

NORTH DORSET LOCAL PLAN 2011 – 2026 PART 1

MARKET TOWNS SITE SELECTION

BACKGROUND PAPER

November 2013

This Background Paper is intended to be read and used in conjunction with the other background papers that support the Local Plan Part 1

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This document is one of a number of background papers produced to support Part 1 of the North Dorset Local Plan that set out the strategic policies for the District for the period 2011 to 2026.
- 1.2 The Local Plan Part 1 has been developed from the draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) (also known as the New Plan for North Dorset), which was published in March 2010.
- 1.3 The Local Plan Part 1 has been drafted to reflect recent major reforms to the planning system and to have regard to the recent global economic downturn. It has also been prepared having regard to the results of all previous consultations, including the responses made to the draft Core Strategy.
- 1.4 In the light of recent changes and responses to consultation the Council has investigated different ways of delivering positive outcomes for local communities through planning policy and has reassessed the need for future development, particularly housing and employment development.
- 1.5 The background paper explains how the Council has identified locations for development at the four main towns of Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton against the background of these changes. It summarises those parts of the evidence base which informed the 'town policies' (Policies 16 to 19) and also sets out the policy background – at national, regional and local levels – against which plans are prepared.
- 1.6 The background paper is a working document which will be updated as evidence is acquired and the consultation process proceeds and has been prepared to support the pre-submission publication version of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Sustainable Development Strategy Background Paper includes evidence on the population of all settlements, the range of services they contain and patterns of accessibility across the District. It also includes an overview of the characteristics of the four main towns in North Dorset (i.e. Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton), identifying them as the main service centres in the District.
- 2.2 This evidence demonstrates that on the basis of their population, employment opportunities and range of higher level facilities, the four main towns of Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton are the most sustainable locations in the District. This evidence has informed the Core Spatial Strategy set out in Policy 2 of the Local Plan Part 1, identifying these towns as the main focus for growth both for the vast majority of housing and other development.
- 2.3 Other background papers set out how the Council has sought to identify and meet housing needs, support economic development and ensure that necessary infrastructure is provided. This background paper explains, in the context of the Core Spatial Strategy for North Dorset and the need for growth, how locations for future development at the four main towns have been identified.
- 2.4 This background paper gives a brief overview of national and (now defunct) regional policy on the location of development and how the need for growth has been established. For each town, it then:
- outlines the technical evidence used to inform the selection of locations for development;
 - explains the work undertaken on the evaluation of options through the sustainability appraisal process; and
 - discusses the issues raised through previous consultations, including issues raised in response to consultation on the draft Core Strategy.

3. The Location of Development

National Policy

- 3.1 In terms of the location of development, paragraph 17 of the NPPF advises that councils should actively manage growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations, which are or can be made sustainable.
- 3.2 More specific guidance for the location of housing in rural areas is given in paragraph 55 of the NPPF, which states that 'to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities'. Paragraph 55 also advises local planning authorities to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances.
- 3.3 The NPPF is less prescriptive than previous national policy, which informed the production of the Council's draft Core Strategy in March 2010. Paragraph 3 of PPS 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, stated that 'away from larger urban areas, planning authorities should focus most new development in or near to local service centres where employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together. This should help to ensure these facilities are served by public transport and provide improved opportunities for access by walking and cycling. These centres (which might be a country town, a single large village or a group of villages) should be identified in the development plan as the preferred location for such growth.'
- 3.4 The NPPF recognises the importance of taking local factors into account in plan making. Paragraph 10 states 'plans and decisions need to take local circumstances into account, so that they respond to the different opportunities for achieving sustainable development in different areas.' National policy also indicates that a local plan should identify key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period¹.

Regional Policy

- 3.5 The approach to the spatial distribution of development set out in PPS 7 was taken forward in Chapter 3 of the 'emerging' Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West. This set out the 'Core Spatial Strategy' (CSS) for the scale and location of development across the region, which was seen as a key tool to delivering a more sustainable pattern of development. Individual local authorities were required to

¹ Paragraph 47, National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012)

apply the 'spatial hierarchy' of Development Policies A, B and C to the settlements in their local areas in their core strategies.

- 3.6 Development Policy B set criteria to be used by local authorities to identify 'market and coastal towns' in their Districts, which should be 'the focal points for locally significant development including provision for the bulk of district housing provision outside the SSCTs'. Development Policy C set criteria for development in 'small towns and villages', which the emerging RSS indicated should be 'the primary focus for development in the wider countryside away from A and B Settlements'.
- 3.7 In draft Core Policy 3 of the draft Core Strategy, the Council sought to apply the 'spatial hierarchy' of the 'emerging' RSS to the settlements of North Dorset. How the Council went about this and how the RSS 'Development Policy B and C Settlements' were identified is explained in the Sustainable Development Strategy Background Paper.
- 3.8 The draft Core Strategy also identified locations for growth at the three 'RSS Development Policy B towns' (Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury) and at the largest of the 'RSS Development Policy C towns' (Sturminster Newton) on the basis of:
- the technical evidence base studies available at the time;
 - the sustainability appraisal work that had been done to evaluate different options; and
 - the views expressed through engagement with local communities.

The Approach in the Local Plan Part 1

- 3.9 The national and regional policy context has changed considerably since the draft Core Strategy was produced in March 2010. These changes, the reduced housing numbers in the 2012 SHMA Update Report, together with the introduction of neighbourhood planning have informed the Council's review of its spatial approach to growth.
- 3.10 A strategic policy framework is still required, but it is no longer necessary to set a housing provision figure for the rural area or to categorise settlements on the basis of a strategic assessment of a limited number of sustainability criteria in order to accord with regional policy.
- 3.11 The Council continues to believe that the District's main towns (i.e. Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton) should continue to expand, and that their expansion is a strategic issue, which requires some detail in policy. However, the approach to development elsewhere is seen as a less strategic issue and the Council now suggests a more flexible approach to development in the rest of the District within a 'light touch' strategic policy framework.
- 3.12 The Local Plan Part 1 broadly maintains the levels of development at the four main towns, having had regard to updated and new evidence base studies, further work

on sustainability, especially in relation to sites at Blandford and Gillingham, and the responses to consultation on the draft Core Strategy.

- 3.13 The reduction in the level of development proposed for Stalbridge and the villages in the Council's strategic policies, not only gives these communities the opportunity to plan for their own needs, it also means that the Local Plan Part 1 now proposes that the vast majority of growth should take place at the four main towns.
- 3.14 Strategic sustainability factors (such as accessibility) and strategic environmental considerations (such as flood risk and potential landscape impact) played a major role in the formulation of options for the location of growth at the four main towns. These options were also shaped by the availability of land (as identified primarily through the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - SHLAA). More local, and in some cases site-based evidence, has also influenced the evaluation of the options.
- 3.15 How that growth should be accommodated is set out in each of the 'place-based' policies for the four main towns (i.e. Policies 16 to 19). Each policy deals with the key strategic topics from the topic-based policies and includes sections relating to:
- sustainable development strategy;
 - environment and climate change;
 - meeting housing needs;
 - supporting economic development; and
 - infrastructure.
- 3.16 These policies have been tested in the final Sustainability Appraisal report that accompanies the Local Plan Part 1 and shaped by the responses to consultation, including those made in response to the draft Core Strategy.

4. Establishing the Need for Growth

Introduction

- 4.1 Prior to the abolition of regional planning, the planning system sought to establish the need for growth in a District through the preparation of a regional (spatial) strategy. The draft Core Strategy, produced in March 2010 was prepared on the basis that it would have to make provision to meet the needs identified in the 'Proposed Changes' to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West, produced in July 2008.
- 4.2 National policy now places much more emphasis on local councils establishing the need for growth and sets out the key 'evidence base' studies required to enable such an assessment to be made. In terms of growth, the main issues that need to be considered are:
- housing demand and supply;
 - employment land demand and supply; and
 - the provision of grey, social and green infrastructure.
- 4.3 These issues are discussed in detail in the background papers on: meeting housing needs; supporting economic development; transportation; and infrastructure, but a brief overview is set out below.

Meeting Housing Needs

- 4.4 The future need for housing should be established primarily through a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the potential supply of land should be established primarily through a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

- 4.5 The NPPF identifies that a SHMA is a key piece of evidence that should be used to establish housing requirements at the District level. It also indicates that local planning authorities should work with neighbouring authorities where housing market areas cross administrative boundaries. The SHMA should identify the scale and mix of housing and the range of tenures that the local population is likely to require over the plan period.
- 4.6 In January 2012 JG Consulting (in association with Chris Broughton Associates) produced an update of the 2008 SHMA, which was prepared in compliance with the 2007 DCLG practice guidance and Planning Policy Statement 3 – Housing (PPS 3), which formed part of national planning policy at the time.
- 4.7 The SHMA Update Report suggests an annualised rate of housing provision from 2011 onwards of 280 dwellings per annum (dpa). Over the 15 year period from

2011 to 2026 that equates to 4,200 homes. This level of provision is below the numbers proposed in the draft Core Strategy for the period from 2006 to 2026 (i.e. 7,000 homes over 20 years or 350 dpa), but reflects more up-to-date population projections.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

- 4.8 The SHLAA aims to identify land across the District that may be suitable for housing development. The aim is to identify sufficient land to meet the housing requirement for the District and to inform the Council's planning policies as to the location of the available land.
- 4.9 The North Dorset SHLAA was initially undertaken in 2008, with a base year of 2007, to a methodology approved by an independent panel of local environmental groups, developers, community groups and local authority planners. The methodology followed that outlined by Government, adding detail to reflect local circumstances.
- 4.10 The SHLAA was updated in 2011 to a revised base date of 2010. The results of the initial study published in early 2009 identified sufficient suitable land to deliver more than 13,000 dwellings against the requirement in the 'emerging' RSS of 7,000 dwellings. A similar level of land supply (i.e. with the capacity for 13,000+ dwellings) was also identified in the 2011 SHLAA update. The majority of this land was on greenfield sites, however there was sufficient brownfield land identified to deliver about 1,500 dwellings.

Supporting Economic Development

- 4.11 The need for future employment land – for Use Classes B1 (business), B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) - for the whole of the Dorset Sub-region was examined in a 'workspace' strategy, produced in 2008. These employment land projections were updated in 2012.

Employment Land Projections

- 4.12 The estimated need for jobs in 'emerging' RSS was based on pre-recession economic growth projections. These assumed Gross Value Added (GVA) growth of 3.2% per annum across the South West. The 2012 Workspace Study updates the estimated need for jobs based on post-recession economic growth projections, which assume 2.5% GVA growth per annum across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. The 2012 study indicates that about 4,400 full time equivalent jobs will be needed in North Dorset over the 20-year period between 2011 and 2031.
- 4.13 The study shows a requirement for 28.5 hectares of employment land - for Use Classes B1 (business), B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) – in North Dorset between 2011 and 2031. A 10% 'flexibility allowance' increases the

requirement to 29.5 hectares. Increasing the 'flexibility allowance' to 20% further increases the requirement to 30.5 hectares.

- 4.14 The 2012 Workspace Study also looked at the supply of employment land. This showed a supply of 49.6 hectares of employment land for Use Classes B1 (business), B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution).
- 4.15 The 2012 Workspace Study shows that the amount of employment land available in North Dorset on sites with planning permission or on sites which are already allocated in the 2003 Local Plan exceeds the identified need over the next 20 years.
- 4.16 This situation is reflected in Policy 11 – The Economy (which sets out requirements to 2026) and has enabled the Council to develop a more flexible policy approach to 'non B-Class uses' on employment sites.

Infrastructure

- 4.17 The Council wishes to ensure that infrastructure is delivered at the right time and in the right place to support the growth proposed in the Local Plan Part 1. The different types of infrastructure are:
- 'grey infrastructure' (including transport, utilities and drainage);
 - 'social infrastructure' (including community, leisure, cultural, education and health facilities); and
 - 'green infrastructure' (linked networks of open space including informal recreational areas and wildlife corridors).
- 4.18 The Council has examined likely future needs for infrastructure both through various technical studies and through dialogue with local communities. These needs are set out in detail in Section 7 (Policies 13 to 15) of the Local Plan Part 1.
- 4.19 The Council has also produced an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), which provides more detail on how infrastructure projects will be delivered, by setting out:
- what infrastructure is required;
 - when the necessary infrastructure will be put in place;
 - what likely costs are involved;
 - how those costs will be met; and
 - who will deliver that infrastructure.

Conclusion

- 4.20 The Council has sought to meet the needs for growth (and supporting infrastructure) in the context of the core spatial strategy, which seeks to focus it at the District's four main towns. At each town, the Council has attempted to identify suitable opportunities to accommodate growth in a sustainable manner, drawing on technical evidence and views expressed by local communities in consultation.

Site selection has also been informed by the sustainability appraisal process, which has progressed in tandem with the development of policy.

5. Blandford

Introduction

- 5.1 'Blandford' comprises the main town of Blandford Forum to the north of the River Stour and the smaller built-up area of Blandford St Mary to the south, which effectively function as a single settlement. The town lies in the gap where the River Stour cuts through the chalk downland and is encompassed by two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and the Dorset AONB.
- 5.2 Blandford is the main service centre in the south of the District with an extensive rural hinterland. The 2011 Census showed that the town had a population of 11,836. Blandford has expanded significantly in recent years, more than 1,400 new homes being built between 1994 and 2012.
- 5.3 Blandford Forum has been described as one of the finest ensembles of Georgian country town architecture in the UK, possessing an excellent example of a Georgian town centre which contains many Listed Buildings. The town has a good range of shops and other key town centre uses, with a number of national businesses represented as well as independent traders. There are a number of large employment sites within the town and many local people are also employed at Blandford Camp, a large military site located just to the east of the by-pass. The settlement also contains three primary schools with a fourth at Blandford Camp, a secondary school and a community hospital.

Technical Evidence Informing Policy

- 5.4 This section sets out the strategic evidence base studies and the local evidence base studies that have informed the town policy for Blandford. This section also outlines recent changes in circumstances that are reflected in the revised policy in the Local Plan Part 1.

Strategic Evidence

North and north East Dorset Transportation Study (N&nETS)

- 5.5 The North and north East Dorset Transportation Study (N&nETS) was undertaken between 2008 and 2011². It was based on draft RSS growth figures that proposed 7,000 new homes in North Dorset by 2026, of which 1,500 were in Blandford. One of the key elements of the Study is the assessment of the relative accessibility of proposed development sites in Blandford. This assessment was based on the nearness of each site to food shops, primary schools, GP surgeries and employment

² North and north East Dorset Transport Study, Buro Happold (November 2008 to November 2011)

opportunities and distances were weighted according to the frequency with which different types of trips were made.

5.6 The relative accessibility of a number of potential development sites around the town was examined:

- a) BLAN 1 land west of Sunrise Business Park;
- b) BLAN 2 land north of the bypass;
- c) BLAN 3 land off Shaftesbury Lane (industrial);
- d) BLAN 4 land off Shaftesbury Lane;
- e) BLAN 5 land north east of Blandford (Letton Park);
- f) BLAN 6 land at Black Lane;
- g) BLAN 7 land to the west of Blandford ('Crown Meadows');
- h) BLAN 8 land to the south of Blandford ('the Brewery site');
- i) BLAN 9 land to the west of Blandford St Mary; and
- j) BLAN 10 land to the south of A350/A354 ('the Tesco site').

5.7 For the residential sites, BLAN 8 (the Brewery site) emerged as the most accessible, followed by BLAN 7 (Crown Meadows). The least accessible sites were BLAN 1, BLAN 2 and BLAN 5 (land west of Sunrise Business Park, land north of the bypass and land north east of Blandford) respectively. The Study also highlighted the mixed-use nature of the scheme for the Brewery site allowing, which would allow easy access to employment potential and St Mary C of E School in Blandford St Mary.

Landscape Impact Assessment

5.8 Consultation on the draft Core Strategy in 2010 highlighted the concerns of local communities regarding the landscape impact of development at Blandford. The Council therefore commissioned a landscape impact assessment to examine the potential impacts of taking forward potential housing sites (as identified through SHLAA) both on AONB and other landscapes.

5.9 The assessment examined a number of different sites against the same criteria. It did not seek to rank the sites according to their landscape value or make judgements about the suitability of certain sites for development but it has provided consistent data to help inform such judgements and provided guidance where mitigation was an option.

5.10 The survey examined nine sites at Blandford:

- Land between A354 and A350;
- Land west of Blandford St Mary;
- Land west of Blandford (Crown Meadows);
- Land at Junction A354 /B3082;
- Land North East Blandford (Salisbury Road);
- Land at Lower Bryanston Farm;

- Land North of Milldown Local Nature Reserve;
- Land North East of Blandford (off Higher Shaftesbury Road); and
- Land West and East of Sunrise Business Park.

- 5.11 **Land between A354 and A350** - The assessment concluded that development would impact negatively on the site's role in forming part of the rural countryside setting of the town and would extend the urban edge beyond the existing logical edge created by the A354 bypass. In this way, development would impact negatively on the open, undeveloped character of the South Blandford Downs landscape character area and on the amenity of users of Wards Drove. This impact would be greater in the winter months when vegetation is not in leaf. Development would also adversely affect trees/copses and hedgerows directly or indirectly. For example, development would damage the root zone and would break up the unity of the field pattern in this part of the downland landscape. Development would also impair the open views and context that this site provides when viewed from the busy A354/A350 roundabout.
- 5.12 The site has a relatively high amenity value for users, from Wards Drove in particular, and has a high value in terms of its contribution to the rural setting of the town in its surrounding downland setting. The site has some historic value³ as part of the enclosed field pattern and the hedgerows/trees have some wildlife value. The site lies outside both the Dorset and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.
- 5.13 The overall conclusion of the assessment was that, due to the sensitivities and vulnerabilities outlined above, any form of mitigation would have limited effectiveness. The only form of mitigation which might be considered worthwhile would be restricting development to a small area in the lower slopes of this site in the far north-east corner which would have some benefits in ensuring that development would not be seen on the skyline. This would reduce some of the adverse impacts on landscape character but would create a new hard urban edge outside the context of the existing settlement pattern and disrupt the existing field pattern. Development here would also be viewed directly from Wards Drove, thus reducing the amenity of users and the setting of the town when viewed from this location.
- 5.14 **Land west of Blandford St Mary** - Development on this site would affect a series of undeveloped paddocks and farmland and potentially impact on the important trees, hedgerows and copses within and around the site. Development would be on greenfield land adjacent to the Dorset AONB and would have some negative impact on the character and setting of this designation and its landscape character. Any

³As defined by English Heritage in Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, English Heritage (April 2008) and as defined in everyday assumed use of this term.

- development on the elevated part of the site would have a greater negative impact on the character and setting of the AONB and its landscape character.
- 5.15 As the site abuts the AONB it has an impact on its setting and therefore has a high sensitivity rating. It also has some amenity value as open, undeveloped greenfield land and the trees and hedgerows have some important wildlife value.
- 5.16 If development were to be located away from the more elevated and exposed parts of the site (within the southern arable field) then this would minimise the identified impacts on landscape character and the AONB. Additionally, if development also ensured the retention, protection and management of the key mature old hedgerows crossing the site and those which border it then impacts could be minimised. This network of vegetation would provide a mature framework within which development could 'sit'.
- 5.17 The fact that development would not break the skyline when seen from key viewpoints on New Road (due to the rising landform and the existing development to the south-east) is a key factor in mitigating identified impacts. The framework of mature vegetation and existing development off Fairmile Road also provides a backdrop and context/setting for any new development which would, in turn, help to integrate it. In other words, such development would be within the context of the existing pattern of development on this edge of Blandford.
- 5.18 **Land west of Blandford (Crown Meadows)** - A number of impacts were identified in the landscape assessment with regard to development of this site. There would be a negative impact on the open, undeveloped floodplain parkland character of the site and therefore an impact on its function in contributing to the setting of the town, Conservation Area and the setting of the Dorset AONB. Development would also impact negatively on the important mature parkland trees in the site and potentially 'block off' open views out across to the floodplain meadows to the backdrop of the cliff beyond. Lastly, development would impact on the historic urban edge of the town, particularly around the southern edge of the site, and the setting of the leisure centre grounds which currently enjoy open aspects and vistas out across the floodplain.
- 5.19 Due to its Conservation Area designation, this site has high value in its contribution to the historic context and setting of the town. High value is also due to its position within the setting of the Dorset AONB, the boundary of which lies along the eastern edge of the River Stour. It also has some amenity value as open, undeveloped country.
- 5.20 However, if development were to be limited to the more 'urban fringe' northern part of the site, and the paddocks with the closest association with the floodplain landscape were left undeveloped, this would limit the identified impacts on character and important site features. The areas considered potentially as more suitable for development are those closest to the urban edge. Maintaining a green,

open 'wedge' through any development would also help mitigate the impact on views, break-up the development and link physically and visually the existing floodplain meadows and the undeveloped grounds of the leisure centre.

- 5.21 **Land at Junction A354 /B3082** - This site was granted planning permission in October 2011 and development is well advanced.
- 5.22 **Land North East Blandford (Salisbury Road)** - Development of this land would have an injurious effect on the open, undeveloped, rolling rural character of this site, harming its role in providing a green setting for this edge of Blandford. Development would also have an adverse impact on the existing character and visual amenity of this part of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The fact that the site slopes south towards the AONB increases the impact of any built development on the site. An obvious and distinctive edge to this settlement is formed by A354 when viewed from the open countryside and any further development would break this important physical and visual function, creating a negative cumulative impact. Development would also have a deleterious impact on the integrity of the internal hedgerow boundaries, two of these being important historical parish boundaries. The potential negative impact on hedgerows and trees around and adjacent to the site is also a key sensitivity. Lastly, the setting and context of Letton Park would also be adversely affected.
- 5.23 While the site is outside the AONB, it does impact on the overall setting of the AONB, thereby elevating the site's sensitivity to high, particularly as it is open to views from key viewpoints within the AONB. It has a high visual amenity status in its role as providing a green undeveloped setting and context for this edge of the settlement. The adjacent and internal hedgerow trees and copses have a high wildlife value.
- 5.24 Due to the openness of the site to views from the AONB, little mitigation is possible which could minimise the identified negative impacts on the landscape and townscape character. In the winter months, potentially additional open views would be possible into the site, for example, from along A354.
- 5.25 **Land at Lower Bryanston Farm** - The site has a high value in terms of landscape and visual impact due to being within the Dorset AONB. It has some value in providing a green open undeveloped wedge which flows in from the wider countryside up to the existing urban edge. It has some amenity value for passers-by, users of the public rights of way and residents as green, open countryside.
- 5.26 If development were to be restricted to the lower / flatter eastern half of the site then this would minimise the identified impact. If the creation of a new, hard, urban, west facing edge were to be softened by structural planting then this also would be a key mitigation measure. Development in this suggested, limited location would also sit within the context of existing development and be at a low enough elevation not to create a significant negative landscape and visual impact

on the wider character of the AONB and the setting of the town. If existing hedgerows / trees were protected, maintained and managed then this also would be a significant mitigation measure.

- 5.27 **Land North of Milldown Local Nature Reserve** - Development would create a significant adverse impact on the rural setting and landscape character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and would be very dominant, especially in views from the north-west. This would create an unacceptable detrimental impact on the setting and context of this rural edge of the town. It would also impact negatively on the context setting and integrity of the Trailway, the Milldown Local Nature Reserve and the Blandford Conservation Area.
- 5.28 Development would create an incongruous and large urban extension out into open downland countryside. It would not link in with any other built form and therefore be at odds with the current settlement pattern. Further, development would impact directly and indirectly on the important dense and mature wooded areas around and within the site.
- 5.29 The site lies within the AONB and it is continuous with the chalk escarpment / downland landscape out to A350. This designation gives it a high sensitivity rating. The site has a vital role in providing an open, green, undeveloped area of countryside helping to create a 'soft' edge to this part of the settlement and forming a key backdrop to the Milldown Local Nature Reserve, the North Dorset Trailway and the Blandford Conservation Area. The trees, woodland and hedges around and within the site have significant wildlife value as does the Milldown Local Nature Reserve / SNCI adjacent to this site.
- 5.30 Due to the openness of the site to views from the AONB and Milldown LNR, little mitigation is possible which might minimise the identified negative impacts on the landscape and townscape character. In the winter months, potentially more open views would be possible into the site, from Milldown LNR and along A350, for instance.
- 5.31 **Land North East of Blandford (off Higher Shaftesbury Road)** - This site was granted planning permission in March 2010 and development is currently taking place.
- 5.32 **Land West and East of Sunrise Business Park** - Development would have a significant, adverse impact on the rural setting and landscape character of the AONB, being seen on the skyline from several directions and therefore creating a negative landscape and visual impact. It would have an unacceptable impact on the setting and context of this part of the settlement and form a large, incongruous urban extension out into open, undeveloped countryside. Development would also impact negatively on the internal and boundary trees, hedgerows and copses.
- 5.33 The site lies within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and is continuous with this open, downland landscape in the AONB to the north; this designation gives it a high sensitivity rating. The site also has an important role in

providing a green, open, undeveloped area of countryside rolling up to the A350 boundary and in creating a distinct, urban/rural edge to this northern side of the settlement. Some of the surrounding trees and copses will have some wildlife value and the site's historic field pattern has some historic value.

- 5.34 Due to the openness of the site to views within the AONB, little mitigation is possible which could minimise the identified injurious impacts on character of the landscape. In the winter months, there is the possibility of more open views into the site from along the A354 Blandford Bypass.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

- 5.35 The strategic flood risk assessment undertaken in 2007⁴ shows that parts of Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary are at risk of flooding from the River Stour. In addition, parts of Blandford Forum are at risk of flooding from the Pimperne Brook. Groundwater and surface water flooding could also be issues in Blandford.

Local Evidence

Site Specific Studies

- 5.36 A certain amount of information has been available to the Council as a result of the submission of planning applications or by way of preparatory work prior to the making of an application.
- 5.37 The Crown Estate has commissioned studies looking at flooding and drainage, landscape, ecology, heritage and traffic in respect of the land to the west of Blandford Forum (Crown Meadows).
- A Flood Risk Assessment was undertaken in 2010 to demonstrate the relationship of the land proposed for development by the Crown Estate to the Environment Agency's Flood Zones. This showed that the proposed site's design would avoid placing construction in areas liable to flood.
 - A Drainage Impact Assessment has been prepared to ensure that there would be no increase in flood risk from surface water runoff from the development.
 - Technical studies have been undertaken to ensure that the landscape impact of any development is minimised. These studies informed the Council's 'key issues' consultation in autumn 2012, which sought views on whether the indicative capacity of the site should be reduced from 200 to 150 homes. 150 homes is the indicative capacity assumed in Policy 16.
 - Ecological studies have focussed on the potential impact of development on wildlife and the necessary mitigation measures which can offset such impact.

⁴ Bournemouth, Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset and Salisbury Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Halcrow Group Ltd (February 2008)

- A number of transportation and highways studies and assessments have been carried out to examine the relationship of any new development with the existing highway network in Blandford and the wider strategic network.
- Other assessments and studies include an archaeological assessment of the site's historic features and structures, including Listed Buildings.

5.38 The planning application made for a mixed use development (including an Asda store and petrol filling station) on land south of the junction of A350 and Shaftesbury Lane was accompanied by a number of technical supporting documents, including:

- a landscape and visual assessment to evaluate the landscape character and visual amenity of the surrounding area, including the relationship of the site and the proposed development with the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB;
- a transport assessment looking at traffic flows on A350 and Shaftesbury Lane together with junction capacities and usage;
- a travel plan to address the issues of sustainable transport and accessibility;
- a flood risk assessment looking at flooding and drainage matters relating to the site, both on- and off-site; and
- an ecological survey assessing habitats and wildlife on the site and general area and mitigation measures to deal with any adverse impacts created by development.

Topic-based Studies

5.39 A number of topic-based studies available to the Council have addressed issues having a bearing on Blandford and the development of policy for the town.

5.40 Blandford Forum was one of the towns studied in depth in the Dorset Historic Towns Project, undertaken by Dorset County Council in conjunction with English Heritage and the District Council. The study provided a basis for understanding and appreciating the historic built environment.

5.41 The Dark Skies and Light Pollution Study undertaken for the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB in 2007 highlighted the contribution made by lighting in Blandford and at Blandford Camp to overall light pollution affecting the AONB.

5.42 The implications of traffic growth for the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and roads in the AONB were examined in the report on Roads and Planning in the AONB undertaken in 2007.

Recent Changes in Circumstances

5.43 Changes in circumstances since the draft Core Strategy was published in 2010 have had an influence on the drafting of the policy for Blandford in the Local Plan Part 1. These are:

- **neighbourhood planning.** Blandford Town Council, Blandford St Mary Parish Council and Bryanston Parish Council have resolved to prepare a joint neighbourhood plan to address local issues affecting the town and the two parishes. Reference is made to this in the revised town policy.
- **approach to the provision of sports pitches.** The 2010 consultation highlighted a number of matters of local concern, one of which was the provision of sports facilities serving Blandford. Land to the north of the Blandford bypass was originally the focus of efforts to provide new sports pitches but these efforts have proved to be unsuccessful. Accordingly, the green infrastructure element of the policy has been amended to remove specific reference to this land and now refers to provision within the built-up area. The policy in the 2003 Local Plan that proposed sports pitches north of the bypass remains saved, thereby giving the opportunity for options to be reviewed through the neighbourhood planning process.
- **planning permissions for major retail developments.** Planning permission has been granted for an extension to the Tesco supermarket at Stour Park⁵ and for a new Asda supermarket off Shaftesbury Lane on the northern edge of the town⁶. Reference is made to these decisions in the revised policy.

Policy 16 – Blandford

- 5.44 The following sections demonstrate the ways in which the evidence, both strategic and local, along with changing national policy and local circumstances, helps underpin the evolution of the Blandford town policy.

Sustainable Development Strategy

- 5.45 The sustainable development strategy as it relates to Blandford is based on national planning principles of sustainability and the outcome of consideration of available locally relevant evidence relating to accessibility and the environmental implications of traffic growth. By bringing forward both housing and employment in tandem, it is intended to enhance the town's self-containment. This will be strengthened by the mixed-use development of the Brewery site and assisted by town centre regeneration.
- 5.46 Walking and cycling links, especially to new development to the west of Blandford Forum and to the west of Blandford St Mary, and improved public transport will enable more sustainable movement patterns to develop within the town. An enhanced green infrastructure network, focused primarily on the Stour Valley and the Trailway that runs through the town, will consolidate this.

⁵ The extension to Tesco gained permission in 2012 and will increase the stores floorspace from 2,273m² to 3,941m².

⁶ Planning permission was granted in March 2013 for a 2,300m² Asda supermarket and petrol filling station on land off Salisbury Lane.

Environment and Climate Change

- 5.47 Blandford's setting is largely shaped by the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, reflecting the landscape value of the countryside surrounding the town. The town's built environment is historically important, reflected in the number of Listed Buildings and Conservation Area designation. Both the natural and historic environments will be protected and enhanced and development accommodated within environmental constraints.
- 5.48 The particular challenge facing Blandford in terms of climate change is the potential impact of flooding, which is evidenced in a number of studies, and the implications of development on groundwater resources. Requiring sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in new development will help address the former while groundwater sources will be protected, partly by ensuring compliance with the principles of the Environment Agency's groundwater protection policy⁷ and by encouraging water use efficiency.

Meeting Housing Needs

- 5.49 While there has been recent development in Blandford off Shaftesbury Lane and on Black Lane, it is anticipated that about 960 new dwellings will be required in Blandford between 2011 and 2026. The mixed-use regeneration scheme for the Brewery site in Blandford St Mary already has planning permission and development is taking place on the site of the former Magistrates' Court on Salisbury Road. Planning consents are also in place for a number of other, smaller sites in the town.
- 5.50 Because of environmental constraints, most notably AONB proximity and flooding, the options for larger scale greenfield development required to meet anticipated housing need to 2026 are limited to:
- land west of Blandford St Mary and west of Blandford Forum, largely outside the Dorset AONB (with capacity for about 500 dwellings);
 - land to the south east of Blandford St Mary, outside both the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB (with capacity for at least 200 dwellings); and
 - land to the north-east of Blandford Forum beyond the by-pass outside, but surrounded by, the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB (with capacity for about 800 dwellings).
- 5.51 The option of the land west of Blandford St Mary and west of Blandford Forum is the one included in Policy 16.

⁷ Groundwater Protection: Policy and Practice (GP3) Environment Agency (November 2012)

Supporting Economic Development

- 5.52 The mixed-use regeneration of the Brewery site will help meet employment needs during the Plan period. Other sites include land off Shaftesbury Lane to the north of the town and vacant sites on existing industrial estates such as Blandford Heights. These will be sufficient to meet the town's needs until 2026.
- 5.53 Additional retail floorspace with associated employment opportunities will be available during the plan period by way of regeneration of the town centre and the extension of existing retail units. Retail floorspace will also increase both as a result of the extension of Tesco at Stour Park and by the development of the ASDA supermarket off Shaftesbury Lane which received planning permission in March 2013.
- 5.54 Tourism is recognised by the Council as making an important contribution to the local economy and applications for development that support tourism and are compatible with the town's historic character will be considered positively.

Infrastructure

- 5.55 Within the sustainable development strategy framework, the emphasis in terms of grey infrastructure will be on providing better facilities for walking and cycling between residential areas and key destinations, such as the town centre, employment sites, schools and other community facilities.
- 5.56 A key social infrastructure component is the Corn Exchange in the town centre, which is to be refurbished so that it can function as the main community venue for the whole town. Additionally, Blandford Leisure Centre's facilities, which offer a wide range of indoor and some outdoor sport activities to the local community in the south of the District, will be retained and upgraded during the Plan period. School provision will also be extended to meet the town's need in coming years and GP surgery capacity increased.
- 5.57 Existing green spaces and the links between them will be conserved and managed to improve their connectivity, quality and functionality. Open spaces in new developments will add to the 'stock' of green space in the town.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 5.58 Options considered in 2010 in the Initial Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report for the town comprised not expanding the town; expanding the town to the north east; or expanding the town to the south west.
- 5.59 The report concluded that the option of not expanding the town would reduce the impact of development on the local environment but would not meet the housing or employment needs of the town. The likely result would be an increase in long distance commuting and housing becoming less affordable. In addition, it would not engender the improvement of services and facilities in the town.

- 5.60 It was concluded that the preferred development option would be to extend the town to the south-west. However, it was noted that any development would need: to include adequate green infrastructure; to link development to the town centre; and to create and / or enhance habitats to offset any impact that may result from development. Due to the proximity of the River Stour, there would also be a need to ensure that flood risk is not increased as a result of the development.
- 5.61 The SA of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 reassessed the town policy for Blandford. The Initial SA Report considered three options for the post-2016 expansion of Blandford. However, since that Report was published (in 2010), a further option emerged for consideration. This was as a result of a change in highways policy relating to the provision of the A350 Charlton Marshall / Spetisbury / Sturminster Marshall by-pass. The status of this road proposal has changed considerably, from a firm proposal in an adopted Structure Plan, with a clear implementation timetable, to a long term aspiration (in LTP 3), with little certainty about its provision and no delivery timetable.
- 5.62 This additional site lies to the south of the A350 / A354 junction, south of Blandford and beyond the town's bypass. Further work is required to confirm the capacity of the site but it is likely to be a minimum of 300 dwellings. The site lies outside the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The assessment of this site (Option 15 (1) d) (and all other options) was reported in the Addendum to the Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report⁸.
- 5.63 The site is located relatively close to jobs and facilities but the by-pass would act as a barrier to pedestrian and cycle movements. However, measures (for example, a bridge or an underpass) would be needed to overcome the 'severance' caused by the location beyond Blandford's by-pass. The Addendum to the Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report noted that the feasibility of satisfactorily accommodating an alternative route for the proposed Charlton Marshall / Spetisbury / Sturminster Marshall by-pass would need to be established and agreed with the Highway Authority. Subsequent negotiations with Dorset County Council indicate that this may be achievable in principle.
- 5.64 The Highways Agency submitted an objection to the site in response to the autumn 2012 'key issues' consultation, raising concerns about potential impacts on the strategic road network to the south (that is, A35 and A31). Finally, the Council's Landscape Assessment of potential housing sites at Blandford (and Shaftesbury) highlighted concerns that development of the site would adversely impact on the landscape and the setting of the town.
- 5.65 Consequently, the updated SA assessment still indicates development to the south-west of the town as being the best strategic option for future growth, due to its

⁸ Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document - Addendum to the Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report (October 2012)

lesser impact on the landscape than other sites and its proximity to the town centre. This is reflected in the policy.

Consultations

Introduction

- 5.66 The development of policies for Blandford has taken place with the benefit of three rounds of public consultation:
- in 2007 based on emerging issues and options;
 - in 2010 in respect of the draft Core Strategy; and
 - in 2012 targeted at certain key issues.

Consultation 2007 – ‘Issues and Options’

- 5.67 The community’s views on key issues from national and ‘emerging’ regional policy were sought when the Council undertook consultation on the issues and options⁹ for a ‘stand-alone’ Core Strategy in June – July 2007. The consultation on issues and options was based on the draft RSS, which was published in June 2006.
- 5.68 In consultation, the Council suggested that Blandford (including both Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary), should have RSS Development Policy B status. In general terms respondents supported this approach and the need to try and attain higher levels of self-containment in the towns. The town's geographical location close to the strategic road network and local distributor routes and its range of town centre facilities were particularly mentioned.
- 5.69 However, although there was general support for Blandford to have Development Policy B status, there was also concern that the level of growth allocated should be within sustainable limits and not result in overdevelopment, environmental and landscape degradation, and increased commuting on the District’s roads.
- 5.70 The responses showed support to redevelop brownfield land and regenerate settlements in support of a sustainable strategy with a clear lack of support for expansion onto greenfield land. However, a combination of the two was recognised as a means of identifying appropriate and deliverable sites with a focus on a ‘brownfield first’ approach. Respondents felt that the sustainability of this approach rested, to some extent, on the adequate availability of employment land and there was some feeling that Blandford did not have sufficient.
- 5.71 With regards to retailing, the most support was for retaining the current retail hierarchy as set out in the 2003 Local Plan. A need for policy to promote a ‘town centre first’ approach was also recognised.

⁹ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)

Consultation 2010 – The Draft Core Strategy

- 5.72 In March 2010, the Council published the draft Core Strategy for consultation. Draft Core Policy 15 related to Blandford, which was defined as a RSS Development Policy B settlement. Draft Core Policy 15 attracted comments from 141 respondents, of which 14 were specific consultees such as parish councils and statutory consultees. A full report was presented to Members of the Planning Policy Panel on 5 July 2012¹⁰.
- 5.73 Draft Core Policy 15 proposed that 1,500 homes would be built in Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary during the period 2006 - 2026. Of these, 750 would be built by 2016 on three main sites. The remainder would be built thereafter on land to the west of Blandford Forum and land to the west of Blandford St Mary.
- 5.74 The proposed residential development would be complemented by the development of land for employment on existing sites, notably land off Shaftesbury Lane and the Brewery site but also on smaller sites such as those at Blandford Heights and Stour Park.
- 5.75 Draft Core Policy 15 provided for the development of 1,700 square metres of additional comparison goods retail floorspace in the town in locations consistent with national retail and town centre policy and draft Core Strategy policy. Town centre regeneration would be focussed on land to the south of East Street and the Market Place.
- 5.76 In addition, the draft Core Strategy presented a range of infrastructure improvements to support growth for the town:
- grey infrastructure proposals included the provision and enhancement of walking and cycling links within Blandford between residential areas and key destinations; the provision and enhancement of public transport, cycling and walking links between Blandford and the surrounding villages (and Blandford Camp); and the improvement and extension of the North Dorset Trailway for cycling and walking;
 - social infrastructure proposals embraced refurbishment of the Corn Exchange to provide a community hall for the town; the provision of neighbourhood halls to serve new development in the northern part of the town and at Blandford St Mary; the retention of Blandford Leisure Centre in community use; the extension of the Archbishop Wake and Milldown primary schools and the extension of the existing secondary school; and a new doctors' surgery or extension of existing facilities.
 - green infrastructure proposals centred on a network of green infrastructure which would be developed in and around Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary focussing on: linking existing sites, such as the Milldown, Stour Meadows

¹⁰ <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

and the North Dorset Trailway; and the provision of new sites and links. Other proposed green infrastructure proposals were the provision of new sports pitches and associated facilities on land to the north of the A350 Blandford Bypass; open space in the Stour Valley associated with development to the west of Blandford Forum; and formal and informal sports pitches and play spaces in new areas of housing development.

- 5.77 In response to draft Core Policy 2 - Delivering Sustainable Forms of Development - one objection suggested that the policy was at odd with others. It was suggested that sustainable development could not be achieved when 1,500 homes were proposed in Blandford as this would perpetuate the existing unsustainable commuting patterns between the town and the Bournemouth / Poole conurbation.
- 5.78 The vast majority of comments in relation to draft Core Policy 3 - Core Spatial Strategy for North Dorset - related to the suitability of settlements to accommodate growth and were supportive of the identification of the main towns, including Blandford, being the centres for growth although Blandford Forum Town Council suggested that the boundaries of the town and Blandford St Mary would need to be reviewed.
- 5.79 Responses regarding draft Core Policy 4 - Housing (Including Affordable Housing) Distribution - were largely supportive with Blandford Town Council wishing to explore the potential for an increase in housing. Durweston Parish Council, however, was concerned over the environmental constraints in the Blandford area. More general comments relating to Blandford were divided, with some suggesting that numbers should be reduced to reflect the environmental constraints in the area whilst others were suggesting that numbers should be higher. There were also suggestions that some of the growth planned for Blandford should be reassigned to Gillingham due to the constraints that exist around Blandford. Some comments also suggested that the level of housing at Blandford did not accurately reflect its role as a service centre.
- 5.80 Some respondents used draft Core Policy 5 - Managing Housing Land Supply - as the opportunity to raise objection to the proposed development of land west of Blandford (Crown Meadows). These objections centred on perceived adverse impacts on landscape, biodiversity and habitats, harm to the Conservation Area and local flood risk. However, Blandford Forum Town Council gave its support to the policy.
- 5.81 Draft Core Policy 6 - Economy - raised little response relating to Blandford. The policy was supported by Blandford Forum Town Council which noted, though, that no new employment land allocation was made for Blandford.
- 5.82 Blandford Forum Town Council supported draft Core Policy 7 - Retail and Other Town Centres Uses - but suggested that where there are large residential developments there is a need to provide convenience stores. The Town Council

also felt that the reference to 'vitality and viability' and shopping frontages was too restricting and that there was a need for greater flexibility in the policy. Blandford and District Civic Society considered it wrong to restrict retail facilities to overcrowded town centres.

- 5.83 Draft Core Policy 8 - Housing Mix, Type and Density - with Draft Core Policy 9 - Affordable Housing - and Draft Core Policy 10 - Affordable Housing: Rural Exception Schemes - were generally supported but with the suggestion from the Town Council and the Blandford Garrison that more affordable family type homes were needed in Blandford.
- 5.84 Draft Core Policies 11, 12 and 13 related to grey, social and green infrastructure proposals. Many of the responses made raised issues of general applicability, such as provision of parking in town centres and education provision. Blandford Garrison drew attention to restricted recreation and leisure opportunities in Blandford. While the green infrastructure strategy received support from Blandford Forum Town Council, it also highlighted the need for enhancements to the Milldown play area. The need for the protection of Crown Meadows was raised by one respondent to draft Core Policy 13.
- 5.85 Draft Core Policy 15 was the main policy specific to Blandford. In total, 161 people responded, a very large proportion objecting to the proposal for housing on land west of Blandford (that is, Crown Meadows). These objections centred on adverse impact on biodiversity / habitats and the landscape, flood risk, lack of capacity in the town's schools and GP surgeries, detriment to Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area, creation of traffic congestion, impact on road safety and increased pressure on parking spaces.
- 5.86 In responding more generally to the policy some other respondents felt that the overall housing numbers in Blandford were too high. Transportation issues were significant in the responses received, notably: in seeking to ensure that adequate alternatives to the car were available; in that public transport received support; and walking / cycling facilities were improved.
- 5.87 While Blandford Town Council's response included objection to development to the west of Blandford it offered support for many of the other elements of the policy but in some cases on qualified basis.

Consultation 2012 – Key Issues

A 'targeted' consultation on key issues was undertaken in 2012. Against this background, the questions which the Council asked in relation to Blandford were:

- **Question 20** – Do you agree that the indicative capacity of the proposed housing site west of Blandford Forum (Deer Park / Crown Meadows) should be reduced from 200 to 150 new homes?

- **Question 21** – Should land be made available as public open space in the floodplain of the River Stour as part of an overall scheme for the development of the land to the west of Blandford Forum?
- 5.88 Some 286 responses were received to Question 20. Of these, 49 responded 'Yes', 67 responded 'No' and 170 simply made comments. The comments submitted were largely totally opposed to any development on the Crown Meadows site, although some suggested a lower number of homes in the range 50 - 70. Many of the views expressed repeated those previously submitted.
- 5.89 Question 21 attracted 68 'Yes' responses, 56 'No' responses and 63 responses of comment only. Again, many of these repeated opposition to any development and some stated that the land should be available as public open space without any development taking place.
- 5.90 From the responses to the two questions which related to Blandford, in summary it may be seen that:
- many members of the public reiterated their general and previous objections to any development on Crown Meadows, often reiterating flooding issues, increased traffic congestion, adverse visual impact, impact on wildlife and the availability of an alternative site ;
 - there was some support for the provision of public open space on the floodplain but, for many respondents, having residential development on the remaining land was perceived as too high a price to pay; and
 - respondents felt that other land should be investigated as an alternative to Crown Meadows, notably land adjoining the A350/A354 but also other sites beyond the Blandford bypass.

Other Consultation Information

Bryanston Park Preservation Group (BPPG) Petition

- 5.91 The Bryanston Park Preservation Group (BPPG) has submitted a petition to the Council containing in the order of 6,000 signatories, the great majority being from Blandford but also including signatories from elsewhere in North Dorset and the country. Those signatories were "totally opposed to the proposed housing development at the Crown Meadows site because it fails to respect Blandford's iconic setting and would exacerbate the already severe traffic congestion in the one way system."
- 5.92 The petition was not submitted in response to any of the Council's consultation exercises.

BPPG Alternative Questionnaires to the 2012 Key Issues Consultation

- 5.93 The BPPG circulated an 'alternative' questionnaire largely relating to the Crown Meadows site during the Council's 2012 'key issues' consultation. The 'alternative'

questionnaire bore the Council's logo and gave no indication that it had been prepared and circulated by the BPPG. As a result, some people thought that it had been produced by the Council.

- 5.94 Respondents were asked to return completed forms to the Council or to a number of collection points in Blandford. The questionnaire repeated the Council's questions 20 and 21 and asked three additional questions with 'Yes' and 'No' tick boxes for respondents to indicate their answers to the questions:
- A If you would prefer to see NO development of the Crown Meadows because of the harm to this beautiful rural landscape and the extra traffic congestion in the town centre, tick here.
 - B If you think the offer of some open space is an unjustified inducement to accept the unwanted and harmful development of the Crown Meadows, tick here.
 - C If you would prefer that 360 houses are built on the site between the A350 and A354 (the Tesco site) with no extra traffic through the town centre, tick here.
- 5.95 The 215 responses to the alternative questionnaire was analysed by the Council and presented to Members, alongside the responses to the 'official' questionnaire.
- 5.96 The responses to Questions 20 and 21 on the BPPG 'alternative' questionnaire largely show opposition to any development on the Crown Meadows site. Relatively few comments were made in addition to the 'Yes/No' answers to the two questions. Comments stemming from the BPPG additional questions generally reflected the issues highlighted in the Council's questionnaire. Responses to the BPPG questionnaire:
- pointed to the issue of flooding;
 - expressed concerns about traffic impact from development;
 - suggested that a lack of employment opportunities would create problems;
 - identified adverse visual impact as an outcome of development; and
 - stressed perceived infrastructure deficiencies in Blandford, especially highways.
- 5.97 Overall, the 'alternative' questionnaire's results in relation to Questions 20 and 21 largely mirrored concerns expressed in the Council's consultation, both with regard to housing development at Crown Meadows and to an area of land being made available for public open space.
- 5.98 With reference to BPPG Question A, an overwhelming majority (206 out of 215) expressed opposition to development of the Crown Meadows site on the grounds of visual intrusion and traffic impact. Almost half those respondents expressing a preference for no development on the Crown Meadows site also made comment. These comments ranged over a number of issues - flooding potential, negative impact on visual amenity, likely traffic problems, strained infrastructure and a perception that more housing was not needed at Blandford. Some comments were of a more general nature, such as stating that there should be no development

within the bypass and that brownfield sites should be developed first. The alternative site near Tesco on the A350/A354 junction (embraced in the third additional question) was specifically mentioned by 6 respondents in their comments, one respondent stating that this was a second choice site after Crown Meadows.

- 5.99 BPPG Question B, referring to use of some of the site as public open space alongside residential development being an unjustified inducement to accept development, did not invite views on the acceptability or otherwise of the general principle of use of the land as public open space. A large majority of respondents supported the basic proposition. Very few additional comments were made relating to this additional question and they took the line that open space was a preferable use to housing.
- 5.100 BPPG Question C, asked for views on land off the A350/A354 junction being a preferable site to Crown Meadows. Two assumptions underpinned the question, namely, that:
- a) it would support 360 houses; and
 - b) it would generate no extra traffic through the town centre.
- 5.101 It was not clear from the BPPG form exactly how b) would be achieved, whether through design or preventing access to the town centre from this site or whether it is an assumption that no traffic would wish to visit or pass through the town centre should such a development take place. However, although the majority of responses were in support of the alternative offered at the A350/A354 junction it should be noted that a significant number of respondents (59 or 27.5%) did not answer 'Yes' to this question.
- 5.102 From the responses to the three alternative questions posed by the BPPG in relation to the Crown Meadows site, there emerges a general consensus of opposition to the development of the Crown Meadows site. A number of comments accompanied responses and these comments generally:
- emphasised the matter of flooding;
 - expressed concerns about traffic impact from development;
 - identified adverse visual impact as an outcome of development; and
 - stressed exacerbation of perceived infrastructure deficiencies in Blandford.
- 5.103 Overall, these concerns mirrored concerns expressed in responses to the District Council's consultation questions.

Bryanston Parish Council Alternative Questionnaires to the 2012 Key Issues Consultation

- 5.104 Bryanston Parish Council circulated two questionnaires of their own to residents of

Bryanston and Bryanston School¹¹. In the first, they posed 25 questions based on those which the District Council had used in its own consultation. Responses from some 32 individuals were analysed by the District Council, the results of which are summarised below. No space was allowed on the form for comment and so responses were simply Yes/No with the option of not answering either for individual questions. However, a few residents did add comments to the form or attached them on a separate piece of paper.

5.105 The responses may be summarised as follows:

- The majority of respondents to the general Bryanston questionnaire supported the principle of a neighbourhood plan but still felt that the District Council's Core Strategy should be considered as an alternative means of dealing with development in the parish. Affordable housing was seen by the majority as an important issue but with a more even division of opinion as to how this should be delivered (rent only or half rent/half buy), determined on a site by site basis. There was a strong support for developer contributions being gathered towards the provision of affordable housing¹².
- Within Bryanston, a density standard for new development was strongly backed, together with a more sensitive approach to infilling, including the development of garden areas.
- There was a clear feeling that social infrastructure is currently insufficient and that adequate provision should be a pre-requisite for granting permission for new development, with contributions collected to provide this infrastructure.
- Some support was evident for additional employment generating uses not being allowed in Bryanston and those that might be allowed being non-industrial in nature (such as cafes and shops).
- Although some were not in support, a majority of respondents favoured provision of public open space on the Stour floodplain as part of a development of 150 dwellings on the Crown Meadows site.
- The additional comments submitted with this questionnaire were brief and tended to modify answers given, such as agreeing that a contribution per dwelling should be made toward infrastructure but only for larger developments.

5.106 The second questionnaire circulated by the Parish Council related to Bryanston village. It embraced 8 questions inviting Response/Comments rather than Yes/No. While most respondents replied simply Yes/No rather than making a comment,

¹¹ The Parish Council has stated that 195 and 53 forms respectively were delivered and that the overall response rate was just below 20%.

¹² Since this survey was carried out, the government has clarified that the Community Infrastructure Levy cannot be used for the provision of affordable housing.

some made only a comment and some answered Yes/No with a comment. The Council analysed 34 responses from residents.

- 5.107 In terms of the key issues, there was a general feeling that new development in Blandford should take place beyond the bypass. However, there was hardly any response in respect of infrastructure associated with any development in Blandford. Comments relating to such development cited traffic issues and flooding as the main reasons for looking at sites outside the bypass.
- 5.108 In terms of infrastructure if development were to be approved within Blandford, almost all those who responded to this question put either medical facilities or roads as their top priority. While the majority of respondents in the village looked for more facilities, a significant proportion thought that there was no need for further facilities. One respondent commented that the existing playing field is underused and others felt that the Bryanston Club could be better utilised, notably as a village hall.

Conclusion

- 5.109 The essence of the policy for Blandford is that it will maintain its role in the south of the District as the main service centre. To achieve this, it will develop in a sustainable way to ensure that housing and employment needs are met. Increasing self-containment will have environmental benefits and strengthen its functioning as a market town.
- 5.110 Growth options for Blandford are limited by the environmental constraints facing development in the town, in particular AONB landscapes and flood risk, chiefly from the River Stour. With careful siting and design, though, and mitigation of certain impacts on environmental elements, sustainable growth can be achieved.
- 5.111 The housing and employment sites proposed in the Local Plan Part 1 therefore take full account of the key considerations of environmental impact, flooding and transportation matters, as described in more detail below.

Housing Sites

Land to the South of Blandford (The Brewery Site)

- 5.112 When potential housing sites were assessed in the N&nETS, this site was seen as the most accessible. It already has planning permission for a mixed-use development and some elements (including a new brewery) have already been constructed.

Land to the West of Blandford Forum (Crown Meadows)

- 5.113 This site emerged from the N&nETS as the second most accessible of a number of housing sites assessed. It exhibited good links with the town centre, employment opportunities and with facilities such as a GP surgery and schools.

- 5.114 The landscape assessment of the site identified some sensitivities / vulnerabilities when the site was viewed as a whole. The open, undeveloped parkland setting of this part of the town would be affected and open views across the site would be disturbed. However, the assessment concluded that these impacts could be limited if development were to be confined to the more 'urban fringe' area and an open 'green wedge' maintained through any development. This latter would physically and visually link the undeveloped parts of the site and break up development into smaller components.
- 5.115 A more detailed landscape appraisal of the site was undertaken by the landowner, the Crown Estate, and this work informed the Council's 2012 'key issues' consultation. This sought views on whether the indicative capacity should be reduced from 200 to 150 dwellings in order to reduce the visibility of any development in views, particularly the view from the bridge over the River Stour at the entrance to Blandford town centre. Policy 16 in the Local Plan Part 1 assumes an indicative capacity of 150 dwellings, which is considered to be the level of development that could be satisfactorily accommodated within landscape constraints.
- 5.116 The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and the Environment Agency's Flood Zones Map show that parts of the valley of the River Stour are at risk from flooding. However, the Crown Estate has produced a flood risk assessment to show that all development on the site would not be at risk from flooding, because it would be located in Flood Zone 1. This flood risk assessment has been validated by the Environment Agency and they have not objected to the site being proposed for housing.
- 5.117 The main biodiversity issue concerns the presence of great horseshoe bats in the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at nearby Bryanston which forage across this site, amongst other places. Mitigation measures can reduce the potential impact of development and will ensure that sufficient foraging areas are still available for the bats.

Land West of Blandford St Mary

- 5.118 The N&nEDTS identified this land as reasonably accessible in overall terms, being fourth in the list of nine residential sites considered, but particularly with good access to the town centre.
- 5.119 It is well placed in respect of flood risk, lying outside the areas identified by the Environment Agency as being at risk of flooding from the River Stour.
- 5.120 The landscape assessment saw this land as having a high sensitivity rating due to its proximity to the Dorset AONB. Development of the higher parts of the site would have a detrimental impact on the setting of the AONB and the general countryside setting. However, the assessment suggested that if development were to be kept away from the higher land and the skyline then existing trees and hedgerows would

provide the basis for integrating development into the landscape and thereby reduce its impact.

Employment Sites and Retail

- 5.121 The Local Plan Part 1 proposes that employment needs in Blandford will be met effectively by using existing sites and planning permissions to foster economic growth. A new brewery building has been constructed on the Brewery site and the land off Shaftesbury Lane to the north of the town is currently being developed. A number of industrial estates already exist and vacant sites on these will be brought into use during the plan period.
- 5.122 Additional retail floorspace has been granted planning permission, most recently for the new retail store (Asda) off Shaftesbury Lane and an extension to the existing Tesco store on Stour Park. An area has also been identified for regeneration in the town centre.

6. Gillingham

Introduction

- 6.1 This section deals with the main policies in the Local Plan Part 1 dealing with Gillingham, which are:
- Policy 17 - Gillingham; and
 - Policy 21 - Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation.
- 6.2 Gillingham and Shaftesbury are the main service centres in the north of the District, which together serve a rural hinterland extending into Somerset and Wiltshire. The 2011 Census shows that Gillingham has a population of 11,756.
- 6.3 Gillingham has been one of the fastest growing towns in the South West over the period from 1990 to 2010. Housing growth has been matched by economic growth as the town has managed to attract and retain a range of general industrial businesses. However, rapid growth has not been without its problems, such as: the limited retail offer in the town centre; a lack of community facilities and infrastructure; and limited success in achieving regeneration.
- 6.4 A detailed assessment of the town's growth potential for the period up to 2026 and beyond¹³ underpins much of Policy 17. The assessment draws on many of the evidence base studies already produced and identifies the potential for medium and longer term growth. The assessment recognises the potential for Gillingham to develop its economic and service centre functions in the medium term and the relative lack of environmental constraints adjoining the existing urban area. However, it also identifies a number of issues that may limit long term (post-2026) growth including economic potential, town centre capacity, transport and other infrastructure issues and environmental constraints.
- 6.5 It was identified that to accommodate growth additional to that which could be accommodated inside the existing settlement boundary, the most sustainable option would be to plan for a 'southern extension' to the town. This extension will have the capacity to sufficiently mitigate any negative effects associated with growth. The southern extension of Gillingham will take the form of a sustainable mixed-use development that will expand the built-up area of the town to the south and east. Concentrating growth to the south of the town is considered to offer the greatest potential for:
- housing development to be sustainably located;
 - economic development to create employment opportunities for the southern extension and the town as a whole; and

¹³ Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Dorset, Atkins (December 2009)

- the provision of supporting infrastructure, including sustainable transport measures, to increase self-containment by integrating the new development into the existing town.
- 6.6 Policy 21 sets out the Council's views, and reflects local community opinions, on how the southern extension of Gillingham should be taken forward to create attractive new neighbourhoods for the town in the period up to 2026 and beyond.

Technical Evidence Informing Policy

Strategic Evidence

North and north East Dorset Transport Study (N&nEDTS)

- 6.7 The N&nEDTS was undertaken by Buro Happold for Dorset County Council as a front loading evidence gathering exercise to inform the District in the plan making process. Published in March 2010, it was based on draft RSS growth figures that proposed 7,000 new homes in North Dorset by 2026 of which 2,300 were proposed at Gillingham.
- 6.8 In addition to general infilling in the town, nine key sites (based on information from the Council's SHLAA) were identified in the study as growth options and an accessibility audit based on quality of access for each site to existing amenities such as food shops, education, GP surgeries and employment opportunities was undertaken. The sites were:
- GILL 1 – Land at Bowridge Hill, north east of Gillingham
 - GILL 2 – Land near Windyridge Farm, east of Gillingham
 - GILL 3 – Land at Park Farm, south east of Gillingham
 - GILL 4 – Land at Ham, south of Gillingham
 - GILL 5 – Land south of The Meadows, Lodden Lakes, south of Gillingham
 - GILL 6 – Brickfields Business Park, south west of Gillingham
 - GILL 7 – Land at Station Road, central Gillingham
 - GILL 8 – Land at Bay, north east of town centre at Gillingham
 - GILL 9 – Land at Peacemarsh – north-west of Gillingham
- 6.9 All the above sites, except GILL 6 and GILL 7 employment sites, were regarded as developable when assessed as part of the SHLAA prior to assessment as part of the N&nEDTS.
- 6.10 The accessibility audit results, based on RPG10 accessibility criteria, demonstrate that GILL 7 is the only site that complies with all maximum distances for access to food, shopping, primary education, bus and a rail connection. All possible

residential sites are suitably located in respect of proximity to an existing bus connection.

- 6.11 GILL 4 was identified as the next most accessible site, and all the other sites only complied with maximum distances for access to a bus stop, but failed on maximum distances to food shop, primary school, and rail station.
- 6.12 A weighted assessment was undertaken for each site which took into consideration the frequency of different types of trips. GILL 7 ranks highest, being centrally located and within walking distance of all services. Sites GILL 3, GILL 4, and GILL 5 all also rank highly. However, sites GILL 2, GILL 8 and more so sites GILL 1 and GILL 9 are significantly less accessible.
- 6.13 GILL 6 and 7 employment sites were assessed using the same methodology as the residential sites. However, it is accessibility to public transport that is most important for employment sites. Both sites ranked equally overall for access to public transport.
- 6.14 The summary results of the corridor analysis indicated that the B3081 between Gillingham and Shaftesbury would operate near to capacity by 2026 at the assessed growth levels.
- 6.15 The N&nEDTS identified a number of general and specific corridor issues and recommendations for mitigation. In addition to the recommendations of general improvements across the highway network, including demand management, specific measures for Gillingham included: encouraging modal shift by implementing identified walking and cycling schemes and seeking to increase peak time bus services between Gillingham and Shaftesbury, and further to the larger towns of Yeovil and Salisbury; improving public transport interchange services at Gillingham and Yeovil, and introducing flexible ticketing schemes; and implementing highway improvement schemes to the B3081/B3092 and A30 corridor, including the Enmore Green Link road improvement.
- 6.16 In conclusion, the assessed sites in Gillingham which scored highest for accessibility were: Land at Station Road; Land at Ham; Land at Park Farm; Land south of The Meadows (Lodden Lakes); and Brickfields Business Park.

Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham – the ‘Gillingham Study’

- 6.17 Dorset County Council and North Dorset District Council jointly commissioned Atkins consultants to assess the current and future capacity for growth at Gillingham. The Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham (2009)¹⁴ report provided a detailed assessment of the town’s growth potential for the period up to 2026 and beyond underpins much of Policy 17 - Gillingham.

¹⁴ Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Dorset, Atkins (December 2009)

- 6.18 The assessment draws on many of the evidence base studies already produced, including the North and north East Dorset Transport Study, and identifies the potential for medium and longer term growth. The assessment recognises the potential for Gillingham to develop its economic and service centre functions in the medium term and the relative lack of environmental constraints adjoining the existing urban area. However, it also identifies a number of issues that may limit long term (post-2026) growth including economic potential, town centre capacity, transport and other infrastructure issues and environmental constraints.
- 6.19 The report assessed a number of future growth scenarios for the town. The scenarios were informed by consideration of factors which influence the extent to which growth may be accommodated sustainably in environmental, social and economic terms. The package of supporting infrastructure needed to accommodate growth was also considered along with an assessment of viability and deliverability issues. The availability and delivery of appropriate transport infrastructure was found to be a key determinant of the level of growth which may be accommodated sustainably.
- 6.20 The consultants reviewed areas capable of accommodating urban extensions. This comprised land adjoining the existing Gillingham urban area but falling within the landscape envelope around the town. In establishing suitable sites, the starting point was to assess the North Dorset District Council's SHLAA completed in 2009. The Council identified sites in the SHLAA based on those put forward from landowners and developers following a call for sites and those identified by the Council through other sources (land with no other apparent constraints to development).
- 6.21 The consultants tested the overall level of growth Gillingham may be able to accommodate sustainably through a scenario building approach. The process included:
- Step 1 – Develop initial growth scenarios to investigate alternative scales and distribution of development;
 - Step 2 – Establish infrastructure needs and supporting amenities required to support growth;
 - Step 3 – Evaluate initial growth scenarios against sustainability criteria to establish town wide potential;
 - Step 4 - Assess sustainability of individual land parcels;
 - Step 5- Refine the initial growth scenarios to reflect the scale of growth which can be accommodated sustainably at the settlement scale and the potential for individual parcels to accommodate growth sustainably; and
 - Step 6 – Refine assessment of infrastructure needs and supporting infrastructure to reflect refined growth scenarios.

- 6.22 During the scenario building process a workshop with local stakeholders was held and site visits to locations in and around the town were undertaken and four growth scenarios were formulated for consideration. These were:
- maximum growth – maximising potential of all land capable of supporting development;
 - southern focus – concentrating growth to the south of the town;
 - northern focus – concentrating growth to the north of the town;
 - incremental growth – dispersed growth in multiple directions to north and south of the town.
- 6.23 Working through the scenario building approach, further testing of sustainability and a refinement process took place. The scenario that concentrated development to the south of the town was identified as the most sustainable option. This scenario was the only one that scored positively under all the evaluation criteria of:
- economic development and employment opportunities;
 - service centre functions and social infrastructure;
 - potential to increase self-containment and enable sustainable transport; and
 - environmental capacity.
- 6.24 In the time following the production of this report, economic conditions have changed significantly and the Council has undertaken to revise the SHMA and SHLAA. The overall level of growth for the District was revised downwards and at Gillingham this was from about 2,300 dwellings, 4,700 jobs and 38.3 ha of employment land proposed through the draft Core Strategy (for the period 2006 to 2026), to about 1,490 dwellings, 4,400 jobs and 30.5ha of employment land proposed in the pre-submission version of the Local Plan Part 1 (for the period 2011 to 2026).
- 6.25 The revised growth levels are reflected in the level of development likely to be delivered through the southern growth scenario during the Plan period, as set out in the pre-submission Local Plan Part 1. However, it should be noted that there remain considerable further capacity for continued housing growth beyond 2026. The main residential sites at Ham, Park Farm and Lodden Lakes form part of the SSA, while land at Bay and regeneration of the Station Road area form part of the wider Gillingham policy. The main employment sites at Brickfields Business Park, a reduced Park Farm site to that envisaged in the growth scenario but remaining the same size as its previous allocation and regeneration of the Station Road area were retained.
- 6.26 Locating the revised levels of growth in this way will support the sustainable growth of Gillingham and link the location of residential and employment growth while encouraging town centre regeneration.
- 6.27 Through the development of Policy 21, and specifically the Master Plan Framework, the SSA will be planned to be released and developed in a co-ordinated and phased

manner to ensure that the supporting infrastructure is provided in a timely manner and that issues such as landscape impact, flood risk, traffic growth and the provision of access are fully taken into account.

Evidence for the SSA

Transport Assessment (TA)

- 6.28 Through the production of the N&nEDTS and the assessment of the growth potential of Gillingham, it was identified that the key issue to development and expansion of the town was transport constraints. Transport consultants were instructed by two of the developers who control the largest tracts of the SSA to assess the transport related constraints and identify potential solutions.
- 6.29 The scope of the TA was agreed by the District and the County Councils. The consultants undertook a baseline survey, having agreed the methodology and modelling parameters, and subsequently produced a draft TA. Further refinement to model and scoping of a sustainable transport strategy was agreed with the Councils. The results from the TA work undertaken thus far identify both issues and potential solutions and suggests broad phasing of development co-ordinated with transport and highways improvements.
- 6.30 The Highways Authority (Dorset County Council) agrees that a package of potential solutions could be implemented to mitigate the potential impacts of development. Now this has been established, the evidence which forms the TA could be further refined and the information fed into the Master Plan Framework for the site, as required by Policy 21 and further used to inform future planning applications for the SSA.

South Gillingham Framework Plan

- 6.31 The South Gillingham Framework Plan: Understanding the Site and its Context was produced by the consultant team of two of the landowners who own the largest tracts of the site. This framework plan did not cover the whole of the SSA but focused on land at Park Farm and the eastern part of Ham. It provided a useful guide to the design capacity of this part of the site and considered its constraints and opportunities.
- 6.32 The framework plan identified historic growth patterns, existing facilities and undertook a local character analysis. It then set to develop the framework by identifying key views, potential linkages, green and blue infrastructure, landscape structure, and a draft schedule of uses on this part of the site. This information would start to inform a land budget process.
- 6.33 Now this work has been undertaken, the evidence could be further refined and the information fed into the Master Plan Framework for the site, as required by Policy 21 and further used to inform future planning applications for the SSA.

Concept Plan

- 6.34 On the 22nd March 2013, Stage 2 of the consultation for the Gillingham SSA took place. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) facilitated a workshop where stakeholders including members of local community groups, service providers, developers and officers of the District Council undertook the process to produce a concept plan for the southern extension to Gillingham.
- 6.35 First a site visit was attended where key points and views were noted, such as the rural character of Cole Street Lane, the knoll at Ham, the proximity to Kings Court Palace scheduled monument, key entrances to the town, and the site edges. Then a mapping exercise where each group of attendees thought about where key uses should go, such as: the local centre; the alignment of the principal street; employment; allotments; primary schools; sports pitches etc.
- 6.36 Finally, participants reviewed potential design principles to guide the development, which had been formulated with reference to the TDS, to assess appropriateness within the local context. The outcomes of the workshop and composite concept plan have been written up in a report by ATLAS: Gillingham Southern Extension Concept Plan Workshop – March 2013.
- 6.37 The consultation undertaken to date has helped to establish a ‘collective vision and a set of agreed priorities’ for the sustainable development of the southern extension, which are set out in Policy 21 – Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation.
- 6.38 The Council, the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group (GNPG) and developers will continue to work together to co-ordinate these different strands of consultation.

Local Evidence

Gillingham Town Design Statement (TDS)

- 6.39 The local community in Gillingham has long had a desire to be more involved in planning the future of their town. In support of this and to support the adopted and emerging policies for the town, local people were encouraged to prepare a TDS. The role of this is to identify the special characteristics of the town and set out how new development can be integrated into this character. The TDS describes the distinctive local features in Gillingham and includes a set of development guidelines. Extensive local consultation was undertaken and the TDS was endorsed by the District Council on 30th March 2012 and is now used to guide development in the town.
- 6.40 The TDS will be incorporated into the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan to guide design in Gillingham. The work in the TDS has informed the development of the Local Plan Part 1 Policy 17 – Gillingham and Policy 21 - Gillingham SSA and, in particular, has informed the development of the set of design principles which form part of the conceptual framework in Policy 21. The policy requires that the Master

Plan Framework, which will be drawn up for the SSA as a tool to achieve comprehensive development, reflects the elements of the conceptual framework.

Gillingham Landscape and Open Spaces Assessment

- 6.41 This report contains an independent survey and assessment of the landscapes and open spaces of Gillingham. It was undertaken by Richard F Burden (Chartered Landscape Architect) on behalf of the Council following adoption of the North Dorset District Wide Local Plan (2003). The report has helped to provide information and evidence to inform Policy 17 – Gillingham and Policy 21 – Gillingham SSA of the Local Plan Part 1. Although the planning situation has changed significantly since this report was written, the evidence provides a useful context in which to develop the town’s green infrastructure strategy. For example, understanding the landscape character and the sensitivities of the edge of sites proposed for development.

The Three Rivers Partnership Open Spaces Group Report Gillingham

- 6.42 This report builds on the Gillingham Landscape and Open Spaces Report and identifies issues and recommendations for the provision and management of green infrastructure from a more local community view point. Again, the report has helped to provide information and evidence to inform Policy 17 – Gillingham and Policy 21 – Gillingham SSA of the Local Plan Part 1. Community aspirations for types and locations of green infrastructure have informed the policy context, such as the ‘town park’ project off Gillingham High Street. This work could be further used to inform the development of a green infrastructure strategy in the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan.

Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan

- 6.43 Alongside the production of the town design statement, the community decided to produce a town plan to set out the aspirations of local residents and establish objectives for moving forward.
- 6.44 Both of these pieces of work were well progressed when the Government introduced changes to the planning system. These changes gave local communities the right to take more control of planning for their area through neighbourhood planning. The Town Council decided to take on board this new right and begin the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Gillingham using the work already undertaken on the Town Design Statement and Town Plan. Work on the neighbourhood plan is well underway with the Neighbourhood Area being formally designated on 20th August 2012 and Fronrunner funding been awarded by Government.
- 6.45 The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group (GNPG) has been given the responsibility of preparing the neighbourhood plan. One of their first actions was to establish a vision and some key aims to guide the Neighbourhood Plan’s

formulation. A workshop took place on 22 October 2012, in which GNPG, NDDC and ATLAS worked with a cross-section of local people and professionals to elicit views on how the outputs from previous consultation work could be updated and translated into a first draft vision. The outcomes of this workshop were then consulted on with the wider local community.

- 6.46 This vision will incorporate a statement explaining where the town would like to be in the future and how it intends to get there. Policy 17 – Gillingham, and Policy 21 – Gillingham SSA have been written with regard to the context of the ten themed outputs from the visioning consultation event. This should ensure that the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan are aligned to achieve the same objectives for the town.
- 6.47 Following on from the visioning event, consultants “We Made That” undertook a cultural audit to identify deficiencies and opportunities to Gillingham’s cultural offer, and to understand how the local community identify their town and how they see its cultural future progressing. One outcome was the production of an iterative cultural directory called “Gill’s Great”.
- 6.48 This task successfully managed to consult with younger people, which has been a traditionally hard to reach group. This work will inform the development of the neighbourhood plan.

Sustainability Appraisal

Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report 2010

- 6.49 To inform the preparation of the draft Core Strategy options for the location of development around Gillingham were considered in the Initial Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report, which was produced alongside the draft Core Strategy in March 2010.
- 6.50 From the Initial Sustainability Appraisal in 2010 it was concluded that:
- small scale greenfield expansion would be needed prior to 2016 to maintain delivery of housing at an appropriate rate;
 - locating the major greenfield expansion to the south and south east of the town would offer benefits due to its proximity to the town centre, the main employment sites in the town and the railway station. The development would also offer the opportunity to ease traffic congestion at the bridge where the B3081 crosses the railway line through the provision of a southern link road;
 - the designation of an additional strategic employment site (at Wyke) would offer the opportunity to attract businesses that would demand a high quality environment, helping to diversify the economy of the town. Impact on biodiversity, landscape and townscape will need to be considered carefully. A strategic site would need to be reserved for larger suitable employers to meet the aims of diversified employment growth;

- the provision of additional land at or close to the town centre will help to meet the retail needs of the expanded town. Opportunities may also arise to realise wider benefits such as greater use of the railway, a district heating system, enhancing the town centre visually, and links with the rest of the town. A co-ordinated approach to town centre regeneration would enable the links between the different town centre nodes to be improved, thereby improving the viability of the town centre; and
- a package of measures is likely to help reduce the impact of the growth at Gillingham, although it is important that other measures such as cycling and walking links within and into the town are provided. In addition, the impacts on heritage, biodiversity and landscape need to be taken into account when looking at the environmental impacts of the proposed road improvements.

Addendum to the Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report 2012

- 6.51 The Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report did not specifically assess the option of extending the town to the north and east (in the Bay and Bowridge Hill area), although this site had been ruled out at earlier stages of scenario testing in the Gillingham Study. The site was subsequently assessed in the Addendum to the Initial SA, produced in 2012.
- 6.52 The results of assessing the additional site in Gillingham highlighted several issues. Access to the site to the north east of the town would be along existing narrow lanes and would require new bridges across the floodplain. There would also potentially be a conflict between traffic accessing the site and between traffic accessing the existing Riversmeet centre and The Gillingham School.
- 6.53 Additional issues relating to the site include flooding from the neighbouring rivers and landscape constraints due to the topography of the site. The potential of the site is also less than that proposed for the town as a whole and hence would necessitate further development elsewhere in the town or at an alternative settlement. In relation to the sites around Gillingham, the conclusions drawn in the Initial SA Report (and supported by the Gillingham Study); were found to be still valid: with developing land to the south of the town being the option which offered the most benefits and opportunities to mitigate any impacts.

Final Sustainability Appraisal Report 2013

SA of Policy 17 – Gillingham

- 6.54 Overall the appraisal of the Gillingham town policy is similar to the conclusions drawn in Appendix D of the Initial SA Report. The key areas where the revised policy has had a positive impact on the assessment include the provision for more community facilities both within the existing town (for example the Riversmeet centre) and within the Southern Extension. These changes encourage social

progress and help to build strong communities. The development of a neighbourhood plan for the town will also help to foster greater community spirit.

- 6.55 The revised employment projections and the consequent removal of the proposals for a business park at Wyke, have resulted in a change in the appraisal results. The primary effect of this is to reduce the potential significant positive effect on the economic aspects of sustainability but an enhancement of the environment aspects. In addition, specific mention of environment and climate change issues for the town in Policy 17 – Gillingham enhance the environmental aspects of sustainability.

SA of Policy 21 - Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation

- 6.56 Including Policy 21 - Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation in the Local Plan Part 1 at this stage allows strategic levels of growth to progress, with a sufficient level of detail to address mitigation measures and infrastructure provision, without waiting for the subsequent Local Plan Part 2 document to be written and adopted. This brings forward growth to help meet housing and employment needs of the town.
- 6.57 In Gillingham, options for the direction of growth at the town have been considered as has the detailed strategy for the town itself. The detailed appraisal of the southern expansion of Gillingham has been appraised differently due to the inclusion of the detailed Strategic Site Allocation policy in the Local Plan Part 1. The Strategic Site Allocation policy has been appraised separately, looking at the detailed information that is available for this site. The detailed appraisal matrices and explanation of the results of the appraisal are included in Appendix E of the SA report for the pre-submission Local Plan Part 1.
- 6.58 The results of the appraisal of the policy highlighted several concerns which have been addressed.
- In relation to the principal street, the consideration of options highlighted the need to avoid areas liable to flood to build in resilience to climate change and to avoid Cole Street Lane to respect its rural character. It is also important that this route enables bus penetration into the site.
 - Clustering of formal green infrastructure across the site will enable ease of management of each facility in the most cost effective way enabling higher quality facilities to be provided. The provision of informal green infrastructure, primarily along the river corridors, will enable the biodiversity associated with the rivers to be protected and enhanced.
 - Provision of a local centre, incorporating small scale retail, community uses, a surgery, a new primary school and employment uses will help to build a viable community hub. It will be essential to connect this local centre with the existing town and neighbouring residential areas via a network of safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes.

- To avoid negative impacts on the amenity of neighbouring areas of the Kingsmead Business Park, the uses at this site should be restricted to B1 Business uses rather than more general employment uses.
- 6.59 It will be essential that the subsequent Master Plan Framework produced to guide the development of the Southern Extension site is subject to an appraisal of its sustainability and impacts on biodiversity. This will need to consider all aspects of the development across the whole of the site and the impact on the town and neighbouring areas. It should cover the environmental impacts alongside the economic and social impacts and should avoid negative impacts or suggest appropriate mitigation.
- 6.60 The growth at Gillingham may have an impact on the Gillingham / Shaftesbury area both in terms of traffic but also having an impact on service provision in the towns. It will be essential that traffic management measures and the relief of pinch points on the road network are implemented. In addition, the impact on the accessibility of facilities in the area needs to be monitored with enhanced public transport put in place to offset any decline in provision. This is supported by the N&nEDTS and the assessment of growth at Gillingham.
- 6.61 Overall the appraisal of the Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation policy has produced similar conclusions to the results from the Key Issues consultation carried out in 2012. The preferred options that came out of this consultation have also performed best when assessed against the SA objectives.
- 6.62 In relation to the principal street, Policy 21 seeks to protect Cole Street Lane along its entirety, closing it off to through traffic with it being utilised as a 'green route' for limited access to existing buildings, for pedestrians and cyclists thereby retaining its rural character. In addition, optimising access to the site (primarily for pedestrians and cyclists), utilising as many points of access as feasible will help to integrate the Southern Extension into the town.
- 6.63 Avoiding areas at risk from flooding not only reduces costs but also helps to reduce the impact of the Southern Extension on local biodiversity and makes the development more climate change resilient.
- 6.64 Policy 21 seeks to ensure clustering of green infrastructure to provide high quality sports facilities in accessible locations. This will help to improve opportunities for recreation and offer the most cost effective management opportunities, making the facilities more sustainable in the long run. The provision of open space along the river corridors which run through the site, helps to protect and enhance the biodiversity in the area, offers opportunities for informal recreation and helps to integrate the development into the landscape.
- 6.65 The preferred approach for the Local Centre in the policy is the Shaftesbury Road corridor. This offers the opportunity to create a 'centre' which not only supports the existing commercial activity in the area but also builds upon it. This should help

to increase its viability and offer opportunities to improve the entrance to the town through good design. In addition, locating a new primary school at this location will also help to secure the centre's long term viability, creating a community hub in the area.

- 6.66 Overall the policy has been assessed as having a clear positive impact on the SA objectives due to the level of detail included within it and the mitigation measures established. It is however essential that all the different elements of the Southern extension are linked together and linked to the existing town through a high quality network of foot and cycle routes. This will help to integrate the town with the Southern Extension.
- 6.67 As a result of the 2012 consultation the main changes to the Gillingham policy have been appraised as having an overall positive effect on sustainability. The removal of the business park proposal at Wyke has resulted in a less significant positive impact on the District's economy however it is likely to have a more positive impact on the local environment. In a similar way, the inclusion of the Strategic Site Allocation policy for the Southern Extension to the town in the Local Plan Part 1 enables infrastructure and other benefits to be proactively secured, delivering greater benefits rather than if development was left to an ad-hoc approach.

Consultations

Introduction

- 6.68 Informal consultation has taken place on the development of planning policy in North Dorset and in relation to Gillingham. The consultations included:
- 2007 issues and options;
 - 2010 draft Core Strategy;
 - 2012 key issues (both in relation to Policy 17 and the SSA); and
 - 2013 Concept Plan workshop.

Consultation 2007 – 'Issues and Options'

- 6.69 The community's views on key issues from the national and 'emerging' regional policy framework were first sought when the Council undertook consultation on issues and options¹⁵ for a 'stand- alone' Core Strategy in June – July 2007. The consultation issues and options discussions were based on the draft RSS, which was published in June 2006.
- 6.70 In consultation the Council suggested that Gillingham should have RSS Development Policy B status. In general terms respondents supported the proposed settlement hierarchy and the need to try and attain higher levels of self-containment in the towns.

¹⁵ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)

- 6.71 At the time of the Issues and Options consultation 5,100 homes were proposed for North Dorset between 2006 and 2026 with 2,900 to be built before 2016 and 2,200 to be built thereafter. The Council sought views on how development should be distributed between the three main towns (Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury) and the rest of the District in the two 10-year periods 2006 – 2016 and 2016 – 2026.
- 6.72 An urban emphasis to development was supported to help the market towns fulfil their role as the leading centres for growth in the District, along with delivery of the appropriate supporting infrastructure. A combined approach which supported both regeneration of brownfield land (in particular, at Gillingham the Station Road area, which was identified for mixed-use development in the 2007 Employment Land Review) and greenfield expansion to meet needs, was supported.
- 6.73 Concern was expressed that there was a lack of evidence to show that Gillingham had the capacity for an increased level of growth, as identified in the RSS, despite the low level of environmental constraints.
- 6.74 The production of Green Travel Plans was specifically supported at Gillingham to take advantage of existing public transport provision and encourage linkages between different modes of public transport.
- 6.75 The retention and expansion of existing employment sites had generally slightly higher support than the option of designating new sites. Supporting the main towns as ‘local retail centres’ under the RSS and maintaining the hierarchy was also supported to help the towns meet their retail function needs.
- 6.76 In response to the 2007 Issues and Options Consultation the Council sought to gather further evidence, including: N&nEDTS; Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham; and Workspace Strategy. This evidence informed the production of draft Core Policy 16 – Gillingham in the draft Core Strategy.

Consultation 2010 – The Draft Core Strategy

- 6.77 In March 2010 the Council published the Draft Core Strategy and Development Management DPD for consultation. The Draft Core Strategy was prepared in the context of emerging regional policy at the time. Draft Core Policies 15, 16 and 17 related to the RSS Development Policy B settlements of Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury and Draft Core Policy 18 related to the RSS Development Policy C settlement of Sturminster Newton.
- 6.78 1,657 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation and in total they made 5,734 comments on the draft Core Strategy and Development Management DPD. A full report was presented to Members of the Planning Policy Panel on 5 July 2012¹⁶.

¹⁶ <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

- 6.79 Draft Core Policy 16 for Gillingham proposed that 2,300 homes would be built in the town over the plan period, and that this would be complemented by the provision of 22 hectares of land for employment which would support at least 2,500 net additional jobs. Within the employment provision, a new high value business park at Wyke was proposed to support longer term supply-led employment growth, as identified in the capacity study report *Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham*, Atkins (2009).
- 6.80 Draft Core Policy 16 for Gillingham also proposed that the focus for retail and town centre uses should be on land within and adjoining the existing town centre and include 7,500 square metres of additional comparison goods retail floorspace. The land at Station Road, identified for mixed-use regeneration in the 2007 *Employment Land Review (ELR)*, would also support 7,000 square metres of employment floorspace and about 200 homes. Local shops to serve new housing development would also be supported.
- 6.81 The 2,300 dwellings would be split so that about 900 homes would be built in the period up to 2016 with about 1,400 dwellings being built thereafter. The housing sites identified through the SHLAA process included: mixed-use regeneration of land at Station Road; land to the south and south-west of Bay; land adjacent to Lodden Lakes (allocated in the North Dorset District Wide Local Plan 2003); and through infilling and regeneration within the settlement boundary. Housing of 1,400 dwellings post 2016 would be accommodated in greenfield expansion to the south of the town, as assessed in the capacity study report *Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham*, Atkins (2009).
- 6.82 Various grey, social and green infrastructure improvements were proposed, including some relating specifically to the greenfield southern extension, such as: a link road between the B3081 and the B3092; a local centre, including a new primary school and doctor's surgery; the extension of the existing primary school of St Mary the Virgin; a continuation of the network of green infrastructure along the river corridors; and formal and informal sports pitches and play space.
- 6.83 In response to the consultation, there was a suggestion that the southern extension could be made more sustainable, to fit in with Draft Core Policy 1 – Tackling Climate Change, by incorporating an anaerobic digestion plant to produce energy-from-waste to support development and replace the town's sewage treatment works. Options for renewable and recoverable energy production have been considered as policy has been taken forward.
- 6.84 In response to draft Core Policy 2 – Delivering Sustainable Forms of Development, it was suggested that the Gillingham Royal Forest Area (identified in the 2003 Local Plan) be planted with trees where the wood could be used as fuel and that community orchards should also form a local food resource. The Gillingham Royal Forest Project Area policy has been saved and community orchards acknowledged as a community aspiration for future elements of green infrastructure.

- 6.85 In response to Draft Core Policy 3 – Core Spatial Strategy for North Dorset, there was general support at the identification of the main towns, including Gillingham, being the centres for growth to support District-wide needs.
- 6.86 Support was shown for the level of affordable housing at 35% proposed for Gillingham in draft Core Policy 4 – Housing Distribution. It was also suggested that the volume of development identified for the southern extension, be split between the south and the north (Peacemarsh) areas of the town. These scenarios were assessed in the capacity study report *Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham*, Atkins (2009), through which it was concluded that the southern focus was more sustainable with better links to the town centre and less transport (and other infrastructure) impacts when compared to expanding to the north of the town.
- 6.87 Suggestions were also made that levels of housing development at Gillingham were too high and that reduced levels should be able to be accommodated on brownfield land. However, the levels of growth identified to meet the District’s needs, including at Gillingham, had been assessed and undergone a sustainability appraisal. A subsequent update of the SHMA was also undertaken which identified a reduced housing requirement. For the District. There was a concern over the lack of a design framework for the town; however a Town Design Statement was being developed at the time.
- 6.88 Levels of growth proposed at Gillingham were also criticised in the light of no connecting A roads to the town. However, the transport strategy identified in the N&nEDTS for Gillingham includes directing traffic via the southern extension link road to Shaftesbury where the Enmore Green link road will transfer traffic onto the A30. This strategy diverted traffic away from the railway bridge at Gillingham, which is already at capacity, and away from the A303 which was also operating near capacity and had no plans for improvement at the time.
- 6.89 Issues that came out of the consultation on Draft Core Policy 16 – Gillingham, included:
- concern about the retention and enhancement of green infrastructure without an overarching strategy addressing the same;
 - support for the retention and expansion of existing employment sites and regeneration of the Station Road area, but substantial objection to the creation of a new employment site at Wyke through concerns of need, sustainability and environmental impact;
 - support for the expansion of existing schools and provision of a new primary school was received, but concern expressed about the optimum quality of the increased size of schools;
 - concern about future development capacity outside the floodplains;
 - concern about the adequacy of health care provision to meet the town and District need;

- concern about the delivery of employment and infrastructure to balance the proposed level of housing;
 - support for expansion to the south of the town if infrastructure could be delivered;
 - objections for development at Bay due to concerns mainly over capacity of the site and harm to adjacent existing housing areas;
 - alternative sites put forward to accommodate growth at Gillingham, which had been assessed through other processes, such as SHLAA;
 - concerns about adequate social infrastructure to meet growing population needs; and
 - concerns about traffic problems compounded by the growing population.
- 6.90 All these issues were assessed and reported to Members of the Planning Policy Panel on 5 July 2012.
- 6.91 In response to the 2010 consultation the Council has:
- revised housing and employment requirements (specifically through updates to the SHMA and the Workspace Strategy employment land projections);
 - considered how best to meet educational, health, and other infrastructural needs through on-going dialogue with relevant delivery bodies; and
 - worked with the Highways Authority and consultants to review transport issues.
- 6.92 On 13th June 2011, Cabinet decided to take forward the proposals for the Southern Extension to Gillingham in the form of a SSA policy, which would be included in a revised Core Strategy (now the Local Plan Part 1). The SSA would enable the comprehensive development of the Southern Extension with infrastructure being provided in an integrated manner as the site is developed. Work progressed on the more detailed SSA proposals supported by the landowners and developers who are promoting the site. The basic elements of the Southern Extension were consulted on alongside the 2012 consultation on ‘key issues’ with the aim of the proposals being developed further before insertion into the final version of the Core Strategy, now the Local Plan Part 1.

Consultation 2012 – Key Issues

- 6.93 The further consultation on the draft Core Strategy undertaken in the autumn of 2012 was ‘targeted’ on three main areas, which were agreed by Cabinet in June 2011, namely:
- options for the overall level of growth proposed for the District and the main towns (i.e. Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton);
 - the approach to taking forward development at Gillingham through a Strategic Site Allocation (SSA); and
 - the approach to development in Stalbridge and the District’s villages revisiting both the spatial strategy and the level of housing provision.

6.94 The overall level of growth for the District was revised downwards from 7,000 dwellings proposed from the RSS through the Core Strategy 2010 consultation (for the period 2006 to 2026), to 4,200 dwellings proposed in the 2012 consultation on key issues (for the period 2011 to 2026). The updated employment projections reduced the level from 4,700 jobs and 38.3 ha of employment land (over 20 years) proposed in the 2010 consultation, to 4,400 jobs and 30.5ha of employment land (over 15 years) proposed in the 2012 consultation on key issues.

Policy 17 - Gillingham

6.95 At Gillingham, the revised figure of 17.5 hectares of employment land excluded the previously proposed new business park at Wyke that was put forward in the draft Core Strategy. Given the availability of employment land at Gillingham and in the light of revised employment land projections, it was proposed to delete the site at Wyke in favour of business-related growth being primarily located within the Southern Extension site.

6.96 The question in relation to Policy 17 - Gillingham was:

- **Question 22** – Do you agree that the business park proposed at Wyke in the draft Core Strategy should be deleted?

6.97 The response was an overwhelming ‘yes’ from local residents and businesses alike: a view also shared with the specific bodies who responded to this question. Objections were limited to those who considered that an overall review of employment provision in the town was required.

Policy 21 – Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation

6.98 The questions in relation to Policy 21 - Gillingham SSA, which are discussed below, related to:

- green infrastructure;
- the principal street;
- access;
- the local centre;
- the primary school; and
- employment land.

6.99 **Green Infrastructure** - On the basis that informal open space and natural greenspace within the site would be provided primarily along the river corridors, and depending on the location of where other key elements of the development are established, the Council sought views on whether sports pitches and allotments should be clustered together or provided in a more dispersed way across the site. Children’s play areas will be provided across the site in accessible locations.

- **Question G1** – Would you prefer sports pitches to be provided together in one cluster or dispersed across the site? Please explain your reasons.

- **Question G2** – What type of sports pitch provision (for example football, rugby, cricket, tennis or others) do you consider is needed within the town?
- **Question G3** – Would you prefer allotments to be provided in one cluster or dispersed across the site? Please explain your reasons.

6.100 The results to Question G1 showed that preferences expressed for either clustering sports pitches or dispersal were evenly balanced. The main concerns related to access to facilities by a variety of modes, and the provision of comprehensive, secure and cost effective facilities to enable community groups using them to share and manage facilities.

6.101 The responses to Question G2 showed that preferences for type of sports pitches favoured (in order of preference); tennis; football; cricket; rugby; basketball; and, netball. Each of the following had the same lower level of preference: boating lake; bowls; golf; hockey; rock climbing wall; and mountain bike track.

6.102 The majority of responses to Question G3 indicated that a dispersal of allotments around the whole residential part of the site was preferred, with the main reasons given relating to access, ease of use and the community feel that would go with provision of local allotments.

6.103 Pedestrian and cycle access to open space was seen as important as were the linkages between the green infrastructure assets on site.

6.104 **Principal Street** - The capacity study report Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Atkins (2009) puts into context the evidence from the North and north East Dorset Transport Study which identifies several transport improvements required to support growth of the town, and in particular the delivery of a road link between the B3081 and B3092 across the southern extension. This would add resilience to the road network and relieve pressure on the New Road / Shaftesbury Road junction.

6.105 Four options were developed for the route of the principal street which each had various benefits and disadvantages, as set out in the consultation questionnaire, but including impacts on floodplain, open space, landscape, biodiversity, and rural character.

- **Question G4** – Which option for the route of the principal street do you prefer? Please explain your reasons.

The results to Question G4 showed that Option 3, which runs from the south of the higher ground at Ham and avoiding the flood plain, received the most support. Most of the comments received on the principal street highlighted the need to minimise the impact on the local environment through the least invasive approach possible.

6.106 **Access** - The Council sought views on establishing potential access points to the site, on the basis that to enable the greatest connectivity between the southern

extension and the existing town area of Gillingham, it was proposed to utilise the largest number of suitable access points possible.

- 6.107 Access points (a) to (m) are listed in the consultation document and the benefits and disadvantages of each access point set out there.
- **Question G5** – Do you have any comments on establishing any of the potential access points into the site?
- 6.108 The main concern with access points was the impact on the existing residential areas. The preference was for new accesses to be established rather than for loading existing residential streets. The principal street was seen as offering an opportunity for gaining access to the majority of the site. There was again a desire for non-vehicular connections to be established to the existing built-up area.
- 6.109 **Local Centre** - The southern extension would require a local centre to meet local needs. This could include provision of a local convenience shop, a medical centre, and community facilities. Two options were suggested: 1) alongside existing commercial activity near Orchard Park¹⁷; or 2) located centrally within the Ham area of the site, along the principal street.
- **Question G6** – Which option for the location of the local centre do you prefer and why?
- 6.110 The results showed that almost equal support was given to both locations. However, comment analysis suggested the preference was for a local centre to be established near Orchard Park, building on the commercial activity that exists in that location.
- **Question G7** – What facilities do you think should be provided at the local centre; for example should a convenience store be provided?
- 6.111 The results of the consultation showed support for: A1 – shops, including a convenience store, a pharmacy and a hairdresser, all of small scale; A3 – restaurants and cafes; A4 – a pub; B1a – business including offices and possibly some small scale starter units; and D1 – doctor’s surgery, dentist, and a multi-use community building.
- 6.112 **Primary School** - A need for a primary school to support the southern extension had been identified in the capacity study report - Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Atkins (2009). The Council sought views on the preferred location to accommodate the growing educational need, and set out three options in the consultation document: 1) Expansion of St Mary the Virgin School and expand

¹⁷ The term ‘Orchard Park’ was used in the 2012 ‘key issues’ consultation to refer to the area of commercial uses in the Shaftesbury Road corridor. However, Orchard Park is in fact the name of the garden centre in this location. The area of employment land and other commercial uses east of Shaftesbury Road is called Kingsmead Business Park and this name, rather than Orchard Park, is used in the Local Plan Part 1.

Milton on Stour School; 2) Expansion of St Mary the Virgin School and the provision of an additional school at location A, in the centre of Ham; and, Expansion of St Mary the Virgin School and the provision of an additional school at location B, near Orchard Park.

- **Question G8** – Which option for increasing primary school capacity do you prefer and why?

6.113 The results showed support for expanding the existing school and provision of an additional school at location B, near Orchard Park, and so geographically serving both the east and west areas of the southern expansion. Responses indicated that the expansion at Milton-on-Stour would not meet the needs of the southern extension and lead to congestion as people travelled from south to north of the town.

6.114 **Employment Growth** - The southern extension would accommodate both residential and employment growth. The Council sought views on the preferred location of expansion to two existing employment sites at Brickfields and Orchard Park (Kingsmead Business Park).

- **Question G9** – Which option for the location of employment growth do you prefer and why?

6.115 Expansion of both Brickfields and Orchard Park (Kingsmead Business Park) had greater support, than solely expanding Brickfields, as it provides for the maximum amount of employment and business opportunities. Again the need for good pedestrian and cycle links to the employment sites was highlighted as important.

6.116 In response to the 2012 Key Issues consultation, and extensive changes to the planning system, the Council has developed separate policies which cover Gillingham and the Southern Extension. Further consultation on the SSA has taken place as part of a concept plan workshop.

Concept Plan Workshop

6.117 On the 22nd March 2013, Stage 2 of the consultation for the Gillingham SSA took place. ATLAS facilitated a workshop where stakeholders including members of local community groups, service providers, developers and officers from the District Council undertook the process to produce a concept plan for the southern extension to Gillingham.

6.118 First a site visit was attended where key points and views were noted, such as the rural character of Cole Street Lane, the knoll at Ham, the proximity to Kings Court Palace scheduled monument, key entrances to the town, and the site edges. Then a mapping exercise where each group of attendees thought about where key uses should go, such as, the local centre, the alignment of the principal street, employment, allotments, primary schools, sports pitches, etc.

- 6.119 Finally, participants reviewed potential design principles to guide the development, which had been formulated with reference to the TDS, to assess appropriateness within the local context. The outcomes of the workshop and composite concept plan have been written up in a report by ATLAS: Gillingham Southern Extension Concept Plan Workshop – March 2013.
- 6.120 The consultation undertaken to date has helped to establish a ‘collective vision and a set of agreed priorities’ for the sustainable development of the southern extension, which are set out in Policy 21 – Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation. The composite concept plan, vision, concept statement and design principles form the conceptual framework set out in Policy 21. The policy requires that the Master Plan Framework reflect the conceptual framework.
- 6.121 The Council has worked closely with landowners, developers, key stakeholders and the local community over a number of years to develop the proposals for the southern extension of Gillingham. This approach reflects national policy, which seeks to encourage early and meaningful engagement in plan making, stating that “a wide section of the community should be proactively engaged, so that Local Plans, as far as possible, reflect a collective vision and a set of agreed priorities for the sustainable development of the area...”¹⁸

Summary of Consultation

- 6.122 In summary, the community was engaged in the production of the report “Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham”¹⁹, which identified that the town had the economic potential, the capacity (in terms of suitable and available sites) and a relative lack of constraints to enable it to accommodate significant growth. The study examined a range of potential spatial options and the scenario for growth which was considered most sustainable was the ‘southern focus’²⁰.
- 6.123 The Council used that report to draw up proposals for development to the south of the town in its draft Core Strategy²¹. Following public consultation, the Council decided to develop a more detailed policy to take forward growth in the form of a Strategic Site Allocation (SSA)²², which required further consultation.

¹⁸ Paragraph 155, National Planning Policy Framework, DCLG (March 2012)

¹⁹ Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Dorset, Atkins (December 2009)

²⁰ Assessing the Growth Potential of Gillingham, Dorset, Atkins (December 2009), page 46, Figure 4.5

²¹ Draft Core Policy 16, The New Plan for North Dorset – The Draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD, North Dorset District Council (March 2010)

²² The decision to take forward growth to the south of Gillingham in the form of a Strategic Site Allocation was made by the Council’s Cabinet on 13 June 2011

- 6.124 The Council consulted on the options for the southern extension in autumn 2012²³ and held a subsequent ‘concept plan workshop’ with landowners, developers, key stakeholders and representatives of the local community in March 2013²⁴.

Neighbourhood Plan

- 6.125 As set out above, the neighbourhood plan area was consulted on in 2012 and designated in August 2012. The Gillingham neighbourhood plan group consulted on a vision and key aims for the neighbourhood plan in October 2012, and a cultural audit was undertaken reaching hard to reach groups. The neighbourhood plan is being developed alongside the Local Plan with the Local Plan leading on strategic policy and the SSA. The neighbourhood plan will be produced in accordance with the Local Plan.
- 6.126 The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Group (GNPG) will also be a key stakeholder in the development of proposals for the Southern Extension site. As the Southern Extension is strategic in nature, the principal, location and size of the development are established through the Local Plan prepared by the District Council. However, the Neighbourhood Plan can set the framework for more local issues such as design, open space and street scape.

Conclusion

- 6.127 In conclusion, the development of Policy 17 – Gillingham and Policy 21 – Gillingham Southern Extension began with identifying the role and function of the town and the level of growth that would be appropriate to the town within its environmental constraints. Sites around the town were assessed through the SHLAA process for their deliverability and achievability.
- 6.128 The SHLAA sites were then assessed for accessibility through the N&nEDTS. All this work was used as a basis for assessing the growth potential of Gillingham and its infrastructural, environmental, and economic capacity to identify sustainable levels and locations for growth.
- 6.129 The options for the formation of policy maintaining Gillingham’s role as the main service centre whilst recognising its environmental constraints underwent extensive assessment through the sustainability appraisal process. The development of draft policy was punctuated by a programme of informal consultation in 2007, 2010, 2012 and 2013. At each stage, the results of the

²³ Public Consultation on Options for the Southern Extension of Gillingham, North Dorset District Council (October 2012)

²⁴ The ‘concept plan workshop’ was held on 22nd March 2013 and facilitated by the Homes and Communities Agency’s Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS). The results of the workshop are presented in - Gillingham Southern Extension Concept Plan Workshop March 2013: ATLAS Report on the Workshop, ATLAS (July 2013)

consultations were analysed and, with updates to the evidence base, taken to Members with proposals on how the draft policy could be amended.

- 6.130 Against a background of extensive changes to the planning system, a general core policy and a strategic site allocation policy have been developed, with a neighbourhood plan being developed by the local community. An overview of Policy 17 – Gillingham and Policy 21 – Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation can be found in the final section of this background paper.

7. Shaftesbury

Introduction

- 7.1 Shaftesbury supports Gillingham in serving the needs of the northern part of the District and the parts of Wiltshire immediately east of the town. The 2011 Census shows that the town has a population of 7,314.
- 8.1 Shaftesbury's historic core occupies a hilltop location and its attractive town centre supports a good range of shops and is a tourist destination. In recent years growth at Shaftesbury has primarily been on land to the east of the town that was allocated in the 2003 Local Plan. Most of the land here has been granted planning permission (679 dwellings in total) and its design and layout has been guided by the Development Brief that was adopted in 2003 following extensive public consultation.
- 8.2 It has long been recognised that the potential for expansion at Shaftesbury is limited by environmental (mainly landscape and biodiversity) constraints and the limited number of potentially developable sites where the town could expand further. It is important that the remaining development opportunities are taken forward in ways which support the role, function and identity of the town, particularly in the light of the proposed expansion of nearby Gillingham.
- 7.2 Located at the cross roads of the A30 and A350 the town is in a key position to attract additional economic development with two large industrial estates, a secondary school and a community hospital. However, the future growth of the town in an easterly direction is restricted by the reserved corridor for a proposed outer bypass for the town.

Technical Evidence Informing Policy

Strategic Evidence

North and north East Dorset Transportation Study (N&nETS)

- 7.3 The N&nETS was undertaken by Buro Happold for Dorset County Council as a front loading evidence gathering exercise to inform the District in the plan making process. Published in March 2010, it was based on draft RSS growth figures that proposed 7,000 new homes in North Dorset by 2026 of which 1,200 were proposed at Shaftesbury.
- 7.4 In addition to general infilling in the town, four key sites were identified (using information from the Council's SHLAA), in the study as growth options and an accessibility audit based on quality of access for each site to existing amenities such as food shops, education, GP surgeries and employment opportunities was undertaken. The sites were:

SHAF 1 – Land to the east of Shaftesbury;

SHAF 2 – Land east of Wincombe Lane;

SHAF 3 – Employment land to south A30; and

SHAF 4 - Land to west A350.

- 7.5 The results of the study, based on RPG10 accessibility criteria, showed that site 2 was the most accessible assuming that access for the site was taken from Wincombe Lane as the Longmead Industrial Estate was the nearest centre of employment. Site 2 also benefited from the potential for good access to Shaftesbury Primary School. The summed total of weighted distances to services is similar for both site 1 and 4. They are both relatively near to employment sites, namely CB Morgan Limited and the Wincombe Business Park. The Longmead Industrial Estate is the nearest centre of employment to site 1, approximately 0.8km to the west.
- 7.6 The study notes the importance of site 1 being well connected by walking, cycling and public transport facilities to vital services and local employment opportunities. The study identified site 4 as the least accessible in Shaftesbury due to the absence of a nearby primary school within walking distance. It noted that children living on site 4 would be required to cross the A350 to get to the nearest school.
- 7.7 The study identified site 3 as being suitable for employment land uses as it is located 200m from the nearest bus stop, outside the Half Moon Inn, but measures were required to improve connectivity between site 3 and the bus stop.

Landscape Impact Assessment

- 7.8 Consultation on the draft Core Strategy in 2010 highlighted the concerns of local communities regarding the impact of development at Blandford and Shaftesbury on the landscape. With this in mind the Council employed, a senior landscape officer at Dorset County Council (DCC) to undertake a landscape impact assessment of the potential housing sites adjoining Blandford and Shaftesbury, as identified in the District Council's SHLAA.
- 7.9 The assessment was essentially a survey where a number of different sites were examined against the same criteria. It did not seek to rank the sites according to their landscape value or make judgements about the suitability of certain sites for development but it has provided consistent data to help inform such judgements and where mitigation was an option, provided guidance.
- 7.10 In Shaftesbury a total of 10 sites were assessed. For the following sites the study concluded that the sites were considered to be too sensitive from a landscape and visual point of view for any mitigation to be effective.
- 7.11 **Land to the East of Church Farm** – Dismissed as development would impact negatively on the open, undeveloped rural character of the site and create a

development that is not associated with the existing settlement pattern. It would also impact negatively on the setting of the Shaftesbury Conservation Area which is just to the north-east of the site. Development would impact negatively directly or indirectly on the integrity of the hedgerow network around the site.

- 7.12 **Land East of Lower Blandford Road** - Dismissed as development would create a new hard urban skyline when viewed from the A350 and would therefore create a significant negative impact on local landscape character. It would impact negatively on the amenity of footpath users and on the green undeveloped 'buffer' effect the site provides in association with the important linear woodland belts to the east which together sweep right up to the Royal Chase roundabout. These open green spaces provide an important component of the overall green setting and context of Shaftesbury as a whole.
- 7.13 **East of New Road** - Dismissed as development would have a significant negative impact physically and visually on the important dense tree canopy which currently covers the whole site. It would have a significant negative impact on the setting and historic context of this north-west edge of the settlement and would impact negatively on the integrity of the ancient woodland and would fragment the continuous woodland cover which runs along the Greensand slopes to the north-east. Development would impact negatively on the amenity of users of the public right of way and A30.
- 7.14 **Allotment Site in St James** - Dismissed as development would remove a 'green lung' and 'green open space' in the historic core of the Conservation Area that would impact negatively on settlement pattern and character. Development would impact on the setting and character of the wider context of the historic town and particularly the town walls to the north which overlook the area.
- 7.15 **South of New Road** - Dismissed as development would impact negatively on the setting and context of this edge of the settlement site that provides a green undeveloped backdrop to the town and its Conservation Area. Development would create areas of cut and fill which would alter the nature of the sloping landform and therefore affect landscape character in a negative way. Development would also impact on users of the public right of way.
- 7.16 **Land East of Woolands Lane** - Dismissed as development would impact negatively on the quiet, undeveloped nature of this rural intimate countryside location impacting on views, amenity and landscape character in an unacceptable and negative way.
- 7.17 **Site surrounding Blackmore Vale Dairy** - Dismissed as housing development would create a very harsh and hard urban edge, facing directly towards the AONB and seen right on the skyline from this designation. This would create a significant negative impact, impacting adversely on this designation and extending the existing urban edge out into open undeveloped countryside. Development would impact

directly and negatively on the public right of way across the site. Cumulative physical and visual impact of new development, on top of the existing Blackmore Vale Dairy complex, would create a significant adverse impact close to the AONB, impacting negatively on its setting and the amenity of the footpath users in this vicinity.

- 7.18 The following three sites were acknowledged as having sensitivity issues, but through careful mitigation could be appropriate for development without having a negative impact on the landscape setting of the town.
- 7.19 **Land to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park** - Land to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park is an area of flat farmed grassland site that is divided by a mature native hedgerow. The area to the north of the site is enclosed by vegetation and along its northern boundary it has a strong relationship with the Little Down Industrial Estate, residential property and The Cliff. This northern edge has a hard urban feel to it due to the domination of the large industrial units and there are very limited views into and out of this part of the site due to the roadside evergreen hedge, the mature native hedgerow and the trees/woodland associated with The Cliff. A well-used public right of way also crosses this northern part of the site to the Cliff which is an SNCI and an ancient & semi natural woodland.
- 7.20 The southern part of the site is more open and exposed. It sits on the skyline when viewed from the south-west and has an urban fringe feel created by the weak, roadside boundary, an old agricultural shed/barn and electric power lines.
- 7.21 The study identified that the skyline significance of this elevated plateau was a key sensitivity issue for developing the site. However, it did not rule out development but suggested that this impact could be resolved by 'pulling back' any future line of development to the east of the site and locating any public open space associated with the development along this south-western edge.
- 7.22 It suggested that any new public open space would provide opportunities for native tree planting and that this would enable the site to tie-in with the existing vegetation. The study also suggests that the hedgerow and tree network within and adjacent to the site should be protected, retained and managed with suitable undeveloped buffering either side of the existing mature hedgerow. This hedgerow and buffer could form the basis for public open space/access corridor running through the site to link in to any public open space on the south-west edge of the site.
- 7.23 The study also recommends that the evergreen hedgerow along the roadside part of the northern area is retained and that the existing access to Little Down Industrial Estate and dwelling is used as any future access to the site. Enhancement of the roadside boundary along the A350 is seen to be essential mitigation. This could be carried out, for example by new hedgerow, tree edge and/or boundary

wall provision. The study also recommends that a Landscape Masterplan for the site is submitted as part of any future planning application on the site as a means of coordinating the mitigation measures for the site.

- 7.24 **Land to the south of Wincombe Business Park** – Land to the south of Wincombe Business Park is a rectangular medium scale grassland field site that is mainly flat but slopes towards the north-eastern boundary with a distinctive sloping 'hollow' in the far north-eastern corner adjacent to Higher Wincombe Farm. It is enclosed and defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees along three sides and a mainly bracken covered ancient parish hedge bank along the fourth. There are some important hedgerow trees around the site.
- 7.25 The site is bounded on three sides by well used public rights of way which radiate out from the site into adjacent open countryside. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB abuts the site at Higher Wincombe Farm. There are many views into and across the site from the footpaths and bridleways around the site and those which radiate out from these. There are also some distant views to the chalk escarpment/ridge around Win Green and Melbury Abbas to the south and south-east. Along the south-west edge is dense residential development that creates a strong 'urban- edge'.
- 7.26 Due to its location the site forms a transition and buffer between the open, undeveloped countryside and the built-up edge of north-east Shaftesbury. Without mitigation measures the study suggests that development here could create an additional and cumulative negative visual impact on the skyline adjacent to the AONB therefore impacting negatively on the landscape character of the surrounding open countryside.
- 7.27 Development could also impact negatively on the amenity of users of the public rights of way and on some open views into this site. By developing this site the physical and visual buffer the site provides at the moment between open, undeveloped countryside and the existing settlement edge would be removed.
- 7.28 However, the study does suggest that through careful mitigation measures these sensitivity issues could be overcome. In particular the existing landform and land cover (hedgerows and trees) could help to mitigate the identified impacts, particularly if development was limited to selected parts of the site and housing numbers were reduced. By keeping any future development to the lower sections of the site and off the skyline would also help minimise visual impacts as would keeping development out of the 'hollow' area in the north-east corner of the site. Together this would also help reduce the impact on the adjacent AONB. Any new development would need to include structured planting to create public open space and green buffers to the development.
- 7.29 Creating suitable buffers or margins along the ancient boundary hedgerows and route ways on the north and south-east boundaries of the site would be seen as

essential. Once again the development of a strategic Landscape Masterplan for the site is seen as essential and should be developed 'up front' prior to any future planning application.

- 7.30 **Land to the south of Wincombe Lane** – The site assessed in the study identified as land to the south of Wincombe Lane includes the northern tip of the area known as Land East of Shaftesbury. Part of the site is also known as 'Hopkins Land'.
- 7.31 In general the site is part of the elevated plateau on the edge of the Shaftesbury Greensand Terrace Landscape Character Area and is within 300m of the Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB.
- 7.32 The site is formed of a number of small to medium sized arable fields which are flat to gently sloping and is subdivided by dense and mature hedgerows. These hedges are key features as are the few isolated 'in field' trees which are remnant hedgerow trees. The site is strongly influenced physically and visually by the recent housing development especially along the western edges where it creates a hard urban edge, particularly along the more exposed north-western edges. Elsewhere the existing hedgerows 'soften' the impact of this developed edge.
- 7.33 This existing urban edge provides part of the far north eastern extent of the settlement and that to the north west of the site, is seen on the skyline from views within the AONB. A public right of way runs through the site along the line of a mature belt of trees/hedgerow providing a key feature down the central part of the site. The site provides a physical and visual buffer between the Blackmore Vale Dairy and existing housing.
- 7.34 Due to the existing vegetation around and within the site there are limited views out, particularly in the summer months, with only distant glimpsed views south to the chalk escarpment about 2 miles away. The south eastern fields extend beyond the historic pattern of hedged field boundaries and in this way are at odds with the rest of the boundaries to the site. The northern most field has a smaller and more intimate character despite being dominated by existing housing.
- 7.35 Without mitigation measures, development on this site could add a more prominent hard skyline to views from the AONB when viewed looking north-west and south west from rights of way within the AONB. Development could also affect the important hedges/trees around and within the site and have a negative impact on the AONB when looking west from the footpaths near Higher Wincombe Farm. Development could have a negative impact on the amenity of users of the footpaths in the locality and by developing this site the physical and visual buffer the site provides at the moment between open, undeveloped countryside and the existing settlement edge would be removed.
- 7.36 Retaining and using the existing pattern of hedged field boundaries is essential to mitigating the identified impacts. These key features need to be retained, protected and managed as the mature framework for any future development.

Keeping development off sensitive skyline views from the AONB and limiting the extent of development and urban encroachment into underdeveloped open countryside is also critical. Concentrating new development within the 'central' fields would help in this regard and it would also help ensure a better relationship with the existing pattern of recent housing development and retaining the central core belt of woodland/trees as a landscape and visual 'buffer' along the more sensitive eastern edge of the site. Retention, protection and management of the 'in field' trees is also important mitigation. The development of a strategic Landscape Masterplan for the site is essential and should be developed 'up front' prior to any future planning application.

Local Evidence

Development Brief for Land to the Eastern Side of Shaftesbury

- 7.37 Adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance on 31 January 2003, the Development Brief for land to the eastern side of Shaftesbury includes a Design Statement and Masterplan for the site.
- 7.38 The development brief for land on the eastern side of Shaftesbury was prepared following a series of 'Enquiry by Design' workshops held in 2001 and 2002.
- 7.39 The primary aim of the brief is to set out the development principles to be applied to the future development of the land and to assist future developers of the site in achieving a comprehensive form of development that fulfils the policy aims of the 2003 Local Plan and results in a high quality design and layout. Ultimately the aim of the development brief is to create both a place and a community.
- 7.40 The format of the brief is designed to guide developers through the policy framework which applies to the site (Part 1) and through the urban design principles that should be applied in order to achieve a high quality development (Part 2).
- 7.41 Part 1 sets the context and summarises the evolution of the 2003 Local Plan proposals with regard to Shaftesbury. It includes an examination of the urban village concept and outlines the agreed principles arising from the 'Enquiry by Design' approach. The policy framework includes a summary of all the appropriate policies from the 2003 Local Plan, which will apply to the development as well as an indication of how they will be applied. Part 1 of the development brief also stresses the importance of an Environmental Impact Assessment to accompany the submission of planning applications.
- 7.42 Part 2 is based on agreed principles from the Enquiry by Design Workshops. In summary those principles sought:
- a mix of uses on the site;
 - a mix of tenures on the site;
 - multiple use of space and buildings;

- to make Christy's Lane a street not a road;
- to ensure east/west links right through to the town centre; and
- appropriate densities reflecting national policy at the time.

7.43 These principles were taken forward in the design statement and master plan together with further details on drainage, public spaces and the importance of existing hedgerows on the site.

7.44 All subsequent planning applications on the site have been assessed in the context of the adopted 2003 Local Plan policies and the Development Brief.

Shaftesbury, Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Plan

7.45 In September 2013 the parished area of Shaftesbury and the neighbouring parished areas of Melbury Abbas and Cann were designated as a single neighbourhood area. The local community is now preparing a neighbourhood plan to address the local issues affecting the town and the two parishes immediately to the south.

7.46 Through neighbourhood planning the local community can develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and set planning policies to determine decisions on planning applications, although the neighbourhood plan needs to be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. In the case of the Shaftesbury, Melbury Abbas and Cann Neighbourhood Plan that is the Shaftesbury Town Policy (Policy 18) and the Countryside Policy (Policy 20) of the Local Plan Part 1.

7.47 Neighbourhood planning will enable local residents to take an active role in making decisions about the infrastructure needed to support growth. In particular, the neighbourhood plan could identify the location for a new community hall, the expansion or relocation of the doctor's surgery and take an active role in developing a green infrastructure strategy for the town. Where issues are not addressed in the neighbourhood plan the Local Plan Part 2 will be used to take policy forward.

Policy 18 – Shaftesbury

7.48 The following sections explain how the evidence, both strategic and local, together with changing national policy and local circumstances have affected how the Shaftesbury town policy has developed.

Sustainable Development Strategy

7.49 The sustainable development strategy for Shaftesbury is based on national planning principles of sustainability. By bringing forward both housing and employment, self-containment in the town will be enhanced. Together with improved public transport, walking and cycling links (especially within the new development to the

east of the town and regeneration of land to the east of the town centre), the town will be an attractive place to live and work.

Environment and Climate Change

- 7.50 The policy highlights the issues of surface water flooding and the need to protect groundwater resources, as much of the town lies within a groundwater source protection area. To mitigate any adverse impacts, such as contaminated run-off, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are required in all developments in the town.
- 7.51 The policy recognises that the town occupies an elevated position and lies close to the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. The impact of development on the landscape (including the AONB) is therefore an important consideration for any future development.
- 7.52 The policy also recognises the important wildlife sites in, adjacent to and more distant from the town. Castle Hill is a Local Nature Reserves and there are a number of important woodland and grassland sites close to the western edge of the town. Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC is more distant, but still attracts recreational visitors, often to enjoy the panoramic views over the Blackmore Vale. The policy encourages the provision of green space within new developments at Shaftesbury and encouraging access to sites such as Castle Hill can help to reduce recreational pressures on the nearby SAC, which is also mentioned in the infrastructure section of the policy.

Meeting Housing Needs

- 7.53 It is anticipated that about 1,140 dwellings will be built in Shaftesbury between 2011 and 2026. Planning permission has been granted for 679 dwellings on land to the east of Shaftesbury, as it was an allocated site in the 2003 Local Plan and since 2006 the site has been steadily built out. Together with other infill developments in the town between 2006 and 2011, 160 new homes have been built with a further 220 homes completed in 2011/12.
- 7.54 By amending phase boundaries and changing layouts and densities on land to the east of Shaftesbury, the developers can accommodate 679 dwellings without the whole of the original site that was granted outline consent being developed. This change, together with the opportunity for additional dwellings on the land that was originally reserved for a First School, has resulted in an increase in the overall capacity of the site.
- 7.55 To meet the need for housing in the town, two further greenfield sites close to the existing built-up area have been identified. Both have been subject to the Landscape Impact Assessments (as outline above) and suggestions have been made on overall layout and form. These sites are land to the south-east of Wincombe Business Park and land to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park.

- 7.56 Infill and redevelopment will also continue within the existing settlement boundaries to ensure the required 1,140 new homes in the town are provided in the Plan period.

Supporting Economic Development

- 7.57 The employment land to the south of A30 was originally allocated in 2003 Local Plan (Policy SB12). This site remains 'fit for purpose', will meet the needs of the market and is in a sustainable location as identified in the latest employment land projections update²⁵ in 2012. To maximise self-containment it is important that employment land matches housing growth and as such the 7 hectare site continues to be identified in the Local Plan Part 1.
- 7.58 The Council has adopted a more flexible approach to support businesses and encourage the provision of a wider range of jobs on employment sites. In addition to B-Class uses, the Council may permit community uses, healthcare facilities, education facilities and small-scale retail (that is ancillary to a B-Class use).
- 7.59 In addition to allocated employment sites the Council will continue to support and will seek to retain the existing industrial estates in the town to provide job opportunities for local people and will encourage the regeneration of land to the east of the town centre.
- 7.60 The Council recognises the role of tourism in Shaftesbury and will consider positively opportunities for development that will complement the town's historic character.

Infrastructure

- 7.61 Grey infrastructure to support growth is required in the town. In particular for land to the east of Shaftesbury, including the employment site to the south of the A30, the Development Brief and the transport study both highlight the need for the development to be well connected by walking, cycling and public transport facilities. Together with the mixed-use regeneration of land to the east of the town centre, links between the new housing, the employment site and the existing town are seen as essential to ensure a more sustainable and self-contained settlement.
- 7.62 LTP 3 has put back the implementation of a number of longer-term road schemes until after 2026, one of which is an outer eastern by-pass for Shaftesbury. Due to the constrained nature of the town and the lack of potential alternative routes, the Local Plan Part 1 continues to protect the line of the road from development that would prejudice its implementation in the longer term. However, the growth proposed at Gillingham will increase traffic flows on the B3081 and studies indicate that a new link road at Enmore Green is required.

²⁵ Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Workspace Study: Employment Land Projections 2012 Update, Dorset County Council (March 2012)

- 7.63 The need for a new community hall in Shaftesbury has been identified since 2003. However, over the previous Plan period the size and location of a new hall has not been agreed and the debate in the town continues. The needs and aspirations of the local community continue to be included in the Local Plan Part 1 and it is suggested that a new community hall could be delivered as part of a mixed-used regeneration of the land to the east of the town centre. The policy itself is flexible with regard to the hall's location and this may be an issue that neighbourhood plan for the town could address.
- 7.64 The need for a new school in Shaftesbury was first agreed in 2003 when under the three tier system a First School was allocated on land to the east of Shaftesbury. In 2010 when the draft Core Strategy was prepared Dorset County Council, the local education provider, informed the Council that following the school re-structuring programme (going from three to two tiers) and as a result of a re-assessment of school capacities they now proposed to extend the existing primary schools in the town rather than to build a new school.
- 7.65 This remained the position of DCC in 2012 when further key issue consultation was undertaken. However, in 2013 following revised projections DCC are now of the opinion that a new 2 form entry primary school is needed in the town together with an expansion of the facilities at the secondary school. This new requirement has been included in the Local Plan Part 1, but due to timescales no location has been identified to date. The site originally reserved in 2003 on land east of Shaftesbury development is too small for a 2 form entry Primary School.
- 7.66 The Council are keen to build on the existing further education provision in the town and a flexible policy approach to their development and expansion has been included in the Local Plan Part 1.
- 7.67 The multiple benefits of green infrastructure and green spaces in delivering quality of life and quality of place have long been recognised. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Local Plan Part 1 identifies the important role such sites at Shaftesbury can play in reducing the pressure of recreation on nearby nationally and internationally designated sites. The setting of the town is enhanced by its informal open spaces and together with those new areas of open space created as part of the development to the east of the town, will form the basis for the Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- 7.68 The provision and location of infrastructure is critical to the delivery of positive outcomes for the town. The Local Plan Part 2 will seek to allocate sites, but some issues may be best addressed through the neighbourhood planning process.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 7.69 Two key options were explored in the Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report, produced alongside the draft Core Strategy in 2010. The first was the location of

growth and whether this should be restricted to within the current boundaries of the town or permitted on greenfield land to the east of the town. The second was community facilities and whether land should be reserved for the provision of a Community Hub in the town centre or whether provision of community facilities should be allowed on other sites.

- 7.70 From the Initial Sustainability Appraisal in 2010 it was concluded that:
- the moderate expansion of Shaftesbury was likely to be the most sustainable option but in combination with the redevelopment of some town centre sites. The appraisal also recognised the importance of minimising the impact on water resources and including space for expansion of the further education college in the town alongside other community facilities; and
 - reserving the site in the centre of town for community uses would offer multiple benefits for the town. Ideally this would include a community hall, further education facilities and a youth centre however; it considered the development of the site for community benefits in general was more important than ensuring all proposed uses were combined.
- 7.71 In the Sustainability Appraisal of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1, the assessment of the Shaftesbury town policy is similar to the conclusions drawn in the initial appraisal. The key area where the assessment has changed relates to the production of a neighbourhood plan resulting in greater community engagement and therefore making the town more inclusive as it enables all residents to have a say in the future. There is now also specific reference to tourism related development which will assist in developing the local economy.
- 7.72 The mention of the links between Shaftesbury and nearby Gillingham is significant as the growth of Gillingham is likely to have an impact on Shaftesbury. This could range from the negative impact of increased traffic levels through the town to the positive impact of increased job opportunities. The impacts of the growth of Gillingham will need to be carefully monitored to ensure they are not significant and negative and that mitigation measures (such as the Enmore Green Link Road and high frequency bus routes between the towns) are delivered.
- 7.73 In addition the policy now makes specific references to some of the environmental issues that exist including the potential for localised flooding at times of heavy rainfall especially at the bottom of the slopes and the potential for an impact on the nearby protected landscapes of the AONB. The policy also makes reference to the need to incorporate suitable and attractive green space within developments to reduce recreational pressure on nearby internationally protected habitats.

Consultations

Introduction

- 7.74 The future growth of Shaftesbury has been the subject of consultation throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy and more recently the Local Plan. In 2007 the issues and options consultation identified Shaftesbury as one of the District's main towns and this was reinforced in 2010 consultation on the draft Core Strategy. In 2012, the key issues consultation outlined how growth in the town was to be accommodated taking into consideration the development of land to the east of the town and recent housing completions.
- 7.75 Throughout the consultation process the approach to growth in Shaftesbury has remained constant. Figures have varied slightly as Plan periods have been amended and houses have been built, but overall the town continues to be recognised as one of the main service centres in the District and its future growth will ensure that the Local Plan vision and objectives of thriving market towns are delivered.
- 7.76 The 'Enquiry by Design' process adopted for the Land East of Shaftesbury Development Brief provided an opportunity for local residents to make a positive contribution to the built form and layout of this site and how it relates to the rest of the town.

Consultation 2007 – 'Issues and Options'

- 7.77 The community's views on key issues from national and 'emerging' regional policy were first sought when the Council undertook consultation on the issues and options²⁶ for a 'stand-alone' Core Strategy in June – July 2007. The consultation issues and options discussions were based on the draft RSS, which was published in June 2006.
- 7.78 In consultation the Council suggested that Shaftesbury should have RSS Development Policy B status. In general terms respondents supported the proposed settlement hierarchy and the need to try and attain higher levels of self-containment in the towns.
- 7.79 At the time of the Issues and Options consultation 5,100 homes were proposed for North Dorset between 2006 and 2026 with 2,900 to be built before 2016 and 2,200 to be built thereafter. The Council sought views on how development should be distributed between the three main towns (Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury) and the rest of the District in the two 10-year periods 2006 – 2016 and 2016 – 2026.
- 7.80 The responses to the issues and options consultation showed that there was clear support to redevelop brownfield land and regenerate settlements in support of a

²⁶ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)

sustainable strategy, and a clear lack of support for expansion on to greenfield land. However, a combination of the two was recognised as a means to identifying appropriate and deliverable sites with a focus on a 'brownfield first' approach.

- 7.81 In terms of economic prosperity, Issue 11 explored the issues and options associated with identifying sufficient land suitable for development for employment use. The majority of the responses to Issue 11 supported that existing employment sites should be extended where appropriate and that other sustainable sites should be identified. It was suggested that extensions should only apply when the current district-wide supply is used up, and that the identification of other sustainable sites should incorporate flexibility into the system. The lesser supported option was to concentrate land suitable for employment within the three main towns; however this option was recognised as sustainable.

Consultation 2010 – The Draft Core Strategy

- 7.82 In March 2010 the Council published the draft Core Strategy and Development Management DPD for consultation. The Draft Core Strategy was prepared in the context of emerging regional policy at the time. Draft Core Policies 15, 16 and 17 related to the RSS Development Policy B settlements of Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury and Draft Core Policy 18 related to the RSS Development Policy C settlement of Sturminster Newton.
- 7.83 The Draft Core Strategy proposed 1,200 new homes in Shaftesbury with 850 being delivered in the period up to 2016 and 350 built thereafter.
- 7.84 1,657 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation and in total they made 5,734 comments. A full report was presented to Members of the Planning Policy Panel on 5 July 2012²⁷.
- 7.85 147 comments were made in response to the Shaftesbury policy (draft core Policy 17), but no major issues or significant problems were identified. Comments in general were from those people who did not agree with the overall strategy for growth and reassuringly this was not an opinion shared by either the Town Council or the local chamber of commerce. Although they did both highlight a number of issues in relation to certain sites in terms of capacity, land use mix or landscape impact but these concerns were also raised by other individuals.
- 7.86 In terms of specific sites a number of people raised concern about the landscape impact of development on the land to the west of A350.
- 7.87 For the proposed employment site south of the A30, the Town Council and a number of other individuals suggested that the site was large enough to accommodate a range of uses and that new community, social or educational facilities may be able to share the site. They all suggested that a more mixed use

²⁷ <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

may be an appropriate way forward therefore making the site more flexible to meet the needs of the local community.

- 7.88 A third site that was identified by many, mainly due to its proposed allocation of housing, was the land to the east of Shaftesbury. A majority of people objecting to the policy did so because in their opinion Shaftesbury did not and could not accommodate any more growth. However, most of the land here has already received planning permission and is subject to a development brief. The small sites suggested to the north are a natural progression of the development. In fact the key developer on this site objected to draft Core Policy 17 on the grounds that housing figures for the site were not high enough. They suggest that by increasing densities in some areas and building on other areas previously allocated for other uses that housing numbers on the site could be increased.
- 7.89 In the town centre the Town Council and Chamber of Commerce both supported the retail policy and the proposed expansion to the east of the town centre.
- 7.90 Transport was a key concern for many when commenting on the growth of the town and the impact this would have on congestion. Combined with the proposed growth of Gillingham many local residents were concerned that the road infrastructure was not sufficient and considered the proposed link road from the B3081 to the A30 to be essential.
- 7.91 Many local residents were concerned about the impact of increased traffic on Christy's Lane and supported the idea of a by-pass but rather than this just being a reserved route they wanted it to be delivered. The Highways Agency supported draft Core Policy 17 and the fact that the policy sought a range of land uses with an integrated transport strategy for walking, cycling and public transport.
- 7.92 Parking was seen by a number of residents as an issue in the town and some people were opposed to any further growth as this in their opinion would only exacerbate the existing problem.
- 7.93 In terms of social infrastructure a number of people were concerned at the proposal for a new community hall in the town and the impact that this would have on existing facilities. This concern was shared by the Town Council and they suggested that further consultation and assessment of existing facilities is required before this policy could be taken forward. Other interested parties, notably the Scouts, offered to help in the design of any new hall to ensure that it met the needs of local scouting groups and offered to take on the on-going management of any hall.
- 7.94 A number of people were concerned that the proposed growth would lead to capacity issues at the existing health centre and in the local schools.
- 7.95 Finally Wessex Water made a number of comments in relation to particular sites for growth, but they did not result in any aspect of the policy needing to be reviewed.

- 7.96 In response to the 2010 consultation the Council has:
- undertaken a Landscape Impact Assessment of the proposed site for housing to the west of A350 and other sites in the town;
 - reviewed employment land policy in general to allow more flexibility in relation to uses. This has a direct impact on the employment site to the south of the A30;
 - reviewed housing numbers overall in the District and considered the request of developers on the land to the east of Shaftesbury in relation to land previously allocated for other purposes;
 - ensured that the IDP prioritises highway infrastructure in the town to enable growth;
 - sought guidance from health and education providers that schools and medical facilities in the town have the capacity to accommodate growth and identified where expansion is required;
 - supported the provision of new community facilities in the town, but their location and size maybe an issue that the recently formed neighbourhood plan group may wish to explore. They may also seek to resolve local parking issues.

Consultation 2012 – Key Issues

- 7.97 In the 2012 key issues consultation the town of Shaftesbury continued to be recognised as one of the main service centres in the District and its future growth was seen as ensuring that the visions and objectives of the District were delivered.
- 7.98 However, to reflect recent developments, in particular the building out of land to the east of Shaftesbury, the Council took the opportunity to update the figures on the level of housing provision in the town. The consultation was clear that no additional greenfield sites were being proposed, however, it did explained that the capacity of the land to the east of the town to accommodate housing development had been reassessed.
- 7.99 The key issues consultation summed up by explaining that in view of the housing numbers that have been delivered in Shaftesbury between 2006 and 2011 and the new opportunities for additional development on land to the east of the town it is now proposed that 1,140 new dwellings will be built between 2011 and 2026.
- 7.100 It was proposed that infilling and redevelopment would continue within the existing settlement boundaries and the main greenfield sites identified for housing growth were:
- land to the east of the town (including the ‘Hopkins land’);
 - land to the south of Wincombe Business Park; and
 - land to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park.
- 7.101 In total 17 people commented on the revised policy for Shaftesbury. The only parish to comment was Melbury Abbas and Cann Parish Council who felt that there should be no more building in Shaftesbury until infrastructure is in place to

accommodate the growth and that this should include a by-pass for the town. They were also opposed to the allocations of employment land in the town and land for Travellers.

- 7.102 Wessex Water, the only other specific consultee to respond, noted the development on land to the east of Shaftesbury, at Hopkins Land and south and west of Wincombe Business Park. They confirmed that there were major water mains in the vicinity and that flow rate capacity was available to serve this development. However for the site to the west of the A350 an on-site water booster may be required.
- 7.103 Four agents representing key developers and landowners in the town wrote in support of the allocated greenfield sites. In particular Persimmon acknowledged the extra capacity on land east of Shaftesbury. For the land to the south of Wincombe Business Park, the agent confirmed that a suitable access strategy could be provided to serve the development and that they anticipated there was potential to deliver a package of measures that would improve sustainable transport modes in the town.
- 7.104 The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB repeated their concerns that any development in Shaftesbury should consider the potential impacts on the nearby AONB and in particular the views to and from the AONB.
- 7.105 Comments from businesses and concerned local residents focused on infrastructure, in particular the need for a by-pass and a new doctor's surgery and the landscape impact of the growth proposed.

Conclusion

- 7.106 Throughout history the landscape setting of Shaftesbury has played a key role in how the town has developed. Steep slopes to the west have restricted growth whilst more recent development have maximised the use of the flat plateau land to the north and east.
- 7.107 Landscape and biodiversity constraints continue to play a key role in the selection of sites for growth in the town. The Landscape Impact Assessment has been a key evidence-based study that has helped identify and shape future patterns of growth in the town and policies will seek to:
- protect and manage the valuable groundwater resources in the vicinity of the town; and
 - protect and enhance the town's natural and historic built environments.
- 7.108 To enable Shaftesbury to maintain its role in supporting Gillingham to serve the needs of the northern part of the District the policy seeks to provide about 1,140 new homes in the town during the period 2011 – 2026. In addition to infilling and regeneration within the settlement boundary, Shaftesbury's housing needs will be met though the development of land:

- to the east of the town, much of which already has planning permission;
 - to the south east of Wincombe Business Park; and
 - to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park.
- 7.109 To meet employment needs the policy identifies land for employment growth to the south of the A30 whilst encouraging development of vacant sites on existing industrial estates and the retention of existing employment sites.
- 7.110 At the same time the policy also recognises the role of regeneration in creating vibrant and thriving market towns and identifies the land within and to the east of the existing town centre for mixed-use regeneration.
- 7.111 Infrastructure plays a key role in supporting growth. In terms of grey infrastructure in Shaftesbury the policy seeks to:
- provide a new road link from the B3081 to the A30 at Enmore Green;
 - improve walking/cycling links between the town centre and new homes to the east of the town; and
 - protect the route of the Shaftesbury Outer Eastern By-pass from development that would prejudice its implementation on in the longer term.
- 7.112 In terms of social infrastructure provision the policy includes:
- the provision of a new community hall for the town;
 - a new two form entry primary school, an extension to the secondary school and expanded further and adult education on provision in the town; and
 - a new doctor's surgery, or the expansion or relocation on of the existing doctor's surgery.
- 7.113 Finally, green infrastructure in and around Shaftesbury will focusses on:
- linking existing sites, such as the Slopes; and
 - providing new sites and links to serve the residents of both the new and existing development in the town.

8. Sturminster Newton

Introduction

- 8.1 Sturminster Newton, together with Stalbridge and Marnhull serves the rural west of the District. The 2011 Census shows that the town has a population of 4,292.
- 8.2 In the recent past, Sturminster Newton has experienced moderate levels of growth including complete redevelopment of the former cattle market for residential and retail uses, together with a community centre (the Exchange) and medical centre. New housing on a greenfield site at Honeymead extended the northern edge of Sturminster and land at North Dorset Business Park has long been allocated for employment uses, but there has been a lack of development progress.
- 8.3 The active local community have sought to bring forward regeneration and quality development in the town and promote economic development at North Dorset Business Park, which is a key employment site not only for Sturminster, but also for the wider rural area. A key issue for Sturminster Newton is where its role and function fits within the hierarchy of settlements.
- 8.4 Policy 19 in the Local Plan Part 1 sets out the Council's views, and reflects local community opinions, on how Sturminster Newton should be developed to consolidate its role and function of serving the town and its rural hinterland in the period up to 2026.

Technical Evidence Informing Policy

Strategic Evidence

North and north East Dorset Transport Study (N&nEDTS)

- 8.5 The N&nEDTS was undertaken by Buro Happold for Dorset County Council as a front loading evidence gathering exercise to inform the District in the plan making process. Published in March 2010, it was based on draft RSS growth figures that proposed 7,000 new homes in North Dorset by 2026 of which 500 were in Sturminster Newton.
- 8.6 In addition to general infilling in the town, six key sites were identified in the study as growth options and an accessibility audit based on quality of access for each site to existing amenities such as food shops, education, GP surgeries and employment opportunities was undertaken. The sites were:
 - STUR 1 – Land north of Northfields, north of Sturminster;
 - STUR 2 – Land north east of Honeymead, north east of Sturminster;
 - STUR 3 – Land north of the livestock market, north of town centre at Sturminster;
 - STUR 4 – Station Road area, town centre of Sturminster;

STUR 5 – Land east of former Creamery, east of town centre of Sturminster; and
STUR 6 – North Dorset Business Park, north-west of Newton.

- 8.7 All the above sites, except STUR 6 employment site, were regarded as developable when assessed as part of the SHLAA prior to assessment as part of the N&nEDTS.
- 8.8 The accessibility audit results, based on RPG10 accessibility criteria, show that STUR 3 and STUR 4 meet the maximum standards to services. STUR 1 does not meet any of the maximum distances set out for access to the nearest food shop, primary school or bus stop. Similarly, STUR 2 is not well situated with regard to walking distance to existing food shopping and primary education facilities. STUR 5 also fails to meet the maximum walking distance to the nearest primary school.
- 8.9 A weighted assessment was undertaken for each site which took into consideration the frequency of different types of trips. Site STUR 4 ranked highest, being centrally located and within walking distance of all services. Sites STUR 5 and STUR 3 also rank highly. However, sites STUR 2 and STUR 1 are significantly less accessible.
- 8.10 STUR 6 employment site was assessed using the same methodology as the residential sites. However, it is accessibility to public transport that is most important for employment sites. STUR 6 is located approximately 500m from the nearest existing bus stop for access to public transport.
- 8.11 The summary results of the study show that there will be a significant increase in traffic using the A357 and A3030 corridor between Blandford Forum and Sherborne. Sturminster Newton straddles the A357 within this corridor. Localised congestion may become a problem, particularly during the AM peak hour, on this route by 2026 as the ratio of flow to capacity at pinch points nears 80%.
- 8.12 The N&nEDTS identified a number of general and specific corridor issues and recommendations for mitigation. In addition to the recommendations of general improvements across the highway network, specific measures for Sturminster Newton included encouraging modal shift by implementing identified walking and cycling improvements and seeking to increase peak time bus services between Sturminster Newton, Blandford Forum and the Bournemouth / Poole conurbation.

Town Design Statement (TDS)

- 8.13 The Sturminster Newton Town Design Statement (TDS) was prepared by the Matrix Partnership under the management of SturQuest, the town's local community partnership. It was adopted by the Council as a supplementary planning document (SPD) on 25 July 2008.
- 8.14 The overall aim of the Town Design Statement is to achieve a coherent approach to future design and planning to enhance the townscape and to encourage further regeneration of the town and surrounding area as a local centre for employment, retail and service activities.

- 8.15 The TDS contains a contextual analysis, map based analysis, elevation and section studies, identification of character areas, and culminates with design guidelines. The design guidelines seek to ensure that both the essential characteristics of the old town are conserved and that any future redevelopment in the newer part of the town uses the opportunity to create a much higher quality of urban environment. It also seeks to encourage substantially higher quality new development around the edges of the town, particularly where sensitive edges have been identified.
- 8.16 The TDS evolved prior to the site selection process but, nonetheless, identifies the character areas and sensitive edges which can assist in the design of the sites identified for growth.

Local Evidence

Station Road Area Design and Development Brief

- 8.17 This development and design brief (the brief) was commissioned by Sturquest, the Sturminster Newton Community Partnership, as part of its work on the Sturminster Newton Regeneration Strategy. It is a community-led brief which is intended to demonstrate an appropriate mix of uses for the site, provide a basis for the community to work with landowners and developers and to deliver high quality development that respects the character of Sturminster Newton.
- 8.18 The brief looked at site context, townscape analysis, planning and design principles, as well as phasing and implementation for a site of two halves; the eastern portion contained the old creamery, and the western portion was once the railway station but now a town centre car park with some historic and some newer retail outlets. The brief also identifies key views across the site from Railway Gardens to Hambledon Hill.
- 8.19 The Creamery site has now been developed, largely in accordance with the brief and mainly for housing and employment. The remaining portion of the town centre car park and retail units is identified as a redevelopment site in Policy 19 – Sturminster Newton, of Local Plan Part 1. The brief tested and consulted on different options for uses and design of the site for both residential and commercial uses. This brief comprises community expression of how the remainder of the site should be developed.

North Dorset Business Park Design and Development Brief

- 8.20 To stimulate and guide development at North Dorset Business Park, SturQuest commissioned a design and development brief. Endorsed by the Council in 2012, the brief outlines the range of employment uses that are appropriate for the site. In particular lighter, commercial activities are to be situated along the frontage with heavier industrial uses set behind towards the rear of the site. Sustainable access

from the town has been considered in the form of an extension of the Trailway so that the site can be reached from the town on foot and by bicycle.

- 8.21 It is hoped that the brief will provide a basis for the community to work with landowners and developers to ensure that a high quality development that respects the character of Newton and Sturminster is delivered on the site.
- 8.22 A land assembly exercise has taken place and the HCA along with Dorset County Council and North Dorset District Council have progressed essential infrastructure on the site to make it accessible. Some employment plots have already been taken up, and the development brief will continue to be used as a material consideration when guiding development on the site.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 8.23 Two key options were explored in the Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report, produced alongside the draft Core Strategy in 2010. The first was to restrict growth to within the current boundaries of the town thereby encouraging regeneration of the town centre and the second was to permit limited growth on greenfield land in addition to the town centre regeneration.
- 8.24 From the Initial Sustainability Appraisal it was concluded that:
- regeneration of the centre of Sturminster Newton and development within the settlement boundary would offer a number of benefits including the provision of jobs and housing whilst at the same time improving the appearance and connectivity of the town; and
 - housing delivery was important for the town and regeneration with limited greenfield development would be the best option.
- 8.25 Overall the Final Sustainability Assessment of the Sturminster Newton town policy in the Local Plan Part 1 is similar to the conclusions drawn in Appendix D of the Initial Sustainability Assessment. Updated evidence for social infrastructure has refined the policy in relation to school provision and the development brief for North Dorset Business Park has clarified the ambitions of the local community in relation to a localised employment policy for the town and work on site has commenced.
- 8.26 The overall strategy for the town remains as outlined in draft Core Strategy published in 2010. The key areas where the revised policy has had a positive impact on the assessment are in relation to sustainable levels of economic and employment growth.
- 8.27 The commencement of development at North Dorset Business Park is providing vital on-site infrastructure to enable employment growth to come forward, strengthening the local economy and making the town more self-contained. The brief for North Dorset Business Park also includes provision for a food-based training hub that will help to improve local skills.

- 8.28 Completion of the North Dorset Trailway to Blandford encourages more sustainable forms of travel between the two towns and villages along the route. The inclusion of the extension of this route towards Stalbridge with linkages to North Dorset Business Park will help to reduce traffic between the towns and encourage sustainable travel to the business park. Any reduction in traffic will also help to minimise any potential impact on the nearby Rooksmoor SAC at Lydlinch, which is bisected by the A357.
- 8.29 The historic core of the town and nearby heritage assets are specifically mentioned within the policy and this will help to preserve the town's character. The limited greenfield expansion of the town will result in limited landscape impact due to the careful selection of sites and the need for landscape features to be incorporated into the developments. The continued regeneration of the town centre will help to further improve the attractiveness of the town, enhancing it as a local service centre.
- 8.30 Sites for growth at Sturminster Newton have been carefully selected to minimise the impact on the local landscape. In addition, the community's Town Design Statement and design briefs help in ensuring development that does take place reflects local character. The regeneration of the town centre will also help to improve the appearance of the town, all contributing to protecting the local townscape and landscape.
- 8.31 If the town decides to prepare a neighbourhood plan local residents may wish to explore and investigate linkages and connectivity above and beyond those identified in the town policy and the development brief for North Dorset Business Park. This information could feed into the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Where issues are not addressed in the neighbourhood plan, the Local Plan Part 2 will be used to take policy forward.

Consultations

Introduction

- 8.32 Informal consultation has taken place on the development of planning policy in North Dorset and in relation to Sturminster Newton. The consultations included:
- 2007 issues and options;
 - 2010 draft Core Strategy; and
 - 2012 key issues.

Consultation 2007 – 'Issues and Options'

- 8.33 The community's views on key issues from national and 'emerging' regional policy were first sought when the Council undertook consultation on the issues and

options²⁸ for a 'stand-alone' Core Strategy in June – July 2007. The consultation issues and options discussions were based on the draft RSS, which was published in June 2006. For Sturminster Newton, issues were identified from the Area Action Plan.

- 8.34 In consultation the Council suggested that Sturminster Newton should have RSS Development Policy C status. In general terms respondents supported the proposed settlement hierarchy and the need to try and attain higher levels of self-containment in the towns. Although some respondents felt that Sturminster Newton also merited RSS Development Policy B status.²⁹
- 8.35 At the time of the Issues and Options consultation 5,100 homes were proposed for North Dorset between 2006 and 2026 with 2,900 to be built before 2016 and 2,200 to be built thereafter. The Council sought views on how development should be distributed between the three main towns (Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury) and the rest of the District in the two 10-year periods 2006 – 2016 and 2016 – 2026.
- 8.36 An urban emphasis to development was supported to help the market towns fulfil their role as the leading centres for growth in the District, along with delivery of the appropriate supporting infrastructure. Support was received in the identification of Sturminster Newton as a Development Policy C Settlement on the basis of its role and function.
- 8.37 In response to the 2007 Issues and Options Consultation the community sought to understand and direct the quality of future development at Sturminster Newton through the production of a TDS. The community also sought to encourage quality development through the production of design and development briefs for a town centre site for regeneration and the strategic employment site.

Consultation 2010 – The Draft Core Strategy

- 8.38 In March 2010 the Council published the draft Core Strategy for consultation. The draft Core Strategy was prepared in the context of emerging regional policy at the time. Draft Core Policies 15, 16 and 17 related to the RSS Development Policy B settlements of Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury and Draft Core Policy 18 related to the RSS Development Policy C settlement of Sturminster Newton.

²⁸ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)

²⁹ The Council has produced a summary of the main findings of the 2007 consultation and a comprehensive analysis of responses on an issue-by-issue basis. These documents, together with the original responses, can be viewed at the following link http://www.north-dorset.gov.uk/index/living/building_planning/planning_policy/local_development_framework/core_strategy/core_strategy_2007_consultation.htm

- 8.39 1,657 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation and in total they made 5,734 comments. A full report was presented to Members of the Planning Policy Panel on 5 July 2012³⁰.
- 8.40 Draft Core Policy 18 – Sturminster Newton set out a strategy to maintain the role of the town in serving the communities in the west of the District through limited growth, supported by the settlements of Stalbridge and Marnhull. Housing development would be of a smaller scale than at the larger towns reflecting the town's local service centre role.
- 8.41 The key spatial aspects of this strategy were:
- focusing the bulk of housing development within the existing built-up area and in locations close to the town centre, with some more limited peripheral greenfield expansion to meet longer term needs;
 - continuing the regeneration of land to the north of the town centre to include an improved range of services and employment opportunities alongside new housing development;
 - developing North Dorset Business Park to meet the employment needs of communities in the western part of the District; and
 - extending the North Dorset Trailway to improve links with Stalbridge to the north-west and the villages towards Blandford to the south east.
- 8.42 Regeneration was the main focus for growth in the period up to 2016 with 350 dwellings to be delivered in and just north of the town centre with the aim of consolidating the town's role and function as the main service centre in the west of the District. After 2016, there was to be some additional small-scale greenfield expansion of about 150 dwellings in total to the east and north of the town.
- 8.43 Employment was to be focused on the 7ha strategic North Dorset Business Park with renewal on Butts Pond Business Park and limited employment development at the town centre Creamery site. Retail was to be focussed on the town centre car park regeneration and renewal of existing units. Various grey, social and green infrastructure improvements were proposed.
- 8.44 In response to the consultation, protection of the Great Crested Newts at Butts Pond LNR was raised as a concern in response to the proposed development of land north of the former Livestock Market. Concern was also raised that the growth of the town and the resulting increase in traffic on the A357/A3030 might impact on the Rooksmoor SAC at Lydlinch. These issues were picked up and addressed in the Initial Sustainability Appraisal.
- 8.45 Continued support was shown for the categorisation of Sturminster Newton and the role and function identified for the town. Concern was raised over the potential disconnect of the northern greenfield expansion site to town services and capacity

³⁰ <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

of the primary and secondary schools. The potential exists to extend the Jubilee Path through to the greenfield expansion identified for the north of the town, thereby encouraging walking and cycling to town centre facilities.

- 8.46 All these issues were assessed and reported to Members of the Planning Policy Panel on 5 July 2012³¹. In response to the 2010 consultation the Council has revised housing and employment requirements and considered how best to meet educational, health, and other infrastructural needs with relevant delivery bodies.

Consultation 2012 – Key Issues

- 8.47 Since the consultation in 2010 the Coalition Government began the process of reforming the planning system. In addition there has been a global economic downturn. In the light of these major changes the Council investigated different ways of delivering positive outcomes for local communities through planning policy and reassessed the need for future development, particularly housing and employment development.
- 8.48 The consultation on key issues for the revision of the draft Core Strategy undertaken in the autumn of 2012 was ‘targeted’ on three main areas, which were agreed by Cabinet in June 2011, namely:
- options for the overall level of growth proposed for the District and the main towns (i.e. Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton);
 - the approach to taking forward development at Gillingham through a Strategic Site Allocation (SSA); and
 - the approach to development in Stalbridge and the District’s villages revisiting both the spatial strategy and the level of housing provision.
- 8.49 The overall level of growth for the District was revised downwards from 7,000 dwellings proposed in the draft Core Strategy (over 20 years), to 4,200 dwellings proposed in the 2012 consultation on key issues (over 15 years). The updated employment projections reduced the level from 4,700 jobs and 38.3 ha of employment land (over 20 years) proposed in the 2010 consultation, to 4,400 jobs and 30.5ha of employment land (over 15 years) proposed in the 2012 consultation on key issues.
- 8.50 The overall strategy for Sturminster Newton remained the same, but with a reduction in the overall figure for the town from 500 dwellings to 380 dwellings (about 9% of the total) in Policy 19 of the Local Plan Part 1.
- 8.51 The results of the consultation showed substantial support for Sturminster Newton to be considered as a ‘main town’, along with the larger towns, but with development to continue to reflect its role and function in supporting the town and its rural hinterland.

³¹ <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

Conclusion

- 8.52 The NPPF now provides a much less rigid ‘higher level’ policy framework compared to RSS Development Policies A, B and C only requiring planning to “focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable”. Since there is little dispute that Sturminster Newton is a sustainable location and its future growth is clearly a strategic issue for the District, the town has been defined as a ‘main town’ (alongside Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury) in the Local Plan Part 1.
- 8.53 Since proposals for the future development of the town were already set out in some detail in draft Core Policy 18; the change of status would have no significant implications for the Local Plan Part 1 or for the town itself. This strategy is supported by the Sustainability Appraisal, which recognises that sites for growth at Sturminster Newton have been carefully selected to minimise the impact on the local landscape. In addition, the community’s Town Design Statement and design briefs help in ensuring development that does take place reflects local character. The regeneration of the town centre will also help to improve the appearance of the town, all contributing to protecting the local townscape and landscape.

9. North Dorset Local Plan Part 1

Introduction

9.1 Having had regard to the technical evidence that has been gathered, considered the options through the sustainability appraisal process, and sought the views of the community through various stages of consultation, the Council has drafted policies for each of the four main towns that take account of all these factors. A summary of the content of these policies is set out below.

Policy 16 – Blandford

9.2 Blandford will maintain its role as the main service centre in the south of the District. All new development will take into account the risks of flooding and the town's natural and historic built environment will be protected and enhanced.

9.3 About 960 homes will be provided at Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary during the period 2011 - 2026. In addition to infilling and redevelopment within the settlement boundary, Blandford's housing needs will be met through:

- mixed use regeneration of the Brewery site;
- the development of land to the west of Blandford Forum; and
- the development of land to the west of Blandford St Mary.

9.4 Employment needs in the town for the period up 2026 will be met through:

- the mixed use regeneration of the Brewery site; and
- the development of land off Shaftesbury Lane.

9.5 In the period up to 2026, additional retail floorspace will be provided through:

- the extension of the existing Tesco supermarket at Stour Park; and
- the provision of a new (Asda) supermarket off Shaftesbury Lane.

9.6 The main focus for town centre regeneration will be land to the south of East Street, including land around the existing Co-op store.

9.7 Grey infrastructure to support growth will include:

- the provision and enhancement of walking and cycling links within Blandford;
- the provision and enhancement of public transport, cycling and walking links between Blandford and nearby villages (and Blandford Camp); and
- the improvement and extension of the North Dorset Trailway.

9.8 Social infrastructure to support growth will include:

- the refurbishment of the Corn Exchange to form a community venue for the town;
- the retention and upgrading of Blandford Leisure Centre in community use; and

- a new doctors' surgery or the expansion or relocation of existing doctors' surgeries.

9.9 A network of green infrastructure will be developed in and around Blandford, focussing on linking existing sites (such as the Milldown and Stour Meadows) and providing new sites, including informal open space at Crown Meadows and new sports pitches and associated facilities on land within the built up area of Blandford.

Policy 17 – Gillingham

9.10 Gillingham's role as the main service centre in the north of the District will be maintained and enhanced. All new development in the town will take into account the risks of flooding and the town's natural and historic built environment will be protected and enhanced.

9.11 About 1,490 homes will be provided at Gillingham during the period 2011 – 2026. In addition to infilling and regeneration within the settlement boundary, Gillingham's housing needs will be met through:

- the development of a Strategic Site Allocation (SSA) to the south of the town;
- mixed-use regeneration of land at Station Road to the south of the town centre; and
- the development of the land to the south and south-west of Bay.

9.12 Employment needs in the town for the period up to 2026 will be met through:

- the mixed-use regeneration of the Station Road area;
- the development of land to the south of Brickfields Business Park;
- the development of land on Kingsmead Business Park for a local centre and / or for a range of employment uses; and
- the development of land at Neal's Yard Remedies, Peacemarsh.

9.13 In the period up to 2026, additional retail floorspace will be brought forward:

- With primarily comparison retailing as part of the mixed-use regeneration of the Station Road Area; and
- as local shops forming an integral part of the local centre to serve the SSA.

9.14 Grey infrastructure to support growth will include:

- a new link road between the B3081 and B3092 to the south of the town;
- the enhancement of the Railway Station as a public transport hub;
- new routes and upgrading of existing pedestrian and cycle links to key destinations, such as the town centre, employment areas, schools, and other community facilities; and
- upgrading of foul sewers and the town's sewage treatment works.

9.15 Social infrastructure to support growth will include:

- further improvement or expansion of the existing facilities at RiversMeet and the provision of a new community hall on the site;
 - a new local centre to be provided as part of the SSA which will include a new community hall, a new 2 form entry primary school and a new doctor's surgery; and
 - the expansion of St Mary The Virgin Primary School and Gillingham High School.
- 9.16 A network of green infrastructure will be developed in and around Gillingham focussing primarily on the corridors of the River Stour, River Lodden and the Shreen Water and include formal and informal open spaces, sports pitches, play spaces and allotments.

Policy 18 – Shaftesbury

- 9.17 Shaftesbury will maintain its role in supporting Gillingham to serve the needs of the northern part of the District. Valuable groundwater resources in the vicinity of the town will be protected and the town's natural and historic built environments will be protected and enhanced.
- 9.18 About 1,140 homes will be provided at Shaftesbury during the period 2011 – 2026. In addition to infilling and regeneration within the settlement boundary, Shaftesbury's housing needs will be met through the development of land:
- to the east of the town;
 - to the south east of Wincombe Business Park; and
 - to the west of the A350 opposite Wincombe Business Park.
- 9.19 Employment needs of the town for the period up to 2026 will be met through:
- the development of land to the south of the A30; and
 - the development of vacant sites on existing industrial estates and the retention of existing employment sites.
- 9.20 Mixed use regeneration will be encouraged on land within and to the east of the existing town centre.
- 9.21 Grey infrastructure to support growth will include:
- the provision of a new road link from the B3081 to the A30 at Enmore Green; and
 - improved walking and cycling links between the town centre and residential development to the east of the town.
- 9.22 The route of the Shaftesbury Outer Eastern By-pass will continue to be protected from development that would prejudice its implementation in the longer term.
- 9.23 Social infrastructure to support growth will include:
- the provision of a new community hall for the town;

- a new two form of entry primary school, an extension to the secondary school and expanded further and adult education provision in the town; and
 - a new doctor's surgery, or the expansion or relocation of the existing doctor's surgery.
- 9.24 A network of green infrastructure will be developed in and around Shaftesbury focussing on linking existing sites, such as the Slopes, and providing new sites and links to serve the residents of both the new and existing development in the town.

Policy 19 – Sturminster Newton

- 9.25 Sturminster Newton will continue to function as the main service centre in the rural west of the District. Measures will be put in place to reduce the risk of flooding from the River Stour and from surface water within the town through the provision of sustainable drainage systems in all development. The town's natural and historic built environments will be protected and enhanced.
- 9.26 About 380 dwellings will be provided at Sturminster Newton during the period 2011 – 2026. Housing needs will be met through infilling and redevelopment within the settlement boundary, including the redevelopment of land in and around the Station Road area together with the development of the following greenfield sites:
- land to the north of the former livestock market at Market Hill;
 - land to the north of Northfields; and
 - land to the east of the former Creamery site.
- 9.27 Employment needs in the town for the period up to 2026 will be met through the development of North Dorset Business Park.
- 9.28 The main focus for additional retail provision and other town centre uses will be the existing town centre and the redevelopment of the Station Road area.
- 9.29 Grey infrastructure to support growth will include:
- improved walking and cycling links between the town centre and new developments;
 - the extension of the North Dorset Trailway to the north west of the town; and
 - the improvement of pedestrian / cycle links between Sturminster and North Dorset Business Park.
- 9.30 Social infrastructure to support growth will include:
- the promotion of The Exchange building as a community and cultural hub;
 - the retention and expansion of the leisure centre; and
 - an extension to the secondary school and expansion and possible relocation of the primary school.
- 9.31 A network of green infrastructure will be developed in and around Sturminster town and Newton village based on existing sites, such as Butts Pond Local Nature

Reserve, and strategic links such as the North Dorset Trailway. In the period up to 2026, green infrastructure to support growth will include a green buffer between Butt's Pond Industrial Estate and new housing development on land north of the former livestock market and additional allotments on land between Elm Close and the Trailway.

Policy 21 – Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation

- 9.32 The southern extension of Gillingham is the largest and most significant development proposed for North Dorset in the Local Plan Part 1 and will result in a significant increase in the size of the town. Its development will be the primary opportunity to progress the enhancement of Gillingham as the main service centre in North Dorset and as an attractive place to live and work. Proposals for the existing town will be taken forward both through Policy 17 – Gillingham and the neighbourhood plan being prepared by the local community.
- 9.33 Concentrating growth to the south of the town is considered to offer the greatest potential for:
- housing development to be sustainably located;
 - economic development to create employment opportunities for the southern extension and the town as a whole; and
 - the provision of supporting infrastructure, including sustainable transport measures, to increase self-containment by integrating the new development into the existing town.
- 9.34 To assist in securing the effective delivery of this key proposal, the Council has worked with land owners, potential developers, key stakeholders and the local community to develop a 'conceptual framework' to guide the future development of the southern extension. The conceptual framework, is made up of the following elements:
- the 'concept statement', which brings together the design ideas that have emerged through consultation to give a description of the kind of place the southern extension should be;
 - the 'concept plan', which illustrates (on a map) the main design concepts and ideas that have emerged through consultation; and
 - a set of site-specific 'design principles', derived from the Town Design Statement and later consultation.
- 9.35 Policy 21 – Gillingham Strategic Site Allocation sets out the requirements for:
- **climate change** – energy efficiency and renewable energy measures will be incorporated on site to meet the requirements of the Government's Zero Carbon Buildings Policy and off-site allowable solutions may be permitted. Opportunities for a district heating scheme will be considered and measures to

address the risks of fluvial and surface water flooding, incorporating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), will be put in place;

- **environment** – the southern extension will be integrated into the landscape, wildlife interests will be conserved and enhanced and significant archaeological features and their settings will be retained and enhanced;
- **meeting housing needs** – housing will be spatially phased commencing adjacent to existing built-up areas. A mix of housing types (reflecting Policy 7 – Delivering Homes) and 35% affordable housing (subject to site-based viability testing), including 50 affordable extra care units will be provided;
- **supporting economic development** – employment growth will be focussed around the key sites at Brickfields and Kingsmead Business Park and will include high quality design around key gateways into Gillingham;
- **grey infrastructure** – a principal street, designed as a bus route, will link the B3092 and the B3081. A permeable and legible network of well-defined streets and spaces and off-road footpaths and cycleway will be provided within the southern extension together with pedestrian and cycle links to the existing town. Well designed ‘gateways’ will be created on the southern approach to the town and at key access points to the development. Off-site highway improvements will be made to increase capacity, measures to support modal shift and enhance the railway station will be put in place and Cole Street Lane will become a ‘green route’. Contributions will be sought towards a link road between the B3081 and the A30 at Enmore Green and utilities, telecommunications and sewer networks will be upgraded;
- **social infrastructure** – a local centre will be provided to include local convenience retail, a two form entry primary school, a pre-school nursery, a community hall and health facilities. St Mary the Virgin Primary School and Gillingham High School will be expanded and Riversmeet, the town’s library and the town’s fire station will be improved or expanded;
- **green infrastructure** – at least 8.5 hectares of formal public open space (including at least 7 hectares of sports pitches) will be provided, as well as children’s play spaces, allotments and community orchards. At least 26 hectares of informal open space will be provided primarily along the river corridors providing a landscape setting, enhanced habitats for wildlife and off-road pedestrian and cycle links. Important trees and hedgerows will be retained, publically accessible greenways created with SuDS and strategic landscape planting also being provided.