

STURMINSTER NEWTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EXAMINATION

Comments on behalf of Wyatt Homes

10 September 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the response by North Dorset District Council (NDDC) and Sturminster Newton Town Council (SNTC) to the Examiner's questions.

Wyatt Homes has sought to engage positively and constructively throughout the Neighbourhood Planning process. Whilst we are broadly supportive of the overall objectives of the plan, we remain of the view that the plan falls short of the basic conditions on a number of counts, in particular the overall housing provision and the status of the reserve sites and their associated triggers.

Overall, Wyatt Homes consider that the changes suggested by NDDC and SNTC will not assist in addressing the identified housing needs of the area or the serious shortfall in housing land availability that the District is currently facing. Indeed, insofar as they relate to the reserve sites, the proposed modifications serve to further exacerbate the shortcomings of the plan.

Wyatt Homes' comments are set out below (in normal text), underneath the relevant issue, question and response (in italics).

1. PDF page 17; Plan page 10; Para/Section/Policy: Text Box

The Housing–Aims box includes a statement that identifies the intention of the reserve sites is to cater for future local needs. This aim is noted, however, LPP1 Policy 2 sets out that SN is a main focus for growth and, as discussed later in this response, NDDC does have concerns that the NP is not providing for the most up to date level of housing need available at the time of its preparation (2015 SHMA) which for SN under the adopted local plan strategy comprises both strategic and local needs growth. As such it is considered that this aim might not be achievable.

EQ1: Please seek agreement on this issue and provide me with any suggested change(s) to the NP.

NDDC & SNTC JOINT RESPONSE: *The Town Council is of the view that the reserve sites identified should only cater for future local needs. The approach regarding the identification of the reserve sites, and the basis for their release, has been developed following a significant amount of public consultation over a number of years. The District Council notes the views of the Town Council regarding this matter.*

Please also see the response to EQ2 in respect of the issue above.

NDDC & SNTC SUGGESTED CHANGE: *No change required.*

Wyatt Homes response:

The NDDC and SNTC joint response has not resolved the conflict between the strategic polices of the adopted North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (LP1), which

clearly identify Sturminster Newton as a location for strategic growth, and the emerging Neighbourhood Plan (NP), which seeks to restrict growth to local needs.

The key strategic policies of the adopted LP1 that set the direction of growth across the District are summarised as follows:

- Policy 2: Core Spatial Strategy. The core spatial strategy at Policy 2 clearly identifies the four main towns of Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton as the key strategic settlements that are the focus for the vast majority of the District's growth.
- Policy 6: Housing Distribution: Minimum housing targets for each town are set out in Policy 5, although it is recognised that the housing targets in the plan are out of date and actual needs are considerably higher.
- Policy 19: Sturminster Newton: This policy aims to ensure that Sturminster Newton will continue to function as the main service centre in the rural west of the District. Housing needs are stated as a minimum, and locations for development and north and east of Sturminster Newton are identified.

The NP's attempt to restrict future development above the LP minimum housing requirement to local growth is at odds with the spatial strategy and clearly identified role of Sturminster Newton in meeting the strategic growth needs of the District.

The NP therefore does not comply with the basic condition of being in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan.

Wyatt Homes consider that this significant discrepancy between the NP and LP requires modification, with the focus of the NP changed to support and deliver the core spatial strategy of accommodating strategic growth at Sturminster Newton.

2. PDF page 34/38; Plan page 27-31; Para/Section/Policy: Section 4.3

It is noted that, following NDDC's Regulation 14 comment regarding the PPG requirement to take account of the latest and most up to date evidence of housing need (Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 41-040-20160211), the SN Housing Needs paper has been updated to refer to the 2015 SHMA and suggests what might be a pro rata increased housing figure for SN, being around 457 dwellings. This figure however is not explicitly identified in the NP itself, the LPP1 figure of a minimum of 395 continuing to be referred to. (For information, NDDC are currently using the figure published by the Government in the consultation on a standardised method for calculating housing need for the Local Plan Review. This is higher than that in the 2015 SHMA.)

It is noted that in para 4.3.2 the two proposed reserve sites appear to be linked to the need for additional housing, resulting from new housing needs evidence in the Local Plan Review, and that together these could provide around 90 dwellings. However,

para 4.3.4 sets out that the reserve housing sites are intended to cater for growth beyond 2031, Policy 7 stating 'The release of the reserve sites should be phased appropriately through the Local Plan Review, and only brought forward ahead of the end of the plan period if monitoring shows their early delivery is essential.' Para 4.3.4 sets out the scenarios engendering their early release. The first is that '...one or more of the strategic sites in SN is not deliverable within the plan period (and the minimum target of 395 homes would not then be achieved without the release of a reserve site)'. The second is that there is a significant shortfall in housing land supply across North Dorset District, triggering the national policy of a presumption in favour of sustainable development. These both present issues, the first because by using the minimum target of 395, the latest and most up to date evidence of housing need is not being taken account of, and the second because it adds nothing to what is already set out in national policy. It is considered that releasing either or both of the reserve sites to accommodate an increase in the level of SN's share of identified up to date strategic housing need before the end of the plan period would not accord with these scenarios, either individually or collectively.

As previously advised, it is also noted that whilst individual assessments of some of the proposed sites and other potential sites are included in Appendix 1 to the Pre-Submission SEA document, only cursory assessments against the SEA objectives have been undertaken of the sites that are based on housing growth areas already included in LPP1 and the proposed 'infill' sites. The District Council considers that there needs to be detailed assessments of all sites in order to establish their deliverability. In addition, the neighbourhood plan SEA should not be relying on the sustainability appraisal of LPP1 Policy 19 as that policy is a strategic policy covering a wide range of topics and whilst housing growth areas are identified, these are not specific allocations.

EQ2: Please seek agreement on this issue and provide me with any suggested change(s) to the NP. In responding to this request, it would be helpful to have responses to the objections and comments made by Gladman Developments Ltd (SN02), Hall & Woodhouse Ltd (SN03), and Wyatt Homes. In respect of Wyatt Homes and the land south and east of Elm Close, please deal with the objection made by Mr David Wingate (SN08-1).

JOINT RESPONSE: In terms of the point about housing numbers, the Town Council considers that the references in the neighbourhood plan to the 395 figure (that being the 'at least' figure (up to 2031) referred to for Sturminster Newton in the LPP1) should be retained and not replaced by the housing need figure of around 457 dwellings referred to in the Sturminster Newton Housing Needs Background Paper. The Town Council considers that the matter of housing numbers, including the number at Sturminster Newton, is a strategic policy issue that should be considered by the District Council as part of its ongoing Local Plan Review.

The District Council notes the Town Council's view and can confirm that the matter of housing numbers, including the approximate scale of housing development at Sturminster Newton, and the future spatial strategy for the District is being considered as part of the Local Plan Review.

Further to the above, it should be noted that the plan (when taking into account the reserve sites identified) identifies sufficient land to meet the need figure of around 457 dwellings referred to in the Sturminster Newton Housing Needs Background Paper.

Turning to the matter of the proposed reserve sites, as previously stated the Town Council is of the view that the reserve sites identified should only cater for future local needs. In terms of the release of the reserve sites paragraph 4.3.4 of the neighbourhood plan sets out the scenarios engendering their early release. The first is that '...one or more of the strategic sites in SN is not deliverable within the plan period (and the minimum target of 395 homes would not then be achieved without the

release of a reserve site)'. As previously stated, and for reasons already set out, the Town Council considers that the references in the neighbourhood plan to the 395 figure should be retained and not replaced by the housing need figure of around 457 dwellings. In terms of the second scenario the Town Council consider that for reasons of clarity, in respect of the early release of the reserve sites, there should continue to be reference to national policy. The District Council and the Town Council consider that the existing wording relating to the second scenario should be deleted and replaced with the following text:

'one or more of the provisions set out in paragraph 14 of the revised NPPF do not apply'.

With regards to Appendix 1 to the Pre-submission SEA, the District Council has given further consideration to the need for detailed assessments of all sites in order to establish their deliverability. Ideally detailed assessments should have been undertaken. However, following discussions with the Town Council the District Council is satisfied that there is unlikely to be significant problems in terms of deliverability. Additionally, the deliverability of sites is a matter that will be considered again as part of the Local Plan Review.

Further to the above, in terms of the neighbourhood plan SEA relying on the SA of the LPP1 Policy 19, the District Council considers that, ideally, the relevant policies in the neighbourhood plan should have been subject to their own individual assessment in the neighbourhood plan SEA. Nevertheless, whilst the Town Council acknowledges that Policy 19 in LPP1 is a strategic policy that considers issues other than housing, the appraisal that was carried out as part of the sustainability appraisal of LPP1 considered the housing growth areas on which the allocations are based. The appraisal also took into account the fact that the growth areas would play a significant role in meeting the requirement for at least 395 dwellings at Sturminster Newton during the period 2011-2031.

SUGGESTED CHANGE: Delete the second bullet point under paragraph 4.3.4 (i.e. the second scenario) and replace with:

'one or more of the provisions set out in paragraph 14 of the revised NPPF do not apply'.

Wyatt Homes response:

This suggested change is a serious concern as it appears to 'move the goalposts' for the early release of the reserve sites.

Throughout the preparation of the NP, there has been a clear understanding that one of the factors that would trigger the release of the reserve sites would be the District's housing land supply falling below five years and the accompanying presumption in favour of sustainable development.

The District Council has contended that the second scenario in the submission draft NP for the release of the reserve sites does not add anything to national policy, and has sought further clarification.

However, the NDDC & SNTC proposed change does not provide clarification and instead has simply proposed a reference to paragraph 14 the July 2018 NPPF. The consequence of this change is a more onerous set of circumstances for the

release of the reserve sites, including the 3 year land housing land supply and 45% housing delivery tests.

Wyatt Homes considers that the second scenario in the submission draft NP provides an important differentiation to national policy, stating:

‘There is a significant shortfall in housing land supply across the district as a whole, triggering a presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in national policy.’

The NDDC and SNTC suggested change of replacing this with a reference to national policy is a step backwards that will frustrate the delivery of sustainable sites for housing development that are urgently needed to address a serious shortfall in housing land supply across the District.

Wyatt Homes would welcome the retention of the second scenario as worded in the submission draft NP, with some further wording to explain that this relates to the five year land supply.

Wyatt Homes are concerned that NDDC and SNTC appear to be relying heavily on the Local Plan Review as a means of addressing the pressing housing need and land supply issues. The Local Plan Review is well way behind schedule; the previous Local Plan Inspector recommended an immediate LP review to address housing requirements, with a new plan being in place by November 2018. The LP review has not progressed to timetable, the Local Development Schedule is out of date, and officers have been unable to provide a revised timetable for the review. A new unitary council for Dorset comes into force in April 2019, and the transitional arrangements in relation to adopted and emerging Local Plan policies remain unclear.

Wyatt Homes consider that the combination of out of date LP housing requirements, slow progress on the LP review, and uncertainty over future strategic plan-making arrangements, are such that the NP examination process should re-test the housing requirement figure for the area as set out in paragraph 65 of the NPPF. The 457 dwellings identified in the SN housing needs paper represents a useful starting point for a minimum requirement.

Wyatt Homes consider that the status of the reserve sites and their criteria for release are central to whether or not the NP can be considered to meet the basic conditions. The suggested changes appear to have been hastily drawn up and the consequences not fully thought through. Wyatt Homes requests that the suggested change is not made. Should the Examiner be minded to consider it further, we would welcome the opportunity for a hearing session.