

Issue 1 Duty to Co-operate, Legal Requirements and the Council's Broad Strategy (Policies 1 and 2)

Response to Inspector's questions

***Q 1.1** Has co-operation between North Dorset District Council and other nearby local planning authorities been a continuous process of engagement from initial thinking? What evidence is there of effective co-operation (NPPF paragraph 181) and of joint working on areas of common interest being diligently undertaken for the mutual benefit of neighbouring authorities (NPPF paragraph 178)? Is there a long-term commitment to co-operation?*

1 Dorset County Council endorses the work that North Dorset District Council together with neighbouring local authorities has undertaken and which is on – going in the development of the evidence base and background studies for the Local Plan.

2 In our comments on the submission Plan we identified that, despite the record of effective joint working, emerging plans within the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area ran the risk of failing to plan effectively for matters of a strategic nature and in turn to deliver sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). While the joint work contributed to a robust evidence base, there was no clear framework to examine the consistency of the assumptions in the studies, the relationship between the various findings (for example, housing and employment land requirements) or the broader geographical implications. As a consequence Dorset County Council's ability to provide infrastructure and other services for which it is responsible could be undermined.

3 At that stage we sought confirmation that North Dorset would work with neighbouring authorities across the LEP area to produce effective policies on strategic cross boundary matters. We also sought assurance that the Council would enter into a formal agreement with the other Councils to demonstrate their long term commitment to a jointly agreed strategy on cross boundary matters.

4 Since that time, all the other authorities in Dorset have progressed with their plans, with Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch, East Dorset and Purbeck now having adopted Plans while West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland Councils are awaiting the Inspector's report. Work has also progressed on further cross boundary evidence such as the updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the Eastern Dorset area. Work on revised economic projections is also on-going and will be used alongside the demographic projections in the SHMA to derive the objectively assessed housing need for the area. This evidence, which Dorset County Council's Research and Information unit has contributed towards, will be used in the reviews of the current plans in Poole, Bournemouth and Purbeck.

5 In these circumstances it would seem expedient to progress the North Dorset Plan on the current evidence base, closely monitoring progress on housing and employment needs, with the possibility of using the new evidence to trigger an early review of the housing and employment targets. This should be aligned with consideration and agreement by all the local authorities and other relevant partners

within the SHMA and wider Dorset LEP area of the cross-boundary strategic priorities and how best to address them.

6 It is noted that, in their response to the Inspector's question of 13th Jan 2015 on the letter from Brandon Lewis MP to Simon Ridley concerning Strategic Housing Market Assessments, North Dorset District Council has confirmed (in para 2.18) that:

"Looking forward, it is the Council's view that once the Local Plan Part 1 2011 to 2.182026 is adopted, the final assessment of housing need arising out of the Eastern Dorset SHMA will be considered on an HMA wide basis. This review will include all local authorities within the HMA considering how the sustainable distribution of growth will best be achieved in line with the Duty to Cooperate. It will be undertaken alongside full consideration of constraints including Green Belt, AONB and international wildlife designations and will be reflected in a review of Local Plans."

7 Dorset County Council supports this statement and confirms that it welcomes the move towards effective strategic planning across the SHMA. We wish to ensure that Dorset County Council is included in the process as it has implications for our role in relation to the provision of infrastructure including transport, education, community facilities and special needs housing as well as our statutory planning responsibilities for minerals and waste.

8 Subject to satisfactory assurance on the way forward, perhaps through a statement of Common Ground, Dorset County Council would be willing to withdraw its objection on the Duty to Co-operate.

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Question 1.5

Is the Council's core spatial strategy (policy 2) justified and compatible with the principles referred to in paragraphs 17 and 55 of the NPPF? Will the policies and proposals in LP1 contribute to the sustainable growth of the District?

1 Dorset County Council has concerns with North Dorset's approach to development in the villages and rural areas as proposed under Policy 2: Core Spatial Strategy and considers this fails the test on whether the Plan has been positively prepared.

2 While we appreciate the Council's aim to give local communities discretion in how best to address local needs, we have concerns that the Plan fails to give any strategic steer on the means to achieve sustainable development in the rural areas. It also lacks clarity on where development may or may not be allowed through reference to the possibility of communities "opting in to site allocations in Part 2 of the Plan" without explaining how or where in the District these allocations may be considered. This could make it difficult for the County Council to plan future investment in services such as education, community facilities and transport provision in the villages.

3 It is noted that Policy 6 indicates that "a minimum of 230 dwellings will be provided in the countryside" which leaves open the possibility of additional development in the villages.

4 The County Council would welcome a positive steer in Policy 2 of the Plan to encourage some future development in villages, particularly those with existing facilities such as a primary school or a regular public transport service. This might be achieved through some generic wording indicating a broad scale of development considered suitable to address local needs in rural areas together with criteria or principles to help steer local communities in making decisions on Neighbourhood Plans. These may, for instance, encourage development in those locations which are served by public transport and/or have existing local facilities such as a primary school or rural surgery and where additional development may help to sustain them.