

Alastair Nisbet,

21 November 2021

Dorset Council
County Hall
Dorchester

Response to the Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan 2021 – 2038 (SNP)

Summary

The Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan is an important statement of intent. It is an extremely well researched and put together document which highlights the opportunities and threats facing this unique Parish. I have no hesitation in supporting it and urge its formal adoption by Dorset Council.

Personal Statement

I have lived in Dorchester for most of my life and brought up my family here.

We have always loved the water meadows and riverside path to Bockhampton and walked it many times.

This landscape has been a treasured part of family life and my three children - and their children in turn - have acquired a love of the countryside and woodland from their Dorset childhood. One has even completed a qualification as a Forest Schools teacher - something that might not have happened had she not spent so much time in Thorncombe Woods as a child.

Over the past two years, I have fulfilled a personal ambition working on a project in Stinsford parish in partnership with the Thomas Hardy Society and Dorset Council to enrich the experience of visitors to Thorncombe Woods. **Rites of Way with Mr Hardy** is a series of wellbeing walks in the woods with Hardy's poems and tree folklore.

<https://www.screen-play.co.uk/MrHardy/>

River Frome: Paras 1.13, 3.1, 3.5, 3.12, 3.14

The River Frome is one of Dorset's rare chalk streams - a river of international environmental importance and cited as land of local significance in Dorset's draft local plan.

Yet it is subject to sewage discharges from sewer overflows **thousands of times a year** according to monitoring data from the Rivers Trust.

In 2020 the section of river flowing through Dorchester had been subject to 330 discharges for a total of 5740 hours, including discharges upstream from Sydling and Maiden Newton.

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/e834e261b53740eba2fe6736e37bbc7b/?draft=true&org=theriverstrust>

These figures are unacceptable - That is why the SNP is absolutely right to express residents' concerns that any overdevelopment will negatively affect the water quality and therefore impact on the river all the way through South Dorset to Poole Harbour (an important, nationally protected wildlife site).

The land to the north of the river additionally provides an uninterrupted thoroughfare for land mammals travelling east-west through the landscape between Charminster and Stinsford. The line of the river is an important navigation route for migratory birds such as sand martins and swallows.

Open Spaces: 3.4, 3.8, 3.10, 3.16

I am delighted to see that the Parish would like to "work with local landowners to improve climate resilience and enhance the environment through rewilding..." (para 3.8). This is vital given Dorset Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency. The parkland and water meadows around Frome Whitfield and Coker's Frome are ideally placed to fulfil this objective. Soils (which store carbon) can help combat such climate change - a point noted in para 3.4.

The views from the northernmost boundary of the Parish are wonderful. Looking south from Waterstone Ridgeway, one can see a succession of chalk valleys and downland all the way to Dorchester. The vista takes in the AONB towards the distant horizon including Hardy's Monument and Came Woods. It provides a strong sense of place for Dorchester sitting, as it does, on the southern bank of the river valley rising to Poundbury on a promontory to the west. The unspoilt uninterrupted view provides a narrative of where Dorchester sits within its landscape.

The contrast between the landscapes chalk downland and river valley is very clear. The agricultural feel of the lower slopes give a setting for the string of settlements along the length of the river.

The settlements have never been contiguous and I did not believe they should be joined by development. In the SNP, Table 3 shows the importance of the gaps

between settlements and highlights the danger of infill. It is the very discrete nature of the settlements that make up the Parish that defines how it ebbs and flows along the line of the Frome. Notable among these are Frome Whitfield, Coker's Frome and Stinsford itself (see Table 5).

Enhancing the Rural Character: 3.18

The plan states: "Opportunities should be taken, where possible, to enhance the rural character of the area." It goes on to give an example, "the replacement planting of the parkland trees at Frome Whitfield would help reinforce the historic landscape character of this settlement." This is an excellent example of how the Neighbourhood Plan focuses on the local landscape characteristics. This suggestion should be acted on

Dark Skies: 3.21

In Figure 3 it is reassuring to see how far south in the vicinity of Slyer's Lane relatively dark skies can be enjoyed (down to 0.25 – 0.5 Nanowatts/cm²/sr). However, there can be no room for complacency, and it is important to keep pushing down the incidence of light pollution across the parish allowing all residents and visitors enjoyment of the night sky. The dark skies must be conserved at all costs.

Wildlife: 3.1

Table 1 (p7) and Appendix 1 list some of the wildlife found in in the Parish - the majority of the data coming from the Bhompston area.

The parish is an area where residents and walkers from Dorchester can see a variety of wildlife on the doorstep:

Peregrine Falcons, Yellow Hammers, Badgers, increasingly Red Kites, Pipistrelle and Daubenton bats and Sika Deer across he area but regularly seen grazing on the roadside south of the A35.

Threats: Northward Development of Dorchester: paras 3.28 – 3.31, 5.16

The biggest threat to all of the positive aspects of the Neighbourhood Plan is Dorset Council's suggestion that Dorchester should be extended northwards beyond the line of the River Frome for the first time. The extension DOR13 in Dorset Council's proposed Local Plan would entirely be built on what is now part of Stinsford Parish.

Residents of the Parish are "vehemently opposed" to this development and so they should be. This development threatens the environment, the wildlife, the habitats, the river, the dark skies and the rural character of the Parish. If it goes ahead, Stinsford will never be the same again.

Groundwater: paras 6.6, 6.7

Perhaps the most worrying aspect is the potential effect on drinking water. Boreholes in the Parish supply much of the drinking water for its intrinsic villages, Kingston Maurward as well as Dorchester itself. 4000 extra homes, potentially increasing the size of Dorchester by half will put huge strains on supplying the water required.

Will the water supply be sufficient? How will the levels of the river itself be affected? These questions must be addressed by Dorset Council and scrutinised by Wessex Water.

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