

NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 4 AUGUST 2026

Present: Cllrs Richard Crabb (Chair), Carl Woode (Vice-Chair), Alex Brenton, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Val Potheary, Belinda Ridout and Steve Murcer

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

Lara Aintree (Senior Lawyer - Regulatory), Hannah Smith (Development Management Area Manager (North)), Louis Wicks (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice), Rob McDonald (Senior Planning Officer), Kirsten Williams (Lead Project Officer), Chris McDermott (Senior Housing Enabling & Policy Officer and Colm O'Kelly (Senior Landscape Architect).

145. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Rory Major, Barrie Cooper and Les Fry.

146. Declarations of Interest

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

147. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2026 were confirmed and signed.

148. 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.

149. P/OUT/2025/06076, Land off Manston Road, Sturminster Newton, DT10 1AF.

The Lead Project Officer presented the application using plans, aerial photographs and site images, and outlined the proposal and relevant planning policies. Members were advised that the Council's October 2025 five-year housing land supply statement identified a significant shortfall, confirming the Council can only demonstrate a deliverable housing supply that is equivalent to 2.53 years supply.

The site was located approximately 1 km from the town centre in a sustainable location with good access to services and facilities. Landscape visualisations demonstrated that proposed planting and landscaping would soften views of the

development over time, resulting in limited visual impact, including from the Trailway. Overall effects of the development on receptors would be minor or moderate adverse rather than major adverse (significant). The development would not adversely affect the Dorset National Landscape.

Members were informed that flood risk was low and that the proposed drainage strategy included attenuation basins and permeable paving which had been accepted by the Lead Local Flood Authority. Foul drainage would connect to the existing sewer on Manston Road via a pumping station on site. There would be no harm to heritage assets. The scheme would provide two access points with pedestrian crossing facilities and was not considered to raise highway safety concerns. Although some habitat and hedgerow loss would occur, the proposal would deliver biodiversity enhancements and net gain. The root protection area of protected Black Poplar trees could be affected but conditions could be imposed to determine the presence or absence of any tree roots. The site was not classified as best and most versatile agricultural land.

Members were advised that, in terms of the planning balance, weighing against the proposal was the conflict with the spatial strategy, however only limited weight could be given to this given the Council's housing land supply position. Weighing significantly in favour would be the provision of 50 dwellings, including affordable housing, as well as public open space and infrastructure contributions secured by legal agreement. Economic benefits would also arise through construction activity and local spending.

The Lead Project Officer concluded that there were no adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposed development.

Public Participation

Public – Objection

Richard Nye

He explained to the Committee that he had lived on Manston Road for approximately 25 years and raised concerns regarding the cumulative impact of the proposed development on highway safety and the operation of Manston Road. Particular concern was expressed regarding the proposed principal access serving 50 dwellings. He highlighted that existing residential driveways were located opposite the proposed junction, together with a footpath providing access to the recreation ground.

Concerns were raised that vehicle movements associated with the development, existing residential traffic, pedestrians and crossing points would all be concentrated within a limited section of road and that residents were unclear whether the combined impact of these movements had been fully assessed.

He also raised concerns regarding the proposed secondary access and pedestrian crossing opposite an entrance to the Rixon Recreation Ground. Reference was made to highway safety measures previously introduced at this location following a fatal accident in 1982, including pedestrian railings, and it was suggested that the area had long been recognised as a sensitive location for pedestrian safety.

Further concerns were expressed regarding visibility and vehicle speeds on Manston Road, particularly for traffic approaching from Shaftesbury and cresting the nearby hill. He questioned whether sufficient assessment had been undertaken of the interaction between the proposed access arrangements, pedestrian crossing points and existing turning movements. It was noted that the applicant's traffic survey had recorded vehicle speeds above the posted 30mph limit, with typical speeds of 36-37mph and some vehicles travelling in excess of 50mph.

He also referred to an increase in the use of the road by agricultural vehicles, lorries and HGVs and expressed concern that no detailed assessment of vehicle types using the route had been undertaken.

In conclusion, he urged Members to consider whether the highway impacts had been adequately assessed in the context of how the road operates on a day-to-day basis and whether the proposed development was appropriate in this location.

Laura Hitchcock (Speaking on behalf of Manston Road Resident's Association)
She advised that residents recognised the need for additional housing within Dorset but questioned whether the application site represented an appropriate location for development and whether sufficient evidence existed to justify a different outcome from the Planning Inspector's decision issued approximately 18 months earlier.

Reference was made to the officer's report, which identified conflict with the development plan, landscape harm, the presence of two nationally significant native Black Poplar trees, and drainage and groundwater constraints. The objector accepted that these impacts had been identified and argued that the key issue for Members was whether the benefits of the development outweighed those harms.

She noted that proposals for housing on the site had been dismissed on appeal in 1978, 1995 and more recently in 2024, on the basis that development would harm the eastern edge of Sturminster Newton. It was argued that the current scheme was materially similar to previously refused proposals, comprising development on the same undeveloped hillside outside the settlement boundary with similar access arrangements and layout. Whilst recognising the proposed mitigation planting, the objector contended that landscaping could soften views but could not fully mitigate the loss of the site's undeveloped character.

She raised concerns regarding the proposed highway access arrangements. She questioned whether sufficient assessment had been undertaken of the cumulative interactions between the principal access, existing residential driveways, pedestrian crossing facilities and routes to the recreation ground. Further concern was expressed regarding the secondary access, its proximity to a hill crest, and recorded vehicle speeds on Manston Road.

In conclusion, she urged Members to consider whether any material circumstances, other than the Council's housing land supply position, had changed since the previous appeal decision and whether the evidence before the Committee justified departing from previous planning decisions relating to the site.

Courtenay Hitchcock

He advised that they recognised the need for additional housing in Sturminster Newton and explained that a number of major housing developments were already underway, with further growth proposed through both the Neighbourhood Plan and the emerging Dorset Local Plan. However, concern was expressed regarding whether the application site had been demonstrated to be suitable for development.

Reference was made to the Council's assessment, which identified the site as being affected by areas of high surface water flood risk and the highest category of groundwater emergence.

He stated that the drainage strategy had evolved significantly during the application process but that the understanding of groundwater conditions continued to rely primarily on a groundwater investigation undertaken during the summer of 2021. It was noted that the previous Planning Inspector had acknowledged limitations in the available groundwater evidence, and concern was expressed that no equivalent winter groundwater monitoring had been undertaken. He questioned whether the site's maximum groundwater levels were fully understood.

He also referred to the identification of two nationally significant female native Black Poplar trees on the site, which had initially been recorded as Poplar trees. It was noted that these rare trees were closely associated with local hydrological conditions and were located adjacent to the proposed sewage pumping station, access road and wider drainage infrastructure.

Concern was expressed regarding the potential long-term implications of the development on the trees and their environment.

He suggested that the emergence of additional information during the application process demonstrated that understanding of the site continued to evolve. It was therefore questioned whether sufficient information was available to conclude that the site was suitable for development in principle.

In conclusion, he requested that Members carefully consider whether there remained uncertainty regarding groundwater conditions and the potential impacts on the native Black Poplar trees, and whether outline planning permission could be granted with confidence in those circumstances.

Applicant/Agent

Alan Williams (Speaking on Behalf of the Applicant)

The agent acknowledged the concerns raised by local residents and advised that these had been fully considered throughout the determination of the application. Members were reminded that the application must be assessed against the current planning policy position and the evidence before the Committee.

It was noted that the Council could currently demonstrate a 2.53-year housing land supply and, as a consequence, the policies most important to determining the application were considered out-of-date. The agent advised that the presumption in favour of sustainable development was therefore engaged.

The proposal would provide up to 50 dwellings, including 40% affordable housing, together with public open space, biodiversity enhancements and financial contributions towards local infrastructure. These were presented as significant public benefits weighing in favour of the development.

Addressing technical matters, the agent stated that the Highway Authority had assessed the proposal and raised no objections, concluding that the residual highway impacts would not be severe. The Lead Local Flood Authority and the Environment Agency were similarly satisfied that flood risk and drainage matters could be addressed through planning conditions. It was further noted that consultees responsible for ecology, trees and residential amenity had raised no objections that would justify refusal.

In relation to landscape impacts, the agent acknowledged the site's planning history and the previous appeal decision. However, it was advised that the current application was supported by more detailed landscape evidence, including an updated Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. The agent highlighted that the Council's Landscape Officer had concluded that, whilst the development would alter the existing settlement edge, the effects were not significant enough to warrant objection and could be appropriately mitigated through landscaping.

Members were reminded that the application was submitted in outline form, with all matters except access reserved for future consideration, allowing further scrutiny of the detailed design through a subsequent Reserved Matters application.

In conclusion, the agent stated that the adverse impacts identified did not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal, particularly in the context of the Council's housing land supply shortfall and therefore supported the officer recommendation for approval.

Parish/Town Council Rep

Cllr Andrew Donaldson (Sturminster Newton Town Council)

Cllr Donaldson addressed the Committee on behalf of Sturminster Newton Town Council. He questioned what material changes had occurred since the previous application was considered approximately two years ago and stated that he had seen no evidence to suggest the current proposal was materially different or more acceptable than the earlier scheme.

He acknowledged that the Committee's consideration related specifically to the proposed site access; however, he noted that approval of the access would, in effect, facilitate the wider development of the site. He advised that numerous objections had been submitted and confirmed that the Town Council supported the concerns raised by objectors.

Cllr Donaldson highlighted highway safety concerns, particularly in relation to traffic approaching from the north. He referred to a history of pedestrian fatalities in the area and expressed the view that the proposal would do nothing to reduce or mitigate existing risks.

Referring to the Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan, which remains in force until 2030, he drew attention to the policy statement that "land east of Manston

Road is considered unsustainable for further development, particularly because of the topography, making it difficult for landscaping to soften the visual impact of building in the extensive wider views.” He submitted that the landscaping and mitigation measures proposed as part of the application were insufficient to address the visual impact of the development.

Cllr Donaldson stated that he could see no justification for granting the application, particularly in light of the previous refusal.

Officers responded to the comments raised by the speakers as follows:

- The Lead Project Officer advised that ongoing discussions had taken place with the Highway Authority, which was satisfied that the submitted Transport Assessment had appropriately assessed the impact of the development on the local highway network and affected junctions.
- It was highlighted that the Highway Authority had raised no highway safety or capacity concerns that would justify an objection to the application.
- In relation to concerns regarding the driveway opposite the site, Members were advised that this did not constitute a highway objection and that the Highway Authority considered the proposed arrangements to be acceptable.
- The Lead Project Officer referred to the baseline traffic data and the 85th percentile speed survey, explaining that highway engineers had reviewed the submitted information to ensure the suitability of the highway network. A speed survey had also been undertaken as part of the assessment process.
- Regarding pedestrian crossing facilities, it was noted that this issue had not previously been raised by the Highway Authority. The visibility available and vehicle speeds on the road had been assessed, and appropriate planning conditions could be imposed to secure measures such as dropped kerbs and traffic-calming or speed management works where necessary.

Members' questions and comments

- Members questioned why the application was recommended for approval despite a previous appeal dismissal, arguing that the landscape impact remained unchanged and expressing concern that too much weight had been given to the Council's housing land supply shortfall. Concerns were also raised regarding the housing mix, biodiversity net gain, local impacts and the age of the application.
- A proposal for refusal was sought on grounds of landscape and visual harm, impact on the character of Sturminster Newton, and unresolved drainage concerns.
- Concerns were expressed regarding highway safety, particularly the proposed access arrangements, pedestrian safety, visibility, and the absence of a Highway Authority representative. Some Members considered the scale and topography of the site unsuitable for a 50-dwelling development.
- Members raised questions regarding flooding, drainage infrastructure, management of attenuation ponds, affordable housing provision,

biodiversity impacts, and the suitability of the development for all users, including older residents.

- Several Members emphasised the importance of the Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan and local consultation, noting that the site had been identified as unsuitable for development and arguing that greater weight should be afforded to local policies and representations.
- Members acknowledged the Council's lack of a five-year housing land supply but stressed that this should not outweigh other planning considerations. Concerns were reiterated regarding landscape harm, encroachment into the countryside, highway safety, drainage, and the potential impact on the delivery of other housing sites.
- Reference was made to previous appeal decisions, the town's character as a hilltop settlement, and the risk of setting a precedent for further development beyond the settlement boundary.

Officers provided the following responses to Members' questions:

- The Lead Project Officer advised that additional information had been submitted since the previous appeals and that the Council's housing land supply position had changed significantly. It was confirmed that biodiversity net gain could be increased to meet the 10% requirement, whilst housing mix would be considered at a later stage. Members were also advised that third party surveys had identified one female and two male Black Poplar trees in the southeast corner of the site.
- The Senior Landscape Architect explained that, although previous appeal decisions identified some adverse landscape effects, the visual impact was not considered significant. He advised that the site had moderate landscape sensitivity and value, with impacts capable of being mitigated through landscaping and planting. Detailed drainage matters would be addressed at the reserved matters stage.
- The Development Management Area Manager advised that the proposal sought approval for up to 50 dwellings and two access points, with detailed design matters to be considered later. The Highway Authority had assessed the application and raised no objections to the principle of development or the proposed accesses. Significant weight should be given to the provision of 40% affordable housing.
- Members were advised that previous appeal decisions and matters including flooding, heritage and landscape impacts had been carefully considered. Whilst the site lay outside the settlement boundary, officers had not identified harm sufficient to outweigh the benefits.
- In response to highway concerns, it was confirmed that the Highway Authority had reviewed the transport and visibility assessments and raised no objections. Collision data did not indicate an existing highway safety issue, and the site was considered sustainably located with suitable pedestrian access.

The Committee was adjourned from 12:12 - 12:23.

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 representatives; 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 Jones.

Decision: To refuse planning permission for the reasons set out in the appendix to these minutes.

Break: 12:28 -13:00.

150. **P/FUL/2025/05229, Pleydells Farm, Lower Street Okeford Fitzpaine, Dorset, DT11 0RQ.**

With the aid of a visual presentation, including site location plans, aerial photographs, proposed layouts and site photographs, the Case Officer identified the application site and outlined the proposed development, relevant planning history, and applicable planning policies.

Members were advised that housing targets had increased significantly since the previous appeal decision and that the site, although outside the settlement boundary, was considered to be in a sustainable location.

The site forms Phase 2 of a wider development, with Phase 1 already approved and under construction. Previous appeal concerns relating to layout, pedestrian safety, parking arrangements and the attenuation pond had been addressed through revisions to the scheme, including a dedicated footway, amended parking layout and clearer drainage proposals.

Members were advised that the development would provide a mix of affordable and market housing, with design and scale reflecting local character. Officers considered that impacts on the National Landscape, heritage assets and the Conservation Area would be limited.

Ecological enhancements, including biodiversity net gain, landscape planting, hedgerow translocation, bat and bird features, were proposed. The site lies within Flood Zone 1, with a low risk of flooding, and the dwellings would incorporate air source heat pumps.

The Case Officer concluded that the concerns raised in relation to the previous scheme had been satisfactorily addressed and recommended approval, subject to conditions.

Public Participation

Public Objection

Cllr George Norris did not attend the meeting.

Applicant/Agent

Matthew Holmes (Agent)

Mr Holmes advised that the application had been submitted following previous applications and that the plans had been amended during the course of the application in response to feedback received. He welcomed the officer recommendation for approval and stated that the scheme had been carefully designed to fit with the character of the area.

He explained that the proposed buildings were of a traditional design and provided a mix of dwelling sizes. Landscaping was proposed for the front and rear gardens together with an area of green space on the western edge of the site. The scheme had also been designed to take account of the site's biodiversity interests.

Mr Holmes stated that the relevant Council policy criteria had been considered throughout the design process. All dwellings would meet or exceed the minimum national space standards and would benefit from appropriately sized rear gardens. He added that the proposed density of development was comparable to that of surrounding properties.

Reference was made to the officer's report, which concluded that the proposals were acceptable in terms of design and visual impact and would provide a suitable living environment for future residents. He further noted that the proposed dwellings were appropriately separated from neighbouring properties and that the relationship between existing and proposed homes had been carefully planned.

Mr Holmes reminded Members that the proposal was unchanged from the previous application that had been determined at appeal. He stated that the appeal decision had confirmed that the development was acceptable in terms of design, heritage and drainage considerations and that the site represented an appropriate location for new housing. He explained that the previous appeal had been dismissed for two specific reasons: the mix of affordable housing units and housing supply matters.

He advised that both issues had now been addressed. The affordable housing mix had been amended to meet the relevant requirements and housing supply calculations had changed since the appeal decision. As Dorset was now experiencing a housing land supply shortfall, the proposal would assist in meeting identified housing needs.

In conclusion, Mr Holmes considered the proposal to be a well-designed residential development that was appropriate to its context and capable of delivering much-needed housing on a site that was suitable for residential development by virtue of its location and the characteristics of the surrounding area.

Parish Council

Cllr Rachael Rowe (Speaking on behalf of Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council)

Cllr Rowe acknowledged that the proposed development contained some interesting design features; however, she advised that the Parish Council remained opposed to the scheme.

She informed Members that, when the Parish Council had last considered the site, Phase One of the development had been suspended due to instability in construction costs. As a result, she questioned when the proposed homes would be delivered, despite the acknowledged need for additional housing within Dorset.

Cllr Rowe stated that the development would extend beyond the settlement boundary of Okeford Fitzpaine and would therefore result in development within the open countryside. She expressed concerns regarding the impact on wildlife and suggested that approval could set a precedent for further development outside the settlement boundary.

Concerns were also raised in relation to highway safety. Cllr Rowe advised that access to the development would be via Lower Street and that the Parish Council remained concerned about visibility at the junction with Play Close. She explained that vehicles parked outside existing properties could restrict sightlines, particularly during busy periods. Additional concerns were raised regarding the proximity of the village play area, with fears that children may not be readily visible to drivers because of limited visibility from the junction.

She further noted that Lower Street was not routinely gritted during winter conditions and considered that the cumulative impact of traffic generated by this and other developments in the village would exacerbate existing highway issues. Parking pressures within the village centre were also highlighted, with vehicles frequently parked on local streets, which in turn could further affect visibility and road safety.

Cllr Rowe advised that the site was located away from the main transport corridor and was therefore less well connected to facilities and services. Public transport provision within the village was described as limited, and no plans had been identified to increase services to meet the demands arising from additional housing development.

The Parish Council also expressed concern that, despite continued housing growth, local infrastructure had deteriorated. Reference was made to the loss of significant employment opportunities in the area, the closure of the village primary school in 2023, and the resulting absence of pre-school and childcare provision. Cllr Rowe also referred to the loss of the visiting GP service, inadequate or poor-quality pavement infrastructure restricting access for wheelchair users, ageing electricity infrastructure resulting in frequent power outages, and limited public transport services.

Members questions and comments

- Members commented that the development was a modest extension to the existing settlement and sought reassurance that affordable housing would be visually consistent with market housing. Clarification was also requested on refuse collection arrangements.
- Questions were raised regarding the access road, pedestrian provision and adoption standards. It was noted that previous concerns regarding the housing mix had been addressed, and support for the application was expressed.
- Concerns were raised regarding local school capacity and the availability of education facilities.
- Members sought clarification on pedestrian links, management of communal areas and drainage arrangements. It was suggested that the site layout appeared constrained and could have been designed more efficiently.
- Concerns were expressed about the settlement's sustainability, particularly the availability of local employment, healthcare and education services, with questions raised as to whether residents would need to travel elsewhere for many day-to-day needs.
- Members also questioned whether Okeford Fitzpaine would still meet the criteria for designation as a larger village given the loss of some local services and facilities.

In response to Members' questions, officers provided clarification on a number of matters relating to the proposed development:

- Officers advised that the scheme included footways throughout the development and would provide suitable pedestrian access.
- Okeford Fitzpaine was considered a sustainable location in planning terms, consistent with the settlement hierarchy and previous appeal findings, despite the absence of local education and healthcare facilities.
- The Highway Authority had assessed the proposal and raised no objections, subject to conditions.
- Officers confirmed that any significant design concerns regarding affordable housing would have been addressed during the application process.
- Refuse collection would be accommodated through kerbside collection, with a small number of residents required to present bins at nearby collection points.
- Members were advised that contributions towards local infrastructure would be secured through a planning obligation and that nearby settlements provided education facilities.
- The development was designed to accommodate residents and service vehicles, with drainage measures incorporated to manage surface water and reduce flood risk.
- Officers noted that applications must be determined against current planning policies and advised that Okeford Fitzpaine would continue to be classified as a larger village within the settlement hierarchy.

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 representatives; and what they had heard at the meeting, a motion to **APPROVE** the officer's recommendation to **GRANT** planning permission as recommended, was proposed by Cllr Ridout, and seconded by Cllr Brenton.

Decision: To grant planning permission subject to the conditions set out in the appendix to these minutes.

151. **P/MPO/2026/01652, West of Shaftesbury Road At, Land South of Gillingham, Shaftesbury Road, Gillingham.**

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.

The application was to consider the modification of S106 legal agreement on Gillingham Park Farm Deed of Variation dated 2nd April 2024 to remove Clause 2.8 under schedule 2 which reads 'no more than 30% of the intermediate units shall be discounted market units'.

There was no public participation.

Members questions and comments

- Members discussed the proposed affordable housing arrangements and the practical challenges associated with delivery.
- A Member expressed concern that it was unfortunate for prospective residents if affordable housing could not be delivered in its preferred form and sought clarification on whether the proposed discounted market housing units would remain affordable in perpetuity.
- Members acknowledged the challenging market conditions currently facing affordable housing providers. It was noted that the business model for registered providers had become increasingly difficult in recent years and that no affordable housing provider had been secured for the scheme.
- Further comments were made supporting the provision of affordable housing wherever possible. However, Members recognised the difficulties currently affecting the sector and welcomed efforts to identify an alternative mechanism for delivering more affordable homes as part of the development.

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 representatives; and what they had heard at the meeting, a motion to **APPROVE** the officer's recommendation to **GRANT** planning permission as recommended, was proposed by Cllr Jespersen, and seconded by Cllr Ridout.

Decision: To grant planning permission and approve the modification of the agreement.

152. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

153. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 2.33 pm

Chairman

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