

West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Examination

Hearing Statement

for

Matter 12: Northern Localities of West Dorset



Prepared by West Dorset District Council and
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

November 2014

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Agenda Item 12.1: The Council intends to delete extensions to the 2006 Local Plan allocation at Barton Farm. What are the implications for meeting the housing needs of the town as well as those of the District as a whole?

- 1.1 The original allocation of land at Barton Farm, in the 2006 Local Plan (CD/POL2), now has outline planning permission for 279 dwellings. A reserved matters application for layout, scale and appearance of the proposed dwellings is subject to a committee resolution to grant permission. The decision notice will be issued shortly. This development will provide a significant addition to the housing land supply across the plan area, and to the housing available at the town. It will also provide a substantial amount of affordable housing – meeting the need identified specifically for the town in one of the previous affordable housing needs surveys.
- 1.2 The extension to the allocation, included in the Pre-Submission Local Plan (CD/SP1), would have brought the total number of dwellings to around 800 – an increase of around 521 over that provided in the current proposal. This extension has now been deleted from the plan as a result of the strong concerns raised during consultation, about the impact of this scale of development on the historic character and setting of the town.
- 1.3 The implications for meeting the housing needs of the Submission Plan area are that the supply has been reduced by 521, or two-thirds of a year's land supply across the plan area. This would extend the housing land supply over the whole plan period, though by less than a year. As an extension to an existing site, it would not have any implications for the current five-year land supply.
- 1.4 Turning to the housing needs of the town, firstly it is not possible to quantify these precisely at such local levels. While original work on the Plan (during the time of the 2011 consultation) sought to identify needs by local area, this was based primarily on the previous development trends, rather than being any genuine assessment of 'need': this analysis is no longer proposed to be included as evidence to the Submission Plan. There is no specific means of quantifying development needs down to single town level, as people are mobile across wider areas and the majority of housing growth in West Dorset is a result of migration from other areas of the UK. The recent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) guidance on the objective assessment of housing need refers to housing needs as being 'footloose' across housing market areas.
- 1.5 There are however more general policy aims and aspirations for individual towns that can be met through development, such as the need for regeneration and

economic growth in Weymouth. And current affordable housing need, as expressed in the housing register, can be quantified depending on where people have indicated that they would like to live. The Vision identified for Sherborne in the plan is based primarily on the conservation and enhancement of its outstanding historic and cultural character, including references to its arts and cultural offer, tourism, and the benefits of its educational establishments. There is a reference to the balance between jobs and housing, and the 2001 census indicated that the town had more jobs than economically active residents, but not by a very large margin, and depending partly on the difference in character and affordability between Sherborne and nearby Yeovil.

- 1.6 The existing allocation will already provide a substantial addition to the housing stock of the town, as well as a good amount of affordable housing. In the wider area there will also be significant additional development at Yeovil: while this is in a separate housing market area and while there is no intention that this will be meeting West Dorset's housing needs rather than South Somerset's, it does mean that there will be a good choice of housing in the surrounding area.
- 1.7 It is not therefore considered that there are particular housing needs of Sherborne that will suffer as a result of the deletion of the extended allocation.

Agenda Item 12.2: Do the changes envisaged to policy SHER2 (Town Centre Expansion) adequately address the concerns raised in representations to the proposal?

- 2.1 The concerns raised in representations to Submission Plan Policy SHER2 included concerns about the lack of clarity of what was proposed, and concerns about the loss of public car parking.
- 2.2 The policy, like the similar ones for potential town centre expansions at Dorchester and Bridport, was not intended as a firm allocation, but a reservation of land for the potential expansion of the town centre should further evidence during the Submission Plan period demonstrate the need. These sites for potential future expansion were identified within the CBRE Joint Town Centre Retail and Leisure Study (CD/ECON3) and the update (CD/ECON4) of the plan area, included within the evidence base. The amendments to the text of the policy clarify that the land is reserved for this use subject to the identification of further need in the future.
- 2.3 The changes proposed to Policy SHER2 have also now specified that any development should retain 'the existing level of public car parking' rather than 'an appropriate amount of car parking' – in order to make clear that it is public car

parking for shoppers and town centre visitors that is important, and that there should be no significant loss of parking.

- 2.4 The area shown on the map has also been corrected, to take out an area of car park to the north of Newlands Road which had not been part of the site identified within the CBRE Joint Town Centre Retail and Leisure Study.

Agenda Item 12.3: Why would proposals affecting land at the Sherborne Hotel (SHER3) be unsound?

- 3.1 This is a policy that has been carried over from the Adopted Local Plan (CD/POL2) and that has been amended following the summer 2012 consultation in order to reflect local opinion.
- 3.2 The Submission Plan Policy aims to support an existing business sector in the town, namely tourism. Sherborne serves a larger rural hinterland and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires planning policies to support economic growth in rural areas. In order to promote a strong rural economy, local plans should support sustainable tourism and leisure developments that benefit business in rural areas, communities and visitors. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations. Sherborne, as a rural service centre, is an appropriate location. The vision for Sherborne, developed with the Local Area Partnership, includes tourism as an important part of the local economy, and it is considered that this site provides an important opportunity for the provision of an improved and expanded hotel for the town.
- 3.3 Particular concerns were raised during the consultation because of a proposal to develop a supermarket on the site. This has not been pursued since, but had raised substantial local objection, on the grounds of impact of such an out-of-town development on the town centre, but also of the loss of the hotel and opportunity for its improvement.
- 3.4 The Submission Plan Policy allows both for the retention and expansion of the existing tourist facility on the site. However the new policy is more flexible than the previous policy for the site in the 2006 Adopted Local Plan, in that other available land within the site can be used for other business uses rather than being limited to office uses only.

Agenda Item 12.4: Is there evidence to show that making better use of land at the former gasworks site (SHER4) is incapable of being delivered for viability or other reasons?

- 4.1 The former gasworks site was allocated for employment use in the 2006 Local Plan (CD/POL2) but has not come forward for development since then. This could be argued as evidence that the site is not deliverable, at least for an employment use. There is, however, no specific evidence that this is the case. The amended proposal in the Submission Plan now allows for residential development within the site, which should in turn allow greater flexibility and improve development viability. This should mean that development is more likely to be deliverable.