

**Full Council
15 October 2020
Public Participation**

Question 1

Submitted by: Geoffrey Chopping

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government produced a white paper entitled PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE in August 2020. The paper suggests some radical proposals to reform the planning process, in order to speed up the planning process, with land being classified as: Growth Areas; Renewal Areas; and Protected Areas.

Six paragraphs within the paper mention the Green Belt. It is clear, from those 6 paragraphs, that it is the intention of the Government that the Green Belt should be excluded from consideration as land for development.

The width of the green belt between Wimborne and Furzehill was approximately halved in 2014. The white paper proposes that the quantity and allocation of new housing, would be decided by an algorithm, (sometimes called the mutant planning algorithm) which proposes a large increase in development in the Dorset Council area. According to the current analysis by Lichfields, this is an increase of 41.7% on the current local plan annual requirement of 1464 rising to 2075 by the proposed new standard method.

Will Dorset Council accept the government proposal, that Green Belt Land should be protected from development, and consequently will Dorset Council confirm that current Green Belt areas, within Dorset and in particular around Wimborne and near Furzehill, will be classified as Protected Areas, where development is restricted, as stated on page 20 of the white paper?

Response by Councillor David Walsh

The proposed changes to the national planning system have been published for consultation and the council's response to the consultation was considered at the October meeting of Cabinet.

Green belt is strongly protected under current national and local planning policy, and this is expected to continue under the new system. It is however possible to amend the boundaries through the local plan process if there are exceptional circumstances to justify it, and this would be considered through the preparation of the local plan, including public consultation.

We do not yet know whether the White Paper proposals will be changed as a result of the consultation before they are implemented. But if the proposals are

implemented as set out, the council will need to meet a binding housing target, and will need to identify sufficient land as growth or renewal areas to meet that target. This land will need to be in locations that minimise the distances that people need to travel to meet their everyday needs.

It would be premature to commit now to the inclusion of specific pieces of land into any of the three categories. But consultation would take place at the start of the process to enable people to make proposals as to which category they believe certain areas of land should be in.

In relation to housing numbers and the standard methodology for calculating them, it is important to be aware that there are two separate government consultations that have taken place recently.

One of these sets out interim changes to the current national methodology for calculating housing numbers. These would need to be used before the White Paper changes come into effect, and it is these changes that result in the numbers that Lichfields have calculated and that Mr Chopping's question quotes. We will need to use these as the basis for progressing the local plan at the current time, but if the White Paper proposals come into effect then targets will be changed again.

The White Paper proposes that under the new system there would be binding housing targets. These would be based on a standard methodology, but one that takes account of environmental constraints as well as factors such as household forecasts, current housing stock and housing affordability. No further detail of this methodology has been published yet, but we expect there to be further consultation on it next year, and will make sure that we respond.

Question 2

Submitted by: Cllr Alistair Chisholm, Independent Councillor Dorchester Town Council

In what way, precisely, will the building of 4000 houses immediately beyond the water meadows of the river Frome north of Dorchester (a proposal very likely to feature in the Dorset Council Local Plan early in 2021) "enhance"* the landscape of Thomas Hardy's birth parish of Stinsford or, as he termed it in his writing, "Mellstock"?

- the word used by Turnberry, the consultants employed by the North Dorchester Consortium.

Response by Cllr David Walsh

The new local plan is still being developed: Cabinet is due to consider a draft consultation document in December, before widespread public consultation in the New Year. So I cannot at this stage give precise details of what will be in it.

The previous consultation carried out on the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland local plan, however, included the land north of Dorchester and set out a draft policy indicating a wide range of requirements for any potential development in this location. These included significant copse planting to break up the built form in views from the AONB; the provision of a local nature reserve at the water meadows; and creating opportunities for heritage-led tourism and greater interpretation and appreciation of the heritage assets of the area.

A detailed assessment of the implications for the heritage associated with the north of Dorchester area is currently being prepared. This will enable any development in this location to understand fully and respond positively to the historic environment.

It is good practice to seek environmental enhancements in association with new housing development. This now includes the national expectation of 'biodiversity net gain' which we would be requiring on this and other development sites in the emerging local plan.

Question 3

Submitted by: Cllr Alistair Chisholm, Independent Councillor Dorchester Town Council

Given that West Dorset's Member of Parliament, Chris Loder, is opposed to the development of 4000 houses immediately north of Dorchester, how will you use this fact to Dorset's advantage in the protection of its remaining rich biodiversity and the fight against climate change – neither of which would be advanced by slavish adherence to the government's inflated housing targets for the county?

Response by Cllr Ray Bryan

If Dorset Council is to plan positively for the future of its area and retain control over future planning decisions, it is vital that we have an up to date local plan that provides sufficient land for new housing, as well as setting out our requirements for biodiversity, transport and infrastructure. Local plans are independently examined and must demonstrate that they are meeting national policy if they are to progress to adoption. At the moment, the national methodology for setting housing requirements is the starting point, which should be followed unless there are exceptional circumstances. Under the proposals in the government's planning white paper, however, nationally set housing numbers may become binding on local councils.

Sustainable development is the aim of the planning system and there is much that can be done to make sure that development minimises future climate

change. Development in sustainable locations where people can access jobs and services reducing the need to travel by car is critical, and will be a guiding principle in our local plan. This is why the larger settlements such as Dorchester, which already have a wide range of facilities, are being considered. Energy efficiency in new buildings is also vital, and national building regulations are being strengthened so as to achieve this.

Dorset has exceptional biodiversity and this is a very high priority when considering development potential. Areas such as the Dorset Heathlands receive the highest level of national protection and we have local policies to mitigate against any harm to them, through the provision of alternative recreation areas in conjunction with development. And all development will in future be expected to provide a net gain for biodiversity including through the provision of green infrastructure.