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Date: 19/12/2025
Ref: New Forest National Park Local Plan
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VIA Email

Dear New Forest National Park Authority,

RE: Consultation on the New Forest National Park Local Plan (Regulation 18)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the emerging Local Plan for the New Forest National Park.

Dorset Council fully acknowledge the purposes of the National Park and the challenge NFNPA have in meeting the needs of the area whilst fulfilling their duty to further these purposes. In responding to this duty, Dorset Council accept that the New Forest should not be an area that caters for in-migration but focuses on meeting the needs of the existing population. Dorset Council therefore support the emphasis within the Plan *“on small-scale proposals that reflect the area’s character and address the needs of local communities in the National Park, rather than catering for external demand.”*

Dorset Council also welcome the acknowledgement that residents of the National Park look towards neighbouring areas to meet their everyday needs and the impact that this has upon those areas. The provision and enhancement of facilities could help to improve the self-containment of the settlements in the National Park and reduce reliance on neighbouring areas.

Defining the needs of local residents will be a key challenge for the NFNPA Local Plan and Dorset Council support a deviation from the standard method in defining local housing needs. However, the aim must remain to meet the identified housing needs in the area from where they arise. As such, Dorset Council strongly supports Criteria a) in policy SP1 in defining sustainable development as development that which: *“a) makes the National Park a high-quality place to live, work and visit – including appropriate new housing to address local needs; accessibility to local employment opportunities; improved public transport links; local infrastructure provision including digital connectivity; and enhanced community and recreational facilities;”*

The locally derived assessment of housing need suggests that there is a need for 260 new homes per annum. However, the Local Plan only makes provision for 950 new homes over the plan period, equivalent to just 50 new homes per annum. This 50 homes per annum supply may not be a true reflection of the ability of the park to sustainably deliver new homes.

Urban areas that fringe the Park are locations where additional growth could be delivered to meet the needs of the NFNPA area with minimal impact on the park itself. Exploring these options could enable a higher proportion of the areas needs to be met within the National Park boundary and enabling easy access to the facilities that are located in these adjacent urban areas. An assessment of the locations around the Park’s fringe, adjacent to existing urban areas should be undertaken to

inform a full understanding of the unmet housing need in the National Park. Until this assessment is complete, Dorset Council is not in a position to understand the full unmet need for housing. It will also be a challenge for Dorset Council to meet its own housing needs in full, which makes it unlikely that there will be opportunities in Dorset to assist in meeting the needs of the New Forest.

The Vibrant Communities chapter suggests that the focus in the National Park will be on the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs rather than catering for external demands. Some provision of market housing should be included in this mix, not only to provide the affordable housing but also to meet the needs of those who can afford to buy a home.

Dorset Council appreciate that the need for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople is not completely understood at this point in time however consideration of opportunities to meet the final assessed need must be thorough. The identification of one plot against the need for nine pitches for gypsies and travellers and six plots for travelling showpeople is clearly insufficient to meet the need. A further search for pitches and plots is therefore required. Again, until this work is complete, and given the high level of need in Dorset, it is unlikely that there will be opportunities in Dorset to assist in meeting the needs of the New Forest.

Given the high quality natural environment of the National Park and the need for this to be protected and enhanced, the support for smaller scale renewable energy generation opportunities in locations where the impact is minimal is supported by Dorset Council.

Protecting the designated habitats of the New Forest is important and something that Dorset Council fully supports. Dorset Council has been working with NFNPA to put in place a strategic approach to minimising recreational disturbance to the New Forest designated habitats sites. This strategy aligns well with the strategy for managing similar impacts on the Dorset Heaths involving access management and monitoring as well as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to provide attractive alternative areas for recreation away from the protected sites. It is noted that policy SP15 suggests the provision of SANG within the boundaries of the National Park for development outside of the National Park is not appropriate. However, there may be instances where the most effective option would be for a SANG to be provided within the National Park. It is suggested that the policy be amended to enable this.

When considering development locations to meet the identified need of the area, the benefits of the development need to be balanced against harm. This is especially important given the shortfall in provision within the Local Plan. The separation of closely related settlements should be considered in this context as should the approach of making best use of development sites. Locating homes and other types of development close to where the need arises reduces commuting and therefore minimises the impact on neighbouring areas. This approach is advocated in the NPPG¹ “*Strategic policy-making authorities should explore all available options for addressing strategic matters within their own planning area, unless they can demonstrate to do so would contradict policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework*”.

We welcome further opportunities to continue the dialogue as our local plans progress towards examination.

Yours sincerely,



¹ NPPG recommends that Paragraph: 022 Reference ID: 61-022-20190315

Michael Garrity
Corporate Director - Planning