintenance financial contribution
- Formal outdoor sports facilities financial contribution
- Formal outdoor sports facilities maintenance financial contribution
- Public rights of way financial contribution
- Library financial contribution
- BNG monitoring fee
- General monitoring fee and subject to the following conditions:
- Time limit
- Approved plans
- Surface water management and drainage designs – pre commencement and pre occupation
- Foul drainage – pre commencement • Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) – pre-commencement
- Arboricultural Method Statement – pre commencement
- Tree Officer pre-commencement meeting
- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) – pre-commencement
- Vehicle crossing construction – pre-construction of dwellings and internal estate roads • External materials details – pre damp proof course
- Low level lighting scheme – pre installation (if necessary)
- Footway connecting site to recreation ground – Grampian style pre-occupation
- Pedestrian link through to Comerwicke – pre-occupation

- Cycle parking details – pre-occupation
- Finalised soft and hard landscaping and Landscape Implementation and Management Plan – pre-occupation
- Finalised LEMP – pre-occupation
- Finalised EclA – pre-occupation
- Visibility splays – compliance condition
- Estate road construction - compliance condition
- Maintenance of hedgerow adjacent to LAP – compliance condition
- Unexpected potential land contamination and an informative stipulating that a finalised Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) should be submitted to ensure the statutory 'Biodiversity Gain Plan condition' can be satisfied.

or B) Refuse permission for the reasons set out below if the s106 agreement is not completed by 17 September 2026 or such extended time as agreed by the Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement or the Development Management Northern Area Manager. Reason for refusal: In the absence of a legally binding mechanism to ensure the delivery of affordable housing and grey, green and social infrastructure the proposal is contrary to Policies 8, 13, 14 and 15 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1.

Decision: To refuse planning permission for the reasons set out below:

1. The site lies outside the settlement boundary for Okeford Fitzpaine and as such is located within the open countryside. The proposed development would not represent a type of development that would be appropriate in the countryside or otherwise have a demonstrable overriding need for a countryside location and would lack safe and convenient access to a sufficient range of services to meet the day-to day needs of the occupiers of the dwellings. The development of the site would therefore represent an unsustainable form of development, contrary to the spatial strategy of the adopted development plan, specifically Policies 2, 6, and 20 of the adopted North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016), and the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The development would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area through the quantum of development proposed and its urbanising effect on this edge of settlement location. This would be contrary to Policies 4 and 24 of the adopted North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016), and the National Planning Policy Framework.