

Cabinet

21 April 2026

New Forest District Council Local Plan consultation response For Decision

Cabinet Member: Cllr S Bartlett, Planning and Emergency Planning

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team: J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

Report author and job title: Terry Sneller, Strategic Planning Manager

Email: terry.sneller@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority: Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 New Forest District Council have recently published a consultation document to inform their emerging Local Plan (regulation 18). There is need for councils to consider cross-boundary issues in the preparation of their local plans and therefore it is important that Dorset Council responds to the New Forest District Council's Local Plan consultation. This Duty to Cooperate will be tested at examination and this response will be part of the evidence to demonstrate compliance with the test.
- 1.2 The response to the consultation in Appendix A considers the issues that may arise from the New Forest District Council's emerging Local Plan. The consultation on the Local Plan closed on 20 March 2026 and as such, the response has been agreed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning pending formal endorsement from Cabinet. Following consideration by Cabinet, if changes to the submitted response are required, it has been agreed with New Forest District Council that these can be submitted and will be considered as part of the consultation.
- 1.3 Once this consultation is complete, New Forest District Council will work to prepare a Local Plan. However, councils in Hampshire are currently undergoing Local Government Reorganisation which will alter the plan-making geographies in the area. This will have implications for the final draft of the Local Plan.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the response agreed with the Cabinet member for Planning and Emergency Planning.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 It is important that Dorset Council engage with New Forest District Council in the production of their Local Plan and seek to address any cross-boundary issues constructively. The response to the consultation on the emerging Local Plan is part of that on-going cooperation.
- 3.2 The draft response in Appendix A has been submitted to the New Forest District Council. This draft response has been agreed with the Cabinet member for Planning and Emergency Planning. After consideration by Cabinet, contact will be made with the District Council to either confirm that the submitted response is final or to adjust the response and submit a revised version to supersede the original draft response.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 The councils in Hampshire are currently subject to Local Government Reorganisation which will impact on the final form the Local Plan takes. The Government plans to replace the current two-tier system of county councils and district / borough councils with unitary councils across Hampshire. Although the final form of the reorganised authorities is yet to be agreed, one proposal includes four separate unitary councils with New Forest District becoming part of a West unitary authority alongside Eastleigh, Southampton, and Test Valley.
- 4.2 The emerging Local Plan covers the area of New Forest District outside of the National Park. This leaves limited opportunities around the periphery of the area where growth could be accommodated and many of these areas are subject to ecological and landscape constraints.
- 4.3 The consultation document does not include detailed policies or proposals for meeting the growth needs of the area. Instead, it explores how development could be accommodated across the district. It considers five development scenarios which cumulatively would not meet the housing needs of the area as defined by the Government's Standard Method for calculating housing need. As such, it is likely that New Forest District will have an unmet housing need and discussions with neighbouring councils as to how this unmet need could be met, will continue. It is likely that opportunities will arise through the Hampshire Local Government Reorganisation, but Dorset Council will need to continue to engage on this and other cross-boundary issues.
- 4.4 As the consultation ran for a 6 week period, closing on 20 March 2026, a response has been prepared and submitted in draft. This draft response has been agreed with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Emergency Planning.

Should Cabinet wish to make any amendments to the submitted response (included as Appendix A to this report), it has been agreed that these can be submitted to New Forest District Council.

Housing Need

- 4.5 Housing Need for a Local Plan is calculated using the Government's standard method. The calculation is based on the number of existing homes in the area and the ratio of house prices to earnings. For the New Forest District, the housing need is calculated on the basis of the whole district council area including the National Park. However, due to the constraints in national parks, and the legal duty placed on the authorities to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the New Forest, an alternative approach to setting housing numbers for the National Park Authority is used. The remainder of the Standard Method calculated housing need then falls on the District Council (outside of the National Park) to address.
- 4.6 The National Park Authority have worked with the District Council to consider the split of housing need for the two areas. The result of this has proposed a housing target of 260 new homes per annum for the National Park Authority leaving a target of around 1,254 for the district. This figure is more than double the current adopted Local Plan target and the consultation document states that 'it is very likely that there is not enough land available in the Plan Area to meet the housing need'.

Habitats Sites

- 4.7 There are multiple protected habitats sites in the area including the New Forest, the Dorset Heaths and the River Avon. These all require a strategic approach to mitigating impacts on the protected sites and Dorset Council have a history of working with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities to develop these approaches. Continued engagement on these issues is essential.

Employment needs

- 4.8 The consultation document proposes that employment needs will primarily be met in the eastern side of New Forest District, as part of the Solent Freeport proposal. It is likely that this proposal will meet a need greater than that arising solely from the district and therefore there is unlikely to be any unmet need for employment space.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 Dorset Council is required by national legislation and policy to engage with its neighbours in the formation of Local Plans. As such, there is no option to consider other than responding to the consultation.

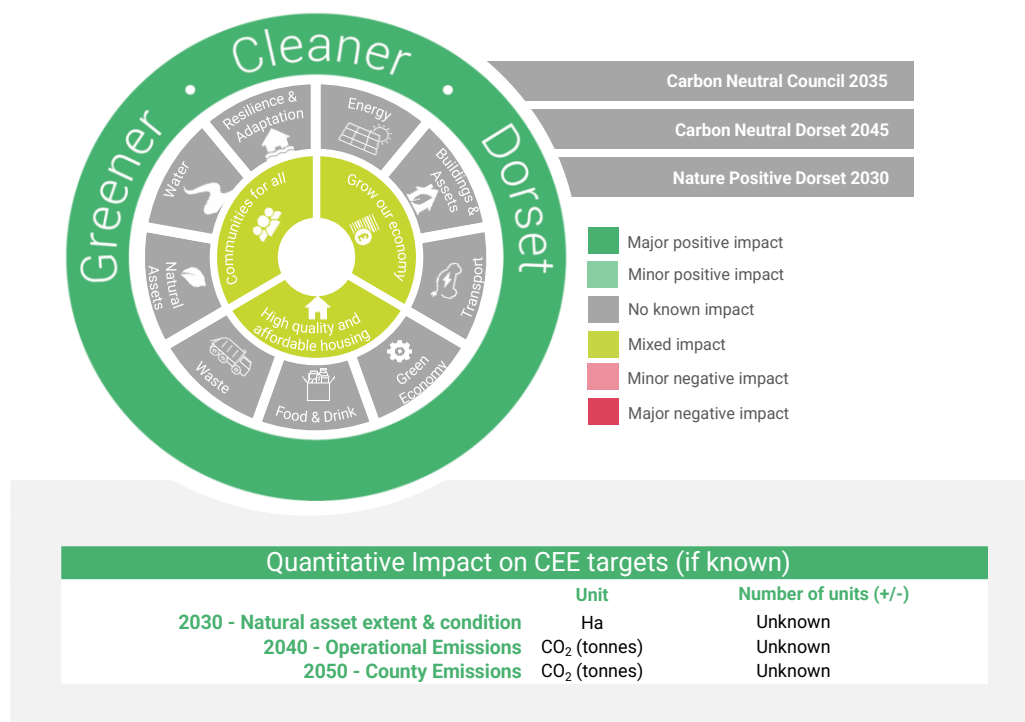
6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 Although the legal Duty to Cooperate has been removed, there remains a need for councils to cooperate on the production of their local plans. If Dorset Council did not engage in this cooperation on strategic cross-boundary issues, it would be unlikely that the Dorset Council Local Plan would be found sound at the examination stage. A considered response to the consultation and is therefore essential.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The response to the New Forest National Park Local Plan consultation has been funded through existing budgets as business as usual. There are therefore no further financial implications arising from this report.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



- 8.1 This Cabinet report seeks endorsement of the response to the New Forest District Council's emerging Local Plan consultation. As such, there are limited implications for the natural environment, climate and ecology for Dorset.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The response to the consultation does not have any direct well-being and health implications for Dorset Council.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None.

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 If a response is not made to the New Forest District Council's Local Plan consultation, there may be implications for the examination of the Dorset Council Local Plan and the assessment of the Duty to Cooperate. The housing need of the New Forest would need to be met with potential options for meeting this including the adjacent local authority areas.
- 11.2 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:
- Current Risk: Medium
- Residual Risk: Medium

12. Equalities

- 12.1 New Forest District Council have the responsibility to prepare an equalities impact assessment of their Local Plan as part of the plan-making process.

13. Appendices

Appendix A – draft response to the New Forest District Council Local Plan consultation as submitted.

14. Background papers

New Forest District Council Local Plan pages: [Local Plan review - New Forest District Council](#)

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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